

# THE PLATFORM

CURRENT MUSLIM AFFAIRS

## STREETS OR THE BALLOT BOX?

THEME: **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE MUSLIM WORLD**



THEME

**Kemal Ergün:**  
“Europe has become the homeland of Muslims”

PORTRAIT

**Inviting Critical Thinking: The Thought of Jabiri**

INTERVIEW

**Lütfi Sunar:**  
“Intellectual world of Muslim communities is dynamic and interconnected.”

BOOK REVIEW

**Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World**

Research Centre for Social Thought and Policy (TODAM); was founded to realize the goal of a just, equitable and prosperous society. In addition to contributing to the social thought, it aims at proposing practicable solutions to the contemporary social challenges. We aim to witness the different dimensions of social change on the basis of knowledge and to bring solutions to social problems on the axis of common values and benefits. The activities we carry out at TODAM are based on a realistic understanding and constructive approach to current social issues from the lens of social sciences. In this way, we act as a bridge between researchers, decision-makers and civil society; and advance the possibility of producing independent knowledge about the social world we live in.

## PLATFORM

Platform magazine is published within the body of TODAM of the İLKE Foundation for Science, Culture and Education (TODAM) in an attempt to provide up-to-date and original perspectives on the intellectual, political, social, economic and cultural agendas of Muslim societies. Platform is an output of the Thought and Movements in Muslim Societies Project. It aims to be a platform where the affairs of the Muslim world are followed and analysed through the activities of influential think tanks, research centres and institutes, universities, political, religious, and social movements. The Muslim world's contributions to global issues and the ongoing intellectual accumulation are presented to Turkey and the world through Platform magazine. It keeps its finger on the pulse of the Muslim world through its website and its database of current institutions, movements, activities, and personalities.

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# Editorial

Muslims have developed various ways to engage in social and political life with their own identities in the regions they inhabit. In societies governed by authoritarian regimes, the public sometimes chooses not to participate in elections as a political stance, while at other times they take to the streets and engage in social protests to be included in the political sphere. As minorities in the places they reside, Muslims demand their rights and aspirations in accordance with the social and political system they are part of, and they make their presence felt as an important political community in those regions.

In the 27th issue of the Platform, we delve into the political and social participation of the Muslim communities in different regions across the globe. Experts in the field analyse the political and social representation of Muslims in the United Kingdom, Morocco, Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Palestine, and Central Asia.

The role and influence of civil society organizations is crucial when discussing the political and social participation of Muslim societies. The IGMG (Islamic Community Millî Görüş), which operates actively both in Europe and globally, stands as a special and distinctive example in this regard. For this issue, we had the privilege of conducting an insightful interview with Kemal Öztürk, the Central President of IGMG, who addressed our questions regarding the organization and the future of Muslims in Europe.

Furthermore, in this edition, we have an insightful interview with Prof. Dr. Lütfi Sunar, that brings his perspective on the contemporary intellectual contributions of the Muslim world to the fore.

Muslim social solidarity is one of the significant factors that enhance the social participation of Muslim communities across the globe, beyond the regions they reside in. Islamic social finance that serves as a means of social solidarity, is evaluated in its theoretical and practical aspects.

The political situation in Sudan that is going through a turbulent period, stands as an important topic on the agenda of the Muslim world. In the analysis titled “Sudan: Transition to Chaos,” Dr. Serhat Orakçı presents important insights into the current political landscape of Sudan.

The book review section includes assessments of the “Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World” series and the book titled “Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World” authored by Shelina Jan Mohamed.

In this issue that focuses on the political and social participation, we have featured a portrait of a figure who has contributed unique perspectives from a contemporary standpoint. Muhammed Abid al-Jabiri is a renowned scholar who has produced remarkable works on both the historical evolution and intellectual foundations of Islamic political thought. His scholarly worldview is examined by Dr. Muhammet Çelik. Furthermore, this issue includes an infographic that provides a quantitative analysis of the socio-political participation in the Muslim world.

*Büşra İnce & Selvanur Demircan*

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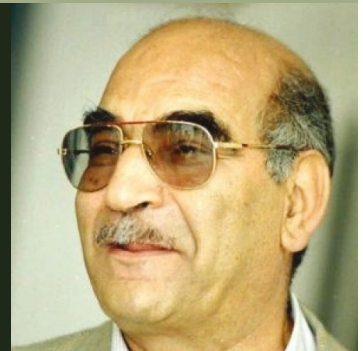
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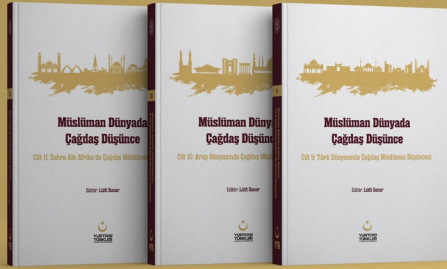


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# ELECTIONS, COUPS, REVOLUTIONS

## Indonesia, Malaysia, Tunisia, and Türkiye

### STRUGGLING AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND THE EXPERIENCES OF POLITICAL PARTY FORMATION



1920

**Türkiye:**  
In 1924, the Terakki Perver Cumhuriyet Fırkası (Progressive Republican Party) was established as the first opposition party.

**Indonesia:**  
In 1927, the Sukarno-led Indonesian Nationalist Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia-PNI) was founded.

**Malezya:**  
The United Malays National Organization (UMNO), advocating for Malay nationalism was established in 1946.

**Tunisia:**  
In 1934, Tunisian leader Habib Bourguiba founded the New Constitution Party

1980

Türkiye entered a period of political silence with the military coup on September 12, 1980, while in 1987, Tunisian leader Habib Bourguiba achieved a "silent revolution" by transferring power to Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

### TURKEY'S 1980 MILITARY COUP AND TUNISIA'S "SILENT REVOLUTION"



### THE DOWNFALL OF THE "NEW ORDER" GOVERNMENT



1990

**Türkiye:**  
"Fighting Religious Fundamentalism" declaration published on February 28, 1997

**Indonesia:**  
Uprisings in May 1998 result in president Suharto's resignation and the fall of the "new order" government. After 55 years, Indonesia holds first national and open elections in 1999.

1950

**Türkiye:**  
The 27-year-long single-party system came to an end with the victory of the Democratic Party in the 1950 elections.

**Indonesia:** It held its first general elections in 1955.

**Malezya:**  
Burhaneddin el-Helmy, Malaysian leader, adopts the nationalist left-wing in politics in 1956.

**Tunisia:** After gaining independence in 1957, Habib Bourguiba became Tunisia's first president.

### ISLAM, SOCIALISM, AND THE ERA OF AUTHORITARIAN RULE



2010



### THE JASMINE REVOLUTION AND THE JULY 15 COUP ATTEMPT

Türkiye's elections on June 2015 witnessed the absence of any political party securing a majority for independent governance. Subsequently, a coup attempt occurred on July 15, 2016. The aftermath of this coup attempt fueled discussions on a potential system change.

After Tunisian man Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire on December 17, 2010, triggering protests in Tunisia. Unable to quell the protests, Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled the country. From that point onwards, Tunisia embarked on attempts to transition towards democracy.

### EMBRACING THE NEW ORDER (ORDE BARU): A GREETING TO CHANGE



1960

Türkiye experienced a military coup in 1960, while in Indonesia, the "New Order" era began with General Suharto in 1965.

In Malaysia, the conflict between Malays and Chinese following the 1969 elections marked a turning point in Malaysian politics.

### BURGIBA: THE LIFELONG PRESIDENT



### 2020: UPS AND DOWNS

In Malaysia, the Barisan Nasional (National Front) coalition lost its dominance in parliament in the 2018 elections. It experienced its worst result in the 2022 elections.

Indonesia held its latest parliamentary and presidential elections simultaneously on April 17, 2019. Joko Widodo emerged as the winner of the presidential elections.

Tunisia, following the Jasmine Revolution, is facing new political challenges. On December 17, 2022, elections were held to determine the third-term parliament members. However, due to the boycott by several parties and movements, the voter turnout remained at a low level of 11.2 percent.

Turkey held its presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023, and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was re-elected.

1970

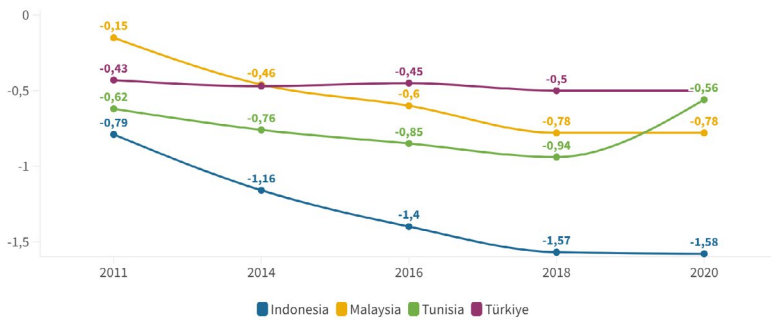


Malaysia's leader, Enver Ibrahim, established an organization called the Malaysian Islamic Students' Union (ABIM) at Malaya University in 1971.

In March 1975, Burgiba, the Leader of Tunisia, elected as "Lifelong President" by parliament, establishing a one-party regime.

2023

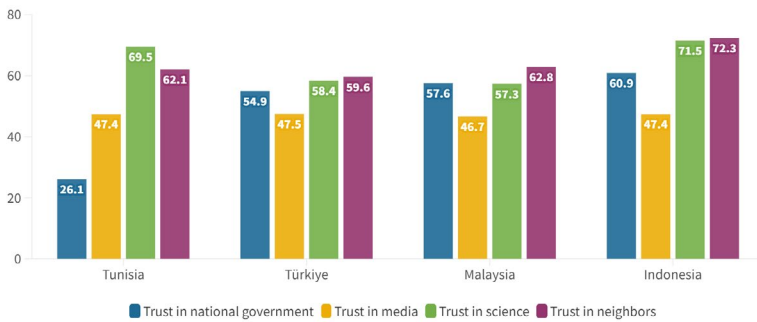




### The Support of Citizens for Democracy

Resource: Our World in Data

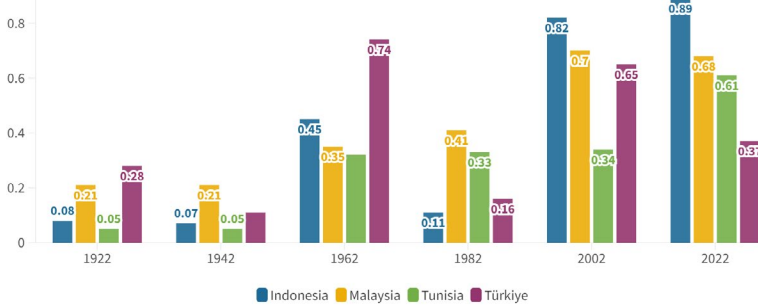
Between 2011 and 2018, there was a notable decline in the support for democracy within Indonesian and Malaysian societies. This decline can be attributed to a range of social and political challenges, including erroneous economic policies, unresolved issues of corruption, and the desire of Malaysians to have strong leaders such as Mahathir Mohamad in positions of power. These factors have played a significant role in shaping the diminishing support for democracy in both countries.



### "Citizens' Confidence Index (%)

Resource: Our World in Data

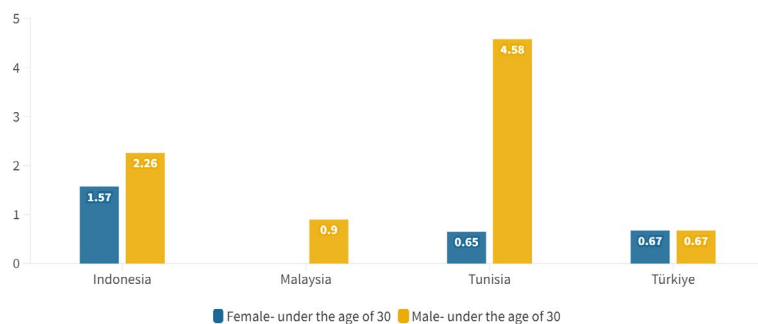
Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia exhibit trust in their respective governments, whereas the Tunisian society lacks confidence in its government. This lack of trust in Tunisia is primarily influenced by President Kays Said's authoritarian inclinations and the repression of political freedoms.



### Civic Participation

Resource: Our World in Data

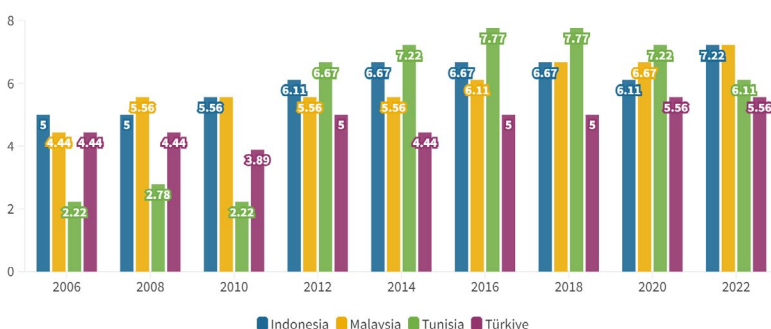
Civil Participation encompasses a wide range of actions, including individual volunteering, advocacy, and activism, in addition to political practices. During the period of 2002-2022, Tunisia witnessed a notable surge in the field of civil participation. The continued upward trajectory of civil participation in Tunisia signifies a strong commitment to the implementation of democracy on a political level. This suggests that Tunisia is likely to maintain a robust stance in advancing the practice of democracy.



### Proportion of Female-Male Members of Parliament Under the Age of 30

Resource: Our World in Data

The absence of female parliamentarians under the age of 30 in Malaysia indicates a lack of political involvement among young women. On the other hand, Tunisia, with the highest proportion of young members of parliament, demonstrates active and strong political participation among young individuals.



### Political Participation Rates

Resource: Our World in Data

While Indonesia and Malaysia exhibit strong political participation, Tunisia experienced a strengthening of societal engagement in politics following the Jasmine Revolution in 2010. However, starting from 2020, there has been a decline in political participation. The exacerbating factors include the impact of COVID-19, economic downturn, and increased unemployment, which have contributed to the political crises faced by Tunisia.

# Pursuit of Democratization and Suppression of Civil Society in the Middle East



**İsmail Numan Telci**

Assoc. Prof. Dr., Vice President of  
ORSAM

<http://dx.doi.org/10.26414/pmdg27>

The political landscape of the Middle East in recent history has been defined by a prevailing trend of regimes exerting control over civil society, curbing its growth and inhibiting its potential as an independent force separate from the state. Numerous countries in the region have witnessed entrenched regimes actively stifling the development of civil society. Nonetheless, the growing calls for civil rights and liberties, coupled with the forces of globalization, have fostered an environment that empowers civil society to assert its autonomy and act independently, transcending the constraints imposed by the state.

In the aftermath of the Arab revolutions in 2011, the Middle Eastern countries have faced a challenging environment that has constrained the potential for civil society to thrive. Factors such as internal instability, disruptions in democratization efforts, economic hardships, and the enduring presence of repressive inclinations have created a limited operating space for civil society. Presently, it is evident that the progress of civil society varies across countries, shaped by distinct contexts. However, it remains primarily confined within the boundaries dictated by political leaderships, functioning within constrained opportunities.

In addition, as demands for democratization increased, particularly since the 1990s, Middle Eastern societies have also intensified their calls for democratic political systems, parallel to the rise of a young and educated population. This situation became most evident through the popular uprisings that started in Tunisia in 2010 and spread to several other countries in the region by 2011, resulting in the overthrow of certain authoritarian leaders. Millions of people, whose rights and freedoms were restricted, took to the streets, demanding the establishment of democratic institutions, the control of governance by civil political actors, and the development of civil society.

These processes initially seemed to hold the potential for revolutionary transformations. However, in the following years, they faced significant failures largely due to intense interventions by the external actors. The most recent example of such phenomenon is currently taking place in Tunisia, one of the countries with a strong tradition of civil society. Since the presidential election in 2021, President Kais Saied, who gained support from civil society organizations,

“ **Middle Eastern societies have also intensified their calls for democratic political systems, parallel to the rise of a young and educated population.** ”

has implemented undemocratic practices in both politics and the civil society sphere through the decisions he has made.

Despite the pressure exerted by revolutionary moves against certain regimes to undergo democratic changes, the outcomes have varied across countries. Over the course of the past decade, some nations have taken strides towards democratization and empowered civil society, while the democratic institutions in others have deteriorated. One of the greatest internal obstacles hindering the cultivation of a robust civil society culture in the Middle East is the existence of negative examples. Individuals and institutions involved in such examples face punitive measures from political authorities, thereby stifling their voices and perpetuating an environment that discourages the growth of civil society.

In this evolving landscape, the year 2021 witnessed similar dynamics in certain countries, such as Tunisia

and Sudan, where civil society faced obstacles in establishing itself as an independent force and exerting pressure within democratic frameworks. Meanwhile, in Israel, civil society organizations have encountered restrictions imposed by the government and witnessed significant violations of rights, particularly affecting Palestinians. Conversely, some reforms in countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia can be viewed as a positive move towards enhancing the role of civil society within the political and social structure. However, in countries such as Syria, Yemen, and Libya, that are plagued by ongoing civil wars and instability, the decline of civil society and the erosion of democratization have reached irreparable levels. At this juncture, it becomes pertinent to delve into recent developments surrounding civil society and democratization in the Middle East through a few illustrative case studies.



Following his interrogation, Raşid Gannuşı, the leader of Tunisia's Nahda Party, is greeted warmly by the Tunisian people.



## Tunisia

Tunisia has suffered one of the most serious setbacks in the context of civil society and democratization (“Egypt: Implementing regulations of NGOs”, 2021) following the Arab popular movements that transformed the Middle Eastern region in political, social and economic terms. President Kais Saied’s decision to dissolve parliament and dismiss the government on July 25, 2021 was undoubtedly the most serious setback to the democratic transformation process that the country has been trying to achieve since 2010. During this process, Kais Saied disregarded the appeals for national dialogue and the demands put forth by civil society organizations in the country, thereby jeopardizing the potential loss of hard-won post-revolutionary achievements.

In a process that represents a setback in democratization, Rashid Ghannouchi, the leader of the Ennahda Movement and former Speaker of the Parliament, was arrested on April 17, 2023 (Turan, 2023). Consequently, the initiation of legal proceedings against prominent members of Ennahda, the largest social movement in

***The emergence of these new civil initiatives can also be attributed to the perceived failure of traditional civil society organizations in Tunisia to respond adequately to Kais Saied’s decisions.***

Tunisia, has created an atmosphere of pressure for those advocating for civil rights in the country. Like other members of the Ennahda Movement who have faced legal processes alongside Ghannouchi, his arrest has been justified under the pretext of “conspiring against state security,” indicating that the arrests have narrowed Tunisia’s democratization processes and can be seen as politically motivated charges (Turan, 2023). Furthermore, the fact that these processes are being conducted by military courts

has been deemed unacceptable by civil actors in Tunisia who aspire to a democratic transformation.

In addition to these developments, the closure of party headquarters and structures, such as the Ennahda Movement’s headquarters and the Tunis Will Party, which will be closely monitored under legal proceedings, has further interrupted the trajectory of democratization. The closure of all Ennahda offices in the mid-2023 following Kais Saied’s interventions has undermined democratization processes and hindered the participation of political movements with popular support, such as Ennahda, in democratic processes (Al Jazeera, 2023).

Amidst the COP27 Climate Conference in Egypt, a demonstration was held to raise awareness about human rights violations.



In processes representing one of the setbacks of democratic gains, the leader of the Nahda Movement and former Speaker of Parliament Rashid al-Ghannouchi was arrested on April 17, 2023 (Turan, 2023). In this context, the initiation of legal proceedings against prominent members of Nahda, Tunisia's movement with the widest social base, led to a serious pressure on those defending civil rights in the country. It was stated that Ghannouchi was arrested within the scope of "conspiracy against state security", as were other members of the Nahda Movement against whom legal proceedings were initiated, and from this point of view, it can be stated that the arrests narrowed the democratization processes in Tunisia and were political accusations (Turan, 2023). Simultaneously, the involvement of military courts in these proceedings was deemed unacceptable by civilian actors in Tunisia who aspired for a democratic transformation. Furthermore, the closure of party buildings and facilities, including the Nahda Movement's headquarters and the offices of the Tunisian Will Party, where legal proceedings were expected to be conducted under close scrutiny, disrupted the ongoing democratization efforts. Notably, in the wake of Kais Said's interventions, all of Nahda's offices were forcibly shut down in the middle of 2023, undermining the democratization processes and obstructing the participation of popularly supported

political movements like Nahda in the democratic sphere (Al Jazeera, 2023).

Following Kais Said's actions, Tunisia, known for its strong emerging civil society, has witnessed independent social groups mobilizing civil organizations of their own accord. One prominent initiative, "Citizens Against the Coup," led by independent political activists who organized through social media, gained prominence through mass protests against the Said administration. This civil initiative, which unites various segments of Tunisian society, continues to exert pressure on the government to ensure that the referendum and election roadmap outlined by Said upholds democratic principles and fulfils the demands of Tunisian citizens. These developments can be viewed as a reflection of Tunisia's longstanding tradition of civil society engagement.

The emergence of these new civil initiatives can also be attributed to the perceived failure of traditional civil society organizations in Tunisia to respond adequately to Kais Said's decisions. Throughout this process, certain trade unions, labor unions, and civil organizations that hold significant political influence remained silent in the face of Said's undemocratic actions. Domestic political differences and ideological divisions among certain groups opposed to the Nahda movement may have contributed to the

ineffectiveness of traditional civil society actors in addressing the President's decisions (Boussen, 2022).

Moreover, Kais Said's position as the ultimate authority in shaping the country's political will grants society the power and privilege to determine which movements are detrimental or beneficial. Consequently, this narrows the space and future prospects for civil society movements in Tunisia.

## Egypt

Due to the political processes and arbitrary practices of the governments, a transformation in civil society was not achieved in Egypt after the change of government in 2013. Under the leadership of Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, a former Chief of General Staff who assumed the presidency, civil society in Egypt encountered constitutional limitations and government-controlled mechanisms. As a result, civil society movements in Egypt have been unable to operate as they would in democratic countries, and independent civil society organizations have faced significant challenges in their survival. The Sisi administration has faced strong criticism from organizations such as the International Crisis Group, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch (HRW). These organizations, through their reports and analyses, have called for a crackdown on civil society organizations in Egypt and for the government to loosen its tight grip on such activities.

One of the major issues that was raised in this context was Egypt's refusal to admit certain civil society organizations and their affiliates to the 27<sup>th</sup> UN Climate Change Summit (COP27) in Egypt. UN human rights experts criticized Egypt's systematic policies in this regard and called for transparency (AP News, 2022). The fact that Egypt has been criticized on different fronts on related issues even during the organization of an international conference, which is a critical issue in terms of international prestige,

shows the serious extent to which the problems of civil society movements and culture have reached.

The control and restrictions imposed on civil society organizations in Egypt have taken a significant turn with the introduction of Law No. 149 on Civil Society Organizations in 2019. The implementation of this law has been temporarily delayed due to both national and international outcry. However, the recent announcement that the law will be fully enforced by 2021 has sparked a strong backlash within the civil society community. Prominent civil society organizations in the country have come together to issue a collective statement, urging the government not to implement the law (Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, 2021). They argue that this law will further intensify the pressure on civil society organizations and curtail the rights and freedoms guaranteed by international conventions in Egypt.

Despite some progress, the absence of specific regulations for individuals detained for political reasons over many years has resulted in ongoing criticism of the Sisi administration by proponents of democracy. In the face of this criticism, Egypt may adopt a more lenient approach towards its stringent policies in this regard and gradually transform the activities of institutions, organizations, and individuals who are not directly involved in terrorism. This shift is particularly significant considering the importance of improving relations with Western countries and institutions for Egypt's reputation. As part of these efforts, certain political prisoners were granted amnesty and released in 2022 and 2023 (Deng and al-Fekki). Human rights advocates have called for the continuation of these decisions (ISHR, 2023).

## Palestine

In recent years, Israel has intensified its policies of oppression and marginalization against Palestinians, while simultaneously accelerating measures

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***Israel has intensified its policies of oppression and marginalization against Palestinians, while simultaneously accelerating measures to restrict civil society organizations, particularly in the occupied territories.***

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to restrict civil society organizations, particularly in the occupied territories. These policies align with the strict agenda pursued by Israeli political leaders in order to prevent the Palestinian population from gaining strength within civil society and exerting pressure on both Israel and the Palestinian government. This practice, which is part of Israel's broader occupation policies, targets not only civil society organizations engaged in political or human rights activities but also institutions working across various sectors, including agriculture, health, humanitarian aid, and freedom of expression.

Within this framework, the Palestinian Farmers' Unions Committee building was subjected to a six-month closure following a raid by the Israeli army in July 2021. Additionally, the office of Defense of Children, an organization advocating for the rights of children arrested by Israel, was raided by Israeli security units during the same period (Harawi, 2021). The Israeli government designates Palestinian civil society groups it wishes to suppress as terrorist organizations. Consequently, in October 2021, Israel

declared six Palestinian civil society organizations as terrorist entities and suspended their activities ("Israel declares," 2021). Following this decision, both the Palestinian side and international organizations, including the United Nations, strongly condemned the actions of the Tel Aviv administration ("Outraged over Israel's Designation," 2021).

These systematic Israeli practices have persisted throughout 2022 and 2023 (Mekelberg, 2023). In August 2022, Israeli security forces halted the operations and sealed the offices of seven non-governmental organizations in Ramallah, including the Palestinian Women's Union Committee and the al-Haq Center for the Protection of Children. The United Nations Human Rights office issued a statement condemning these actions (OHCHR, 2022). While the Israeli government's crackdown on civil society organizations has been widespread, it has also targeted human rights defenders based in Israel. In August 2022, the Israeli government decided to suspend the activities of 53 civil society organizations, including several based in Israel, that



*"Cultural Boycott" demonstrations were organized against Israel.*

had shown solidarity with Palestinian civil society organizations or criticized the practices of the Tel Aviv administration. In response, these organizations released a statement denouncing the government's suppression of civil society (B'tselem, 2022).

Simultaneously, Palestinian cyber versions of civil society organizations have emerged as a novel form of resistance, which have faced repression from Israel. This new dimension of resistance plays a significant role in establishing a fresh civic space for Palestinians. Cyber-organized organizations like "disarmingdesign," "The Mosaic Rooms," and "culturalboycott for Palestine" not only provide a platform for Palestinian civic engagement but also serve as mechanisms to exert pressure on Israel by increasing civil and social visibility. These initiatives are vital in shaping a digital space that contributes to the Palestinian cause (Disarming Design, 2023).

In 2021, the UN declared Israel's human rights record disastrous due to the ongoing pressure on Palestinians, including home demolitions, killings, and the expansion of illegal settlements. It is evident that Israel intensified its oppression of Palestinians in 2021, capitalizing on the normalization agreements with Gulf countries and the concessions granted by the Trump administration. The events that unfolded in May 2021, starting with the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and the subsequent attacks on Muslims at Al-Aqsa Mosque, can be seen as significant indications of this escalation. The political fragmentation within Palestine, coupled with the inability of Palestinians to unite both domestically and in determining foreign policy, hampers the development of a cohesive civil society movement throughout the region.

## Conclusion

The Middle East region exhibits a range of disparities concerning the presence of civil society movements across its countries. Civil society organizations typically encompass groups advocating for causes such as environmental conservation, women's rights, and various social issues. However, there has been a concerning trend in recent years where certain governments seek to exert full control over civil society organizations. In this context, civil society movements in the Middle East strive to make an impact. Nevertheless, due to limited economic opportunities and

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**Civil society movements in the Middle East strive to make an impact. Nevertheless, due to limited economic opportunities and growing political pressures, they face challenges in operating at their desired level of effectiveness.**

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# “ **Civil society activities in technologically supported realms such as cyberspace can contribute to shaping the future civil space in the Middle East.** ”

growing political pressures, they face challenges in operating at their desired level of effectiveness.

Numerous factors impede the progress and empowerment of civil society movements in the region. Primarily, the repressive frameworks of political regimes, along with specific laws, regulations, and the prevalence of self-censorship, hinder the critical, transnational, and intellectual nature of these movements. Additionally, the perception of civil society movements and their institutional structures as non-national entities contributes significantly to the restrictions imposed on their activities and the challenges faced in their development.

Given all these conditions, it seems challenging to make hopeful assessments about the future and development of civil society in the Middle East, based on various examples. Despite the potential for continued existence of civil society in the face of enduring oppressive structures of political will in the region, it can be stated that its impact may remain limited, generating modest outcomes in social and political spheres. In this regard, an important aspect is the significant youth population, particularly in larger countries of the Middle East, and the ability of young people to engage in various civil domains. Civil society activities in technologically supported realms such as cyberspace can contribute to shaping the future civil space in the Middle East.

Furthermore, various political developments in the region, security-focused policies, and geopolitical challenges may hinder the creation of a conducive social environment for the proliferation of civil society activities from the grassroots level. However, the expanding youth population and demands for democratization are exerting pressure on Middle Eastern governments to adopt a more progressive agenda concerning rights and freedoms. Simultaneously, there will persist a grassroots demand for the strengthening and support of civil society. Therefore, the future of civil society will be contingent upon

the grassroots demands and the stances of regimes in response, alongside diverse structural, political, economic, and geopolitical realities.

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# Women's Sociopolitical Participation in the Middle East



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By observing the general structure of our societies and its function, we'll notice that the roles of social movements in political and social changes have increased as a result of the failure or weakness of the governmental and national institutions in addressing the risks and opportunities towards developments that faced these societies. These movements strongly depended on social media to communicate among their local and international networks and to disseminate a unified model for demands and mechanisms for societal change, especially about women.

Thus, women became a central and urgent issue for all international foundations, and all United Nations bodies focused their efforts and programs on empowering and leading women and girls to match the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially in the regions of the Middle East. Almost all local or international conferences or forums are considering these goals, especially in terms of its political and social participation.

However, for accurate women's socio-political participation assessment in the Middle East, unfortunately, it is very difficult to identify indicators that the whole region shares, given the political, cultural, religious and economic diversity of its countries. We can find Islamic countries that followed the principles of Islamic law and gave women their role and right in many fields, like Iran and Iraq, which is ranking as of 4<sup>th</sup> Arab countries in parliaments participation for women. And secular countries that adopted civil standards, for example Türkiye that shares 17.3% of Parliaments seats for women. And countries that can be classified as politically and socially unstable, such as, Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon that since 1943, out of 76 governments formed only 8 included women.

Therefore, women lead contributions and create success, with multi visions and sometimes contradictory, even with the endeavours of the United Nations bodies within their programs with governments and civil society to empower women within national consultations, conferences and meetings with experts, trainings for peace initiatives, and women's rights protocols to redesign the local laws, policies and programs to ensure international charters. However, what women in these countries have carried out, is the use of unified concepts with contents that do not match the environment of these



*Lebanese women are protesting against government corruption.*

societies or the actual needs and priority of women in each country.

This led to, most of the women in political and social positions they reach, worked against changing stereotypical cultural legacies, towards the new roles of men and women, as a new thought of societal change. Some of them worked on parties' program that implemented as previously, with no new ideas of innovation related to the new member. Thus, the real case we must discuss is, that women in their new positions don't have the opportunities to reform policies due to the lack of independence, or analysis of the variance. Their work programs were exclusively voting and proposals for laws that might not be taken into consideration most of the times especially implementing women's quota in parliaments and equality in all institutions and at all levels.

### **Where Is the Reformist Role They Should Be Practicing?**

The closest example of this, is Lebanon, where as in the government of Hassan Diab in 2021, 6 women ministers were appointed, but his government lasted only 7 months, because of the unstable conditions due to Beirut Port Explosion, and nothing changed or presented. Also, During the rule of President Michel Aoun in 2016, the first veiled Muslim woman belonging to a political party was appointed, in addition

to 27 female ambassadors, 3 women out of 10 in the Supreme Commission supervising the elections, and 12 women out of 70 members of the Economic and Social Council. Today, women hold six out of 128 parliamentary seats (Data, 2021).

All that is being worked on to progress strategy to implement equality (50/50 model) in all institutions and at all levels, abolish all discriminatory laws against women and enforce equality in the law: nationality, gender-based violation (GBV), unified personal status, and endorse a law for violence against women in politics to protect women and give them freedom of expression (Increasing Women's Participation in Politics, n.d.). All these with international assistance, that it could rather helped women to contribute in solving the economic and social crisis that Lebanon has been suffering since 2019, which was classified as multidimensional poverty, with a very high rate of unemployment for both men and women, and a lack of needed equipment for schools and universities teaching.

The real problem is not women's sociopolitical participation in the countries of the Middle East or not, but rather the feasibility and visibility of this participation. A Muslim woman has many societal roles in protecting and empowering society according to her capabilities and interests, and most importantly, her innated and acquired duty. Therefore,



Deputies in the Egyptian Parliament

our youth with their high level and distinct degrees and majors, must be collaborate within a national social intervention plan that studies the privacy and needs of each community within a specialized scientific program that adopts systematic studies and comprehensive development applications.

This requires rethinking about “new approaches to empowering women” within national strategic plans that benefit from the experiences of similar societies only. And “new concept of sociopolitical participation” which considers the specific conditions of each region and possibilities available for development. And “re-considering the concept of women’s quota” to understand the dynamics of its approval and the necessity of adopting it with sustainable and early rehabilitation that takes into consider individual differences and diverse interests.

***The real problem is not women’s sociopolitical participation in the countries of the Middle East or not, but rather the feasibility and visibility of this participation.***

By reformulating these, as Islamic societies, it matches our values, which respect and protect women, and prioritize them to facilitate their participation in society, full-filling their role, especially their major one in protecting and raising healthy families that leads to a flourishing society. Here, we must work on creating “role models”, which in turn can formulate a “new feminist” to face “violent extremism” against our Islamic social system, especially towards problematic topics that touch human dignity, such as homosexuality and its accompanying concepts.

Women nowadays are facing very dangerous challenges. This needs accurate and conscious decisions and movements. We are losing our youth, our children, our families, and our homes. Let us begin a new chapter, with fresh, real thoughts.

“Together, Women and Men, for Integration not Equality”

***“Europe has become the homeland of Muslims.”***

**Interview with IGMG  
Central President  
Kemal Ergün**

**The Islamic Community (IGMG) emerged as a mosque established by a few young university students on a campus. Education and instruction held significant importance in the founding phase of IGMG. Today, as a widespread and influential organization throughout Europe, what role does IGMG play in educational participation in Europe? What specific advantages does IGMG bring to Muslim communities?**

We strive to encompass everything that is part of life for our people, not only in Europe but also in the Balkans, Scandinavian countries, Japan, Canada, Australia, and the United States. We make efforts to provide various services. In these mentioned regions, our communities, educational institutions, schools, and institutes have a wide range of services that accompany people throughout their lives. This partnership begins in preschool, continues through secondary education and university life, and extends to other areas of life. We make comprehensive and profound efforts to provide services, ranging from adult education to services offered to our disabled brothers and sisters.

Our greatest goal is to raise generations who live and uphold the moral values of Islam at both individual and societal levels, aiming to pass on these values as beautiful examples to future generations. In this regard, our communities and institutions serve important functions. As the statistics in countries like Germany show, our communities and institutions are the biggest safeguard against young people becoming criminalized and falling into dangerous trends. The data confirms this. We provide a moderate path and lifestyle, allowing our young people and others to embrace a balanced approach and gain a Muslim perspective.

**IGMG is an organization founded by immigrants, but over time it has taken on an identity that integrates it with the society in which it is located. What challenges and opportunities has the indigenous identity of the IGMG in European society created for both Europe and Muslims?**

The journey from being guest workers in Europe to becoming integral and essential members has been a lengthy and arduous process. This multidimensional process is not yet fully completed. Throughout human history, we see numerous examples of such migration stories that have resulted in permanence.



*IGMG President Kemal Ergün*

In our community, with a history of half a century, a significant transformation process began particularly in the late 1990s. The percentage of those who see themselves as guests or expatriates is decreasing. Our people demonstrate that they are integral part of the societies they live in not only in words but also practically in every aspect of social life. The point reached in the 1990s was a turning point and, of course, a process that brought about certain difficulties and debates. However, the children of the millions of people living here are now permanent residents in this geography, and this geography has become their homeland. The term “expatriate” is no longer an accurate description for the people living here. Planning and implementing steps to preserve the language and religion of our people who live in these newly recognized geographies and to pass them on to future generations are fundamental duties of our organization. Since 2011, through our annual Alms Campaigns, we have constructed and continue to build hundreds of institutions such as complexes, dormitories, education centres, schools, and Muslim cemeteries in the countries where we reside. We take these steps for the institutionalization and

***The children of the millions of people living here are now permanent residents in this geography, and this geography has become their homeland.***

permanence of the Islamic identity in these lands. It is not possible to achieve these without embracing these places as homeland and abandoning the mentality of being guests. As you can see, the number of those who choose these new homelands for burial instead of Türkiye is increasing. This is an important indicator.

**What does the phrase “Islamic Community” signify? Can we find inclusivity and pluralism principles within the concept of IGMG?**

We are an organization that has made it a fundamental principle to empathize with the concerns of the Islamic ummah and humanity at large. Serving the ummah is at the forefront of our core principles. As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “The similitude of believers in regard to mutual love, affection, fellow feeling is that of one body; when any limb of it aches, the whole body aches, because of sleeplessness and fever.” This profound hadith summarizes the purpose of our organization. Regardless of the geographical location, the problems and hardships of our Muslim brothers and sisters are our own. Islam is our primary identity, and

**“ The empowerment of Muslim women and their active participation as independent individuals in society has been a long-established vision within our organization. ”**

we never categorize people based on their ethnic origin, skin colour, or language. The phrase “İslam Toplumunu” (Islamic Community) in our name reflects this notion. Therefore, our community not only extends its hand to the people in the countries where we reside but also to our brothers and sisters across continents. As an organization, we gathered some of the world’s prominent academics and politicians in Cologne a few years ago to address and organize the Arakan Conference, with the aim of ending the genocide against Muslims in Arakan. We have been the staunchest supporters of the Rohingya Muslims in seeking their rights through international courts. In November last year, we organized the International Uyghur Forum in Brussels at the European Parliament to raise global awareness about the genocide faced by the Uyghur Turks. During this two-day forum, attended by influential politicians and academics, we formulated an action plan to stop this crime against humanity. What motivates us to do all of this? It is to attain the qualities of a true believer as described in the aforementioned hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and to seek the pleasure of Allah. Standing with the oppressed people of the world and extending our hand to them is a form of worship and jihad for us. Our efforts to serve the ummah and our understanding of jihad are among our core principles.

**IGMG has a wide organizational network spanning from Germany to Scandinavian countries, and from America to Japan and Australia. In this vast geography, where has the participation in settled social life and political representation been most challenging?**

If there is not widespread negative attitude towards religion in the societies we live in, if there is an established tradition regarding the relationship between religion and the state, if religious institutions are

able to participate in the social sphere, education, care, and health sectors, and if there are established customs, then the participation of our mosques and organizations in that society can be relatively easier compared to other places. However, these constitutional, structural, and historical factors may not be sufficient in some cases. For example, in places where Islamophobia is widespread, or in places where established traditions regarding constitutional participation rights and the relationship between religion and the state fail to protect our participation rights. I can give an example from Austria in recent years regarding such developments. Austria has long-established and particularly favourable legal and historical conditions regarding the relationship between religion and the state, which support the participation of Muslims. In fact, we can say that it is the country with the most positive conditions in this regard in Europe. Until the early 2000s, the participation conditions for Muslims in Austria were much better compared to other European countries. We used to refer to Austria as an example in many places. However, the increasing Islamophobia and the distant approach towards Islam and Muslims that started to spread in the early 2000s have made the lives of Muslims in this country significantly more difficult. The country that was once considered the most liveable for Muslims 20 years ago has fallen far behind that positive image in a relatively short period of 10-15 years.

Of course, there is another side of this coin. We are not able to exhibit communication, participation programs, and actions in the same way, with the same strength, content, and prevalence in all regions. When we look back 50 years ago, significant progress has been made. However, it is not enough. We continue to work with determination.



*IGMG Women's Organization Hosts 19th Quran Recitation Competition in Bielefeld, Germany.*

**IGMG places special emphasis on youth and women's activities. What are the main reasons for valuing youth and women's work? In contrast to the image portrayed by the Western media as being "deprived of their rights," what kind of Muslim women profile do you see in Europe? Are Muslim women increasingly able to participate in social life in Europe?**

The empowerment of Muslim women and their active participation as independent individuals in society has been a long-established vision within our organization. The role of women within our organization has been shaped based on this vision. The Women's Organization and the Women's Youth Organization are two essential components that have contributed to the development of our organization. We believe it is our societal responsibility to enhance the valuable contributions made by young and adult women at all levels of our mosques and to strengthen their opportunities for better representation. This approach is deeply rooted in our religious understanding and our tradition of consultation. In all of the hundreds of mosques we have in Europe, the meticulous efforts of both men and women are present. Although often unseen, this effort deserves recognition and frequent mention. Unfortunately, many stereotypes about "Muslim women" in the countries where our organization is active are based on deep historical backgrounds. While

Muslim women struggle against these stereotypes and face daily accusations and occasional attacks due to their headscarves or religious identities, we also need to create spaces where Muslim women can realize themselves and carry their Islamic identity without facing condemnation or exclusion. It is crucial for our organization to have a structure that specifically provides these spaces for (young) women, supporting them in education, employment, civil society work, and politics. Similarly, our perspective on youth does not view youth as a transitional period to be overcome. In our organization, young people have their own organizational structures. They take responsibility, develop and implement projects, and become pioneers of positive transformation in society. Our duty is to support them, provide them with opportunities, and remove the obstacles in their path when they stumble.

**Muslims living in Europe still face Islamophobia and various forms of discrimination. However, alongside this, there are also impressions regarding the Islamization of Europe. Considering the socio-political and economic participation of Muslims, how do you perceive the potential of Muslims in Europe? What contributions can Muslims make towards a more just and principled future in Europe?**

Allah (SWT) is the Lord of all creation. Our Prophet was sent as a mercy to all the worlds. Therefore, Allah



is not only the Lord of Muslims, and our Prophet is not merely a messenger sent exclusively to Muslims. As Muslims, it is our duty to internalize, reflect upon, and implement this awareness in all aspects of our lives. Every individual is sacred. The spirit that Allah breathed into us resides within every human being. From this perspective, when we centre our question not around the “potential of Muslims” but rather the “potential within every human being,” a magnificent picture emerges. Regardless of where they are in the world, every person possesses incredible potential. While enjoying this blessing, we strive to show respect and serve all people based on their inherent potential. Discrimination, marginalization, and injustice only strengthen our determination when viewed from this standpoint. Our utmost effort is directed towards eliminating external and internal barriers between humanity and Islam and rectifying any misconceptions or wrongdoings.

To embody exemplary behaviour that befits human dignity, it is essential for us to be visible and actively present in all spheres of society. However, this can only be achieved by drawing inspiration from the noble example set by our beloved Prophet and embracing the present moment with a forward-looking mindset, free from rigid adherence to outdated customs and narrow-mindedness. It requires being mindful of the concerns of the present time, without falling behind or succumbing to anxieties about the future. We aim to be Muslims who are not reliant on mere rhetoric, but rather, actively contribute by productive actions. We believe that this approach is possible by embracing the values and historical experiences generated by the society in which we live and striving to comprehend and evaluate them from a thoughtful perspective.

The process of Islamization or Muslim participation in European society is monitored and assessed based on which data and indicators? These factors require continuous re-evaluation. We should carefully examine statistics, numbers, and avoid superficial, divisive, or inflammatory rhetoric influenced by propaganda, as well as analyse the populist political agenda. We must engage in continuous contemplation grounded in human worth, our values, and moral foundations to establish healthy communication with all layers of society. By fostering solidarity, productivity, sharing, and critical thinking, we should strive to live in harmony with the community and its various segments.

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***Our presence in the public sphere should not be restricted solely to matters that are relevant to Muslims. Our participation should not be confined to discussions about halal consumption, obtaining permits for mosque construction, or debates about the hijab.***

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**IGMG does not have direct political goals, and it is also opposed to the exclusion of Islam from public life. What should be the moderate behaviour patterns for European Muslims and Muslim communities in general to participate in politics and influence decision-making mechanisms?**

As I mentioned in my previous answers, first and foremost, individuals should see themselves as part of the society and overcome the mentality of being foreigners. Yes, we are Muslims and a minority. There are issues where we differ in religious matters and daily life. But at the same time, there are numerous issues where we can come together, such as human rights or combating racism. This brings forth an important point: If we do not see ourselves as natural members of that society, embracing our religious and cultural differences, and instead continue to limit ourselves within the framework of being migrants or part of a restrictive diaspora, it will negatively impact our motivation and determination to participate and exist in the public sphere.

Moreover, there is an additional responsibility: Our presence in the public sphere should not be restricted solely to matters that are relevant to Muslims. Our participation should not be confined to discussions about halal consumption, obtaining permits for mosque construction, or debates about the hijab.

Similarly, we need to demonstrate our stance in the public sphere on matters such as the country's economy, healthcare system, retirement system, and environmental issues. Being an actor who only speaks up when it suits their own interests raises questions about their position within society. Another significant point is that despite being minorities in the countries we reside in, there are diverse opportunities for constitutional participation. Participation is not limited to voting in elections or in parliamentary sessions. If it were limited to that, our task would be much more challenging. We have opportunities and platforms to participate and voice our concerns in various fields, both before and after elections or parliamentary voting. Being aware of these opportunities, we should strive to be active and influential in these areas.

If Muslims were to establish their own political party, their status as a minority would put them at a disadvantage, making it challenging for them to effectively compete in various domains. If Muslims were to

form a union, it may not have sufficient capacity to effectively advocate for the rights of Muslim workers compared to other unions. If Muslims were to pursue professions such as law, medicine, or engineering, they may not have the same impact as the diverse professional groups in a pluralistic society. Even if Muslims were to establish a football club, it would not be as strong as clubs like Bayern Munich, Barcelona, or Arsenal in the long run. We are not saying that these initiatives should not exist, but their influence would always be limited. Acknowledging this reality and understanding the inherent limitations, we can approach such endeavours with the understanding that our influence may be restricted. To establish a presence in the public sphere and address diverse societal issues, it is most effective to actively participate within existing structures, demonstrating our presence and advocating for Muslim concerns from those positions. In other words, we can achieve this by actively participating in existing political parties, joining existing unions, and entering existing professional fields. This approach requires a solid understanding of religious issues as well as awareness of the expectations of others, establishing closeness and partnership with them. When common ground cannot be found, it also necessitates a constructive criticism approach.

**GMG defines its mission as “We are an organization that concerns itself with the issues of the ummah and humanity.” Do you believe that the political and social engagement of Muslim communities is adequate at ummatic level? What actions need to be taken?**

No, we cannot claim that we find it sufficient. We need to go beyond and actively engage in various aspects of society such as the country's economy, education system, social issues, and environmental concerns in the countries where we reside. Additionally, we should cultivate the ability to offer a vision in literature and art. As Muslims, what contributions do we offer to humanity in the face of the ongoing climate crisis? In addition to criticizing the global capitalist system, what solutions can we provide? Prior to discussing political and social participation as mentioned in your question, it is essential for us to develop a comprehensive political and social perspective.

# Exploring the Political and Civic Engagement of British Muslims



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The British Muslim population constitute a significant minority in the UK. The latest Census results from 2021 estimate 3.9 million people identify as British Muslims, (6.5% of the population in England and Wales), an increase from 2.7 million British Muslims (4.9%) in 2011. The census results for Scotland 2022 have not yet been published. The 2021 Census for England and Wales also highlighted the increase in ethnic groups – with British Bangladeshis increasing from 0.8% in 2011 to 1.1% in 2021; Indians increasing from 2.5% to 3.1%; Pakistanis increasing from 2% to 2.7% and Arabs from 0.4% to 0.6%. Not all members of these ethnic groups are Muslim, and there are many Muslims in other ethnic categories of the Census, but this gives an indication of the increasing ethnic diversity of the UK. Given the ethnic diversity and significant young population of British Muslims, they have an important role to play in context of the political and civic participation.

## Representation of Muslims in Politics

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy. The monarch is King Charles III and the Conservative Party are currently serving in the government. Parliament is made up of two Parliamentary chambers – the House of Commons and the House of Lords. There are also devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, made up of the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The diversity in ethnic, geographical and socio-economic spread of British Muslims has meant that the political party affiliations are also changing. Historically, British Muslim voters have commonly sided with the Labour Party due to its working-class and Union roots. The Labour Party was frequently seen as a tempting party due to their policies on multiculturalism and social justice that are attractive to Muslim voters. However, in recent decades as British Muslim socio-economic status has begun shifting, support across the political spectrum has begun to change, with support for the Conservative Party growing based on economic policies and social values; while both the Green Party, Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party (in Scotland) are also attracting Muslim voters.



**British Muslim elected political representatives - both locally and nationally - have increased substantially in the last decade.**

*United Kingdom's Labour Party, backed by a segment of the Muslim community, nominates Apsana Begum as a parliamentary candidate*

British Muslim elected political representatives - both locally and nationally - have increased substantially in the last decade. In 2019, Muslim candidates won a record 18 Parliamentary seats; up from 15 in the 2017 General Election. Newly elected in 2019 were Apsana Begum (Labour MP for Poplar & Limehouse), Zarah Sultana (Labour MP for Coventry South) and Tahir Ali (Labour MP for Birmingham Hall Green). Apsana Begum was also the first hijab wearing Muslim woman to become an MP.

There is certainly continued success for many female Muslim MPs from the 2017 to the 2019 election with the re-election of Rushanara Ali (Labour MP for Bethnal Green & Bow), Yasmin Qureshi (Labour MP for Bolton South East), Shabana Mahmood (Labour MP for Birmingham Ladypool), Naz Shah (Labour MP Bradford West), Tulip Siddiq (Labour MP for Hampstead & Kilburn), Rupa Huq (Labour MP for Ealing Central & Acton), Rosena Allin-Khan (Labour MP for Tooting) and Nusrat Ghani (Conservative MP for Wealden).

Several politicians of Muslim heritage have held prominent positions within political parties, serving as ministers, shadow ministers, and party leaders at various levels. They include Sajid Javid who served

as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care from June 2021 to July 2022, having previously served as Home Secretary from 2018 to 2019 and Chancellor of the Exchequer from 2019 to 2020; Nadhim Zahawi, who was Secretary of State for Education in 2021/22; London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who has served as the first Muslim Mayor of London since 2016; Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, a British-Pakistani member of the House of Lords, who served as the first Muslim female cabinet minister in the UK, holding positions as co-Chairwoman of the Conservative Party from 2010 to 2012, Minister without Portfolio and as Minister of State for Faith and Communities. In March 2023, Humza Yousaf was elected as the First Prime Minister of Scotland and Leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP). At local Government level, there are over 400 British Muslim councillors and Mayors.

## **Social Engagement of Muslims**

Essentially, British Muslims are not monolithic in their political interests or party affiliation. While efforts to



*Eid Celebrations in London's Muslim Community*

provide a more comprehensive political sphere have meant that advocacy and activism across communities has improved, the continued effort to create a more inclusive political environment should mean that British Muslims can continue to play an active role in shaping the nation's political landscape.

British Muslims are also involved in grassroots activism to address issues affecting their community and promote social justice. They participate in campaigns and initiatives related to civil liberties, anti-racism, Islamophobia, refugee rights, and other social and political causes. One of the not-for-profit organizations that aims to tackle these issues is the Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND). MEND states that its objectives are to “empower and encourage British Muslims within local communities to be more actively involved in British media and politics” (<https://www.mend.org.uk>). It works towards

**The research highlights that the majority of British Muslims identify themselves strongly with a British national identity and are loyal citizens**

encouraging voter registration, and empowering individuals and communities to work towards the common good through civic engagement.

There continues to be challenges and issues faced by British Muslims in the political sphere. There have been incidents of Islamophobia by politicians that have not been thoroughly investigated. Muslims have also faced discrimination and heightened public attention due to concerns

around national security and counterterrorism measures such as Prevent. Counter-terrorism measures include gathering intelligence, covert surveillance, stop and search, arrests, lengthy periods in detention and security checks at airports (including body scanners). These counter-terrorism measures have both direct and indirect impact on human rights, equality, community cohesion and community policing.

Overall, research highlights that the majority of British Muslims identify themselves strongly with



*The British Muslim Council Organizes Seminar on ‘Working for the Common Good’*

a British national identity and are loyal citizens. Surveys that have been conducted emphasise that British Muslims feel a sense of belonging to the UK, as described in a report by Ipsos, which brings together and analyses research from various sources and explores the attitudes of British Muslims as well as the views of the public towards Muslims. In the report, it underlines that “88% say they very or fairly strongly belong to Britain” and in “a 2016 survey, 93% said they felt they belonged to Britain, with more than half saying they felt this “very strongly”, and in another survey in 2015, 95% said they feel loyal to Britain”<sup>1</sup>. This has in part been supported by their active engagement in not only political and civic spheres, but also in the arts, business, sports and education.

## **Institutional Representation of British Muslims**

Islam as a faith places a huge emphasis on public responsibility, charity and community. British Muslims actively engage in many areas of civic life, including community volunteering, interfaith initiatives, and charity work. Muslim organizations also work to foster dialogue and understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims, aiming to combat

misconceptions and promote cohesion. One such umbrella organization is the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). The MCB was formed in 1997, and its vision statement is “empowering the Muslim community towards achieving a just, cohesive and successful British society” ([www.mcb.org.uk](http://www.mcb.org.uk)). The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) is the UK’s largest Muslim umbrella organisation with over 500 members including mosques, schools, charitable associations and professional networks. It is grassroots led, cross sectarian and independent.

The current Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain is Zara Mohammed. Zara Mohammed was elected in 2021 and re-elected in 2023 and became the youngest and first female Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain.

Some organizations are set up to support all communities against discrimination. Hope Not Hate is one such national organization (<https://hopenothate.org.uk/>) that started initially as a space for anti-fascist campaigning. Hope Not Hate then grew to defend “Through our work, we defend, champion and promote democracy and the rule of law; speaking out against anti-democratic and authoritarian forces and policies” and this has included fighting against Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate. They do this through a multitude of methods including

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2018-03/a-review-of-survey-research-on-muslims-in-great-britain-ipsos\\_0.pdf](https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2018-03/a-review-of-survey-research-on-muslims-in-great-britain-ipsos_0.pdf) or <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/review-survey-research-muslims-britain-0>

campaigning, research, publications, educating, advocating and policy recommendations.

Muslims in the UK actively participate in volunteering and charity work, both within their communities and in wider society. They contribute their time, skills, and resources to support various causes, such as providing aid to vulnerable populations, supporting local initiatives, and responding to humanitarian crises. Many Muslim-led charities and organizations are involved in philanthropic efforts, including providing food, shelter, education, and healthcare services.

Some organizations are set up to work on advocacy campaigns to protect and promote civil rights and combat Islamophobia. They engage with policymakers, participate in consultations, and support campaigns that address issues such as Islamophobia, hate crime, and racial inequality. These include the MCB's Media Monitoring team, that aims to tackle media misrepresentation "Promoting Fair and Responsible Reporting of Muslims & Islam" through the analysis of online articles and broadcast content daily, challenging publishers and broadcasters when incidents of Islamophobia or discrimination take place, holding them accountable. They also provide support and organize trainings for stakeholders. One of the key activists in this area is the British Muslim leader Miqdaad Versi who has been involved in challenging media misrepresentation and Islamophobia through his work as the Assistant Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain and Director for media monitoring at the Muslim Council of Britain.

To summarize, the engagement of British Muslims in both the political sphere and community space includes campaigning and advocacy, volunteering and interfaith initiatives. Many of the organizations that have grown organically to support the British Muslim communities have done so through the need of the communities they serve, but Muslims are also supported by many intercommunity initiatives that contribute to strengthening social cohesion, and help build concrete foundations for new generations of British Muslims in terms of their political and civic engagement.

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**British Muslims actively engage in many areas of civic life, including community volunteering, interfaith initiatives, and charity work.**

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# Shadow of Ballot Box: Political Participation and Representation in Iran



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A turbulent period broke out in Iran with the death of Mehsa Emini on September 16, a few days after she was detained by the morality police (Irshad Patrols). The streets of Tehran, where Emini was visiting relatives in the town of Sakiz in the Kurdistan province of Kurdistan, erupted into a series of marches and clashes as rumors spread that she had been killed by the police who detained her. Although the majority of the demonstrations organized at the beginning were mostly peaceful protests, tensions quickly escalated in the streets and there were violent clashes between demonstrators and security forces, resulting in many deaths and injuries. While it is not surprising that mass demonstrations have taken place in Iran in recent years, the fact that this time the demonstrations have turned irreversibly into deep anti-regime protests is something that needs to be scrutinized.

Considering the previous demonstrations, there have been protests in Iran, especially in the last few years, targeting the country's leadership under the discourse of individual rights and freedoms. Sometimes around the economy, sometimes around ethno-sectarian identity and cultural rights. The fact that the streets of Iran have again erupted in the spring of 2022, following the demonstrations in 2017 and 2019, is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed from a number of perspectives. In the meantime, the country held presidential elections in 2017 and 2021, as well as parliamentary elections in 2016 and 2020, with less than a year to go parliamentary elections in March 2024. Moreover, the voter turnout rate, which stood at 42.57% in the 2020 elections, did not exceed 48.8% in 2021, when Ebrahim Reisi was elected president. Therefore, it is quite remarkable that the Iranian people, or at least a significant portion of them, are looking for solutions on the streets instead of going to the polls. The main reason for such a low voter turnout is undoubtedly the electoral system in the country.

## How Significant is the Will of the People in Elections?

Without exception, every election period in Iran is agonizing. Iranian voters elect the president and the parliament every four years, and these two elections are always held in different years. Elections are also held every eight years for the



88-member Assembly of Experts, which is composed of religious leaders. In Iran, the president is constitutionally the second highest political authority in the country after the Supreme Leader (The revolutionary guide) and heads the executive branch. Since the Supreme Leader determines the general direction of the country in every sense, the president's authority in this sense is very limited. In other words, the real authority in the country does not rest with the president, who is elected by the voters at regular intervals. Coupled with subjective practices in the selection process of presidential candidates, it is not surprising that voter turnout in Iran has plummeted.

Under Article 99 of the constitution, the Council of Guardians of the Constitution (CPC) oversees the electoral process in Iran. 6 members of the 12-member CEC are directly appointed by the Supreme Leader, while the other 6 members are jurists selected by the Majlis. The CEC, which has the authority to approve or reject candidacy applications, is not obliged to publicize the justifications for its decisions. The written justifications sent to rejected candidates upon request are rather unconvincing.

Although the number of those who submitted their candidacies for the presidency was quite high in several elections, the number of those approved by the ECEC was very limited in each period. In the 2001 elections, only 10 candidates were approved out of 817 applicants. In the 2005 elections, 8 out of 1014 candidates were ratified, and in the 2009 elections, only 4 out of over 470 applicants were approved.

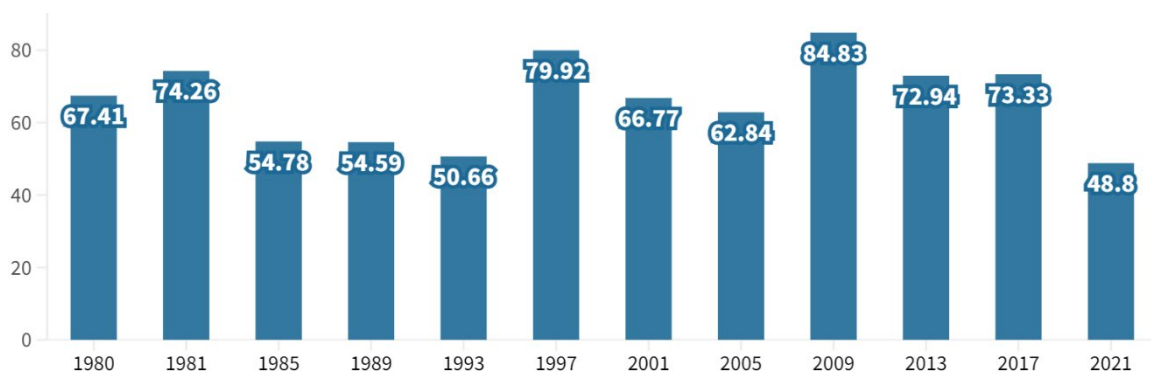
## Why Iranians Don't Go to the Polls?

In the 44 years of the Islamic Revolution, there have been 12 presidential elections in Iran. The table shows the turnout rates in these electoral processes.

Based on this, the lowest turnout rate in the presidential elections in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran occurred in 2021, when Ebrahim Reisi won the elections. Although turnout rates exceeded 70% in the 2013 and 2017 elections in which Hassan Rouhani, Reisi's two-term predecessor Hassan Rouhani was elected, such a low turnout in the last elections in 2021 indicates that the people's faith in the selection processes of candidates and the effectiveness of the elected president in addressing the problems has weakened.

In the first years of the revolution, the turnout rate in elections was over 60%. Terrorist acts, street protests and the 1980-88 Iraq-Iran War caused Iran to go through difficult times in those years. Despite this, the people showed their faith in the decisive power of elections by showing their trust in the polls.

The Iranian elections in 1993 had the lowest turnout in Iranian history after the 2021 elections. The turnout rate remained at around 50%. This was due to the failure of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's government, which came to power in 1989, to meet expectations and respond to the economic and social problems of the people in its first four years.



Graphic 1: Presidential Election Turnout in Iran (1980-2021, %)

Source: IRNA (<https://www.irna.ir/photo/84370260>)



As the income gap between the rich and the poor widened and President Rafsanjani fell far short of bringing the economic prosperity he had promised to the masses, the electorate reacted by not going to the polls.

In the 2017 Iranian elections, the turnout exceeded 70%, which is obviously due to Rouhani's influence. His first four-year term was characterized by improved diplomatic relations with the West and the signing of the Comprehensive Plan of Action, or commonly known as the Nuclear Deal, with the P5+1 countries, which lifted some of the sanctions imposed on Iran and gave the country economic relief. However, in the process, the Rouhani administration faced a confrontation with Supreme Leader Khamenei and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Rouhani's claims that he has been subjected to Khamenei's obstructions while using his powers and the IRGC's moves targeting Rouhani have put Iran's moderate president in tension with the institutional order. During his candidacy in 2017, Rouhani's candidacy was even rejected by the CEC. However, Rouhani was re-elected as president with 57% of the vote against his establishment-backed rival Ibrahim Reisi.

### ***The 2021 elections went down in history as the elections with the lowest political turnout in Iranian history.***

The 2021 elections went down in history as the elections with the lowest political turnout in Iranian history. In fact, the establishment used electoral engineering in these elections to pave the way to the presidency for Reisi, whom it had supported in the previous term. In this process, the role of the CEC was crucial, as it blocked the path to candidacy for each of the strong names that could have challenged Reisi. This caused great controversy in Iranian domestic politics. While Khatami stated that the system should be reformed as soon as possible, Rouhani emphasized the need to increase the number of candidates to increase participation and competition. Former Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, whose candidacy was rejected by the CEC, also criticized the rejection of his candidacy and tweeted questioning the reason for it. Ahmadinejad, who was a candidate but whose candidacy was blocked by the CEC, said that he would show his reaction by not voting in the elections. Indeed, a significant portion of the electorate showed a similar reaction and did not go to the polls. It should also be noted that a large group of voters who did go to the polls showed their reaction by casting invalid votes.



## Are the People Who Didn't Participate in the Elections Heading to the Streets?

Iran has witnessed many mass demonstrations in the last half century. Especially in the period leading up to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, millions of people participated in the demonstrations. In the last 20 years, especially the student protests of 1999 and the Green Movement demonstrations of 2009 indicate that the Iranian people have sought their rights in the streets where they could not find them at the polls.

In the last days of 2017, protests in Mashhad, one of the most important Shiite cities, quickly transformed into anti-regime demonstrations with slogans such as “May your soul be blessed Shah” and “Neither Gaza nor Lebanon, my life is sacrificed for Iran”. These demonstrations, which erupted largely because of economic unrest, soon turned into anti-regime protests.

On September 16, 2022, protests over the death of Mehsa Amini quickly spread across the country, particularly in the Kurdish regions. It would not be wrong to say that separatist groups were at the forefront of the slogans in the protests. For example, in

Kurdistan Province, slogans such as “Biji Kurdistan” were chanted, while in Tabriz, Turkish slogans such as “Azadlık, Adalet, Milli Hükümet” were chanted, referring to recent history. In addition, the slogans “Jin, Jiyan, Azade”, meaning “women, life, freedom”, actually describe the demands of Iranian society. These protests point to the demand for rights rather than economic ones. The fact that all Iranian people participate in these protests rather than a certain group of people reveals that there is such a quest throughout Iran.

The conflict between the institutional order and the governments in the administrative sphere in Iran has also reduced the participation of the people in the elections. In Iran, the Supreme Leader has enormous powers, which limits the president's scope of action. This creates a power struggle that is difficult to resolve. In the past, the Supreme Leader has clashed with pro-reform presidents in many areas, especially on foreign policy issues, and with conservative presidents over appointments and division of duties. At this point, the institutional order's narrowing of the president's sphere of action and the election of the desired name to the presidency as a result of electoral engineering led to the argument that the elections in Iran are for appearances. The Iranian people, who have

*After the death of Mehsa Emini, people flooded the squares with demands for democracy.*



**The Iranian people have shown their lack of trust in the system by not going to the polls or casting invalid votes, especially in the last elections.**

experienced this, have shown their lack of trust in the system by not going to the polls or casting invalid votes, especially in the last elections.

Iranians could not attain the gains they wanted with their will and were stuck in the conflict between the institutional order and the presidency. When economic and social problems were added to this, the people's trust in the state decreased and they took to the streets and shouted for freedom. The Mehsa Amini protests raised the issue of the regime's survival.

These protests have been supported by the opposition within Iran as well as outside the country.

In particular, the People's Mojahedin Organization and Iranian Crown Prince Mohammad Reza Pahlavi have openly supported and lobbied for the protests. However, as each protest movement in Iran creates an avalanche effect, regime collapse seems unlikely. Iran lacks a leader to coordinate the protests. In addition, there is a lack of opposition to both the crown prince and secular anti-regime organizations such as the People's Mojahedin Organization. In this respect, the Iranian regime's unofficial reforms and moves to meet the demands of the people may lead to a short-term respite, if not an end, to these protests.

# Political Participation and Civic Engagement in Morocco



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Same as in other parts of the world, political participation has long been a challenge to be met by various parties involved in the political process in Morocco. And while the focus for encouraging civic engagement and political participation in democratic societies stem from an ongoing effort to safeguard and strengthen democratic practices. The stakes in Morocco might be said to be somewhat higher. In the North African kingdom, political participation is seen as a reflection of the legitimacy of the political system and the regime as a whole. And while elections serve as a direct and obvious –if not only – indicator for political participation; the parameters of the political system in the country put limits on the extent of the effectiveness of elections as a mean for social and political change, which subsequently opened the door for other forms of political participation and civic engagement. The aim of this article is to explain the particularities of the Moroccan case and to provide an overview of various methods used for civic engagement and political participation in the country and the central role that social media started taking in this regard since 2011.

## Royal Authority vs Democracy

As already stated, the question and interest around political participation is not peculiar to Morocco, it is aligned with worldwide concern with this issue. Being an important component of all political systems, we find that political participation is a constant concern in participatory democracies. But it is important to understand as Halder and Philips explain that political participation plays an even more important role of reinforcing the legitimacy of the political authority by fostering stability and order (2020). Having citizens involved in different levels and aspects of the political process is the core of participatory democracy. The stakes are even higher in the case of semi-democratic systems, hybrid regimes or even authoritarian ones. This explains why many non-democratic leaders around the world are adamant about having extremely high numbers of people voting for them, they would rarely “win the elections” by less than 90% of the votes, while elections are usually won in democratic countries by much smaller margins. Claiming the existence of active political participation in non-democratic countries –even if it is not the case – provides the veneer of democratic practices needed to reinforce



the legitimacy of political authorities and systems in those countries.

In the case of Morocco, being a semi-constitutional monarchy the king both reigns and rules. Having his role and responsibilities defined within the constitutional framework of the country, he rules over all three branches of the government and more. He is the head of the ministerial council which consists of the ministers and the head of the government. The king is also the head of the supreme council of the judicial authority. He presides over the opening session of the parliament during every legislative year and he has the authority to dissolve the parliament. Even more than that, the Moroccan constitution grants the king religious authorities as *Ameer al-Moumeneen* (the commander of the faithful) and head of the supreme religious council and he is the head of both the higher Security Council and the head of the armed forces.

Being in a prolonged transition phase to democracy (Levitsky and Way, 2002) is what most politicians, political scientists and intellectuals in Morocco provide as an answer to recurring questions surrounding political practices and the political process as a whole in the country. But it is most relevant to emphasize that within the constraining parameters of the Moroccan political system, the existence of institutions and practices of procedural democracy in the North African kingdom leaves more to be desired by Moroccans who aspire for reform and political change

in their country. After six decades of establishing the electoral process in Morocco, the kingdom is nowhere near claiming democratic legitimacy.

## Political Participation of Moroccans: To What Extent?

While the details and particularities of the Moroccan electoral system is not the main question of this article per say and the country's regime type is beyond its scope, it is important to highlight specific aspects of the political system in the kingdom to understand how the political cap setting that could never exceed the boundaries of the monarchy combined with the declining credibility of the electoral process impact political participation in the kingdom both quantitatively and qualitatively.

It is true that since 1963 (seven years after the independence) elections have been regularly conducted in Morocco, but they are far from being free and fair. Not even considering the key condition of not being subjected to authorities' meddling, elections in Morocco still fail to truly meet the eight basic standards of free and fair elections put forward by the European watchdog "liberties" (The Civil Liberties Union for Europe). From voters' registration to access to reliable information and intimidation and fraud free elections, as well as accurately counting the ballots and respecting the results, the *Makhzen* (regime/ authorities) still



has the upper hand and keeps a strong grip over the electoral process in the kingdom. Besides creating what is known in Morocco as “administrative parties” for the purpose of the balkanization and fragmentation of the political scene, the Makhzen regularly uses election laws and electoral redistricting in every election cycle to control the political scene by favoring specific candidates and parties at the expense of curtailing the chances of others.

For a long time the king had the last say in assigning the head of the government regardless of the results of the elections, but after 2011 and the adoption of the new constitutional document the makhzen had to adapt; in the last legislative elections of 2021, canceling the electoral threshold and changing the electoral denominator for assigning parliamentary seats from casted votes to registered voters were some of the methods Moroccan authorities had to resort to, to tighten its grip.

When examining the data gathered by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, it is important to note that voter turnout in the country has been steadily declining since the 1970s. The lowest rate by far was registered in 2007 where claims of

**The Makhzen regularly uses election laws and electoral redistricting in every election cycle to control the political scene by favouring specific candidates and parties at the expense of curtailing the chances of others.**

fraud and electoral meddling by the *makhzen* were reported by many national and international election monitoring groups. More than low voter turnout which better showcases the relationship between political participation and the political system of the kingdom is voting age population turnout; the VAP turnout in Morocco has never reached the 40% threshold since King Mohammed VI ascended the throne in 1999.

Even more striking are both the VAP turnout and voter turnout registered in 2011. At a time in which the tides of the Arab Spring brought about political change to the forefront of the populace concern and political participation was at its peak across the Middle East, it is indeed very telling that voter turnout for the parliamentary elections held in the country on 25 November 2011 failed to even reach 50%, with only 45.40% and an even lower VAP turnout of 28.65%. Comparatively, the data provide by IDEA shows that voter turnout for parliamentary elections held during the same period in Egypt was at 62% and reached 92% in neighboring Tunisia. One of the more obvious explanations to understand the striking difference between Morocco and its North African neighbors is the regime type and political system of

the kingdom. While Tunisians and Egyptians took to the streets with the intention of toppling their regimes, Moroccans were only calling for reforms and the monarchy was not in the direct crossfire of public wrath.

Moroccans –as is clearly shown by the data – are not highly concerned with elections as a primary and direct form of political participation. By understanding the realities and limitations of the political system in their country, they realize that it is very hard, if not impossible to enact true political change. This obviously negatively impacts political efficacy in the kingdom. Political behaviour studies have long shown the connection between political efficacy on the one hand and political participation on the other (Abramson and Aldrich, 1982). But it is nonetheless important to differentiate between civic engagement as a whole and elections and low voter turnout as only one aspect of political participation, confusing the two will lead to inaccurate synthesis of the issue in the North African country.

## **Electoral Abstention as a Form of Protest**

By criticizing Cassel and Hill’s inclusion of “voting is the only way” as an item in their measure of political efficacy, Abramson and Aldrich are very careful in not broadening the scope of the impact of political

efficacy to exceed turnout to the broader notion of political participation. Consequently, based on the empirical data presented above, it is accurate to deduce that low political efficacy leads to low electoral participation in Morocco, but concluding that the decline of political efficacy has the same clear-cut impact on political participation in general would be misleading. While it is easier to explain low voter turnout by political apathy of the electorate, surveys conducted (as few as they are) to study political behaviours and trends in Morocco reveal that people are not casting their votes in various elections to take a stand and make a political statement, not because they are indifferent towards the political process.

Limitations of the political system in the North African kingdom as well as the low elections credibility, combined with a low trust rate in public and elected institution in the country prompted Moroccans to engage in other forms of political and civic participation. Demonstrations and strikes are some of the measures that people in Morocco use to have their demands heard. With a long history of unionization, Moroccans have long been accustomed to taking to the streets to claim class and political demands, even before 2011. Nevertheless it is important to emphasize the significance of the Arab Spring in terms of incorporating new methods of political participation.





The Arab spring which manifested in Morocco through the 20<sup>th</sup> February movement was a crucial turning point for adopting unconventional forms of political participation and civic engagement. Social media provided a new tool for the people to network, organize and actively participate. Instead of being deterred of engaging in any given issue because of the amount of material and logistical tools needed to organize for a political event. Moroccans and especially young people started using social media and new technologies in very effective ways to organize not only a demonstration or sit in, but a series of political events across the country in a matter of days. Even virtual demonstrations and digital campaigns which were first introduced to the public sphere during the Arab Spring era and were looked down on by traditional activists as a ridiculous millennial invention proved to be more effective in certain cases than the classical forms of political engagement. In 2018 Moroccan youth were able to spearhead a nationwide boycott campaign of major corporate brands in the country. By effectively using social media they successfully mobilized a big sector of the Moroccan public to boycott these brands who were considered by the public to be increasing the prices of goods and monopolizing the market, but maybe even more importantly being a representation of the illegitimate relationship between economic and political interests in the kingdom.

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# From Divine Authority to the Authority of the Faqih: Changing Actors in Shiite Politics



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One of the most unique and interesting interpretations of Islamic political thought belongs to the Shi'a sect offered a different proposal on how Muslims would be governed in his absence. Among these Shiite groups, the Imāmiyya (Twelve Imam Shi'a) first claimed that their imam, whom they claimed to have disappeared (ghaybāt), would one day return and establish the legitimate government. However, as the process of the imam's return dragged on, the sect tried to find some political solutions to this delay. The velayat-e faqih system, which also shapes the politics of Iran today, emerged as a product of this resolution period and aspired to rule the state with a revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. This transformation in Shiite political thought resulted in both the ulema taking the seat of leadership and the people's access to a politics in which they could vote. This article will provide a brief history of the transformation in Shiite political thought, the process of the ulema taking over politics, and how the velayat-e faqih system functions as the official representation of Shiite politics today.

## A Historical Overview of Shiite Political Thought

The Imāmiyya, who gave the right of religious and political leadership to the twelve imams descended from the Prophet Ali (s.a.w), did not recognize any political system without the twelfth imam at its head



as legitimate in the early periods (Saffār, 2010, pp. 53-54). Since the members of the sect generally lived under the rule of Sunnite governments, some of the ideas defended about politics in the early periods can be considered understandable. For example, relations with political administrations, which were considered illegitimate, were not favored, and it was forbidden to go to the qadi appointed by these administrations even for the solution of a legal problem (al-Hur al-Amilī, 1993, 27/11-12). However, since the Imam, who was expected to return since his disappearance in 874, did not appear, the Imāmī community was obliged to flex its stance in relation to politics. It is no coincidence that the first time that this flexing coincided with the Shi'ite al-Buwayhids. From this period onwards, since the Shi'ites had the support of the state behind them, they revised their views on politics, albeit under certain compulsory conditions, and began to make contacts with politicians and take part in these administrations.

A similar situation was observed during the Ilkhanid and Safavid periods, which allowed Shiites to exist more freely. In particular, the Safavid state's adoption of the Imāmiyya as the official sect and pursuing a state policy along this line affected the authority of the Shiite scholars. The famous Shiite scholar Muhaqqiq Karakī (d. 1534), who came to Iran during this period and supported Shah Ismail in his policies, legitimized the authority of the Shah with his fatwas and encouraged the participation of Shiites in politics and bureaucracy. His ideas that the ulama could be

the political representative of the imam also inspired the group of jurists who would later become the religious and political rulers (Uyar, 2020, p. 104). His contributions and efforts were not left unrequited by Shah Tahmasb, who issued an edict characterizing al-Karakī as the true owner of the state and nāib al-imām (representative of the imam) (Kartaloğlu, 2022, pp. 156-157). The fact that the ulema crowned the Safavid shahs, a practice that became a tradition from this period onwards, is crucial in terms of showing the extent to which their political representation power had reached (Arjomand, 1984, p. 177).

In the post-Safavid period, the Shiite ulema have become very influential actors on the political scene. The Qajars and later the Pahlavi period in Iran were periods in which the rulers were aware of this power of the ulema and had to get their endorsement in order to sustain their legitimacy and refrained from opposing the ulema. In this process, the ulema gained the power to change several decisions taken by the state rulers. Although Iran and Russia had made an agreement in the early 1800s and the ruler of the time, Fath Ali Shah, did not agree to go to war, the ulema were able to bring Iran into the war against Russia with the fatwa of jihad. Again in 1891, when the right to sell and export tobacco in Iran was granted to a British company, Mirza Hasan Shirâzī issued a fatwa declaring that using tobacco was haram and that it meant waging war against the absent imam; the Shah was forced to step back and cancel the concession decision (Algar, 1980, pp.



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***In this system, which forms the basis of the Iranian Constitution, the highest authority is represented by the cleric, who is called “veliyy-i faqih” and “religious guide”.***

”

90, 211). Finally, the fact that the ulema were one of the parties in the constitutional debates between 1905 and 1911 demonstrated that they now had a say in regime-related debates as well.

## **Velayat-e Faqih System and the Transformation of Shiite Political Thought**

The system of velayat-e faqih (guardianship of the faqih), which marks the ultimate power of the ulema, is a proposal for Islamic governance that was originally founded by Mullah Ahmad Naraqi (d. 1829), a scholar of the Qajar era, and systematized by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (d. 1989). This concept, which refers to the right of the faqih’s guardianship and authority of disposition, expresses the idea that the just faqih who fulfills the conditions is the religious and political representative of the Prophet and the Imams as the legitimate rulers after him during the period of ghaibāt. Inspiring an Islamic revolution, Khomeini succeeded in transforming velayat-e faqih from theory to practice by eliminating the Pahlavi regime. At the same time, Khomeini, who was the first “veliyy-e faqih” of the Islamic State, stated that he received his authority from the Prophet when appointing a prime minister and based the power of the faqih on a divine power (Biçen, 2022, p. 95). Being the first to make this representation, he earned the title of “imam”. However, he also emphasized that this rank represented by the faqih was equivalent to the rank of the Prophet and the imams, not in terms of position but in terms of duty (Khomeini, 1979, p. 62).

The velayat-e faqih system has been criticized by Shiite scholars in both Iran and Iraq since it was first proposed. According to these scholars, the system has some theoretical as well as operational dilemmas. Criticisms of the system focus on the narrations and jurisprudential foundations on which the velayat-e faqih is based, the unlimited rights granted to the

religious guide by divine will, the lack of a fixed term of office for the religious guide, the fact that the authority of the faqih extends to political matters, and the authority of the faqih is considered the same as that of the prophet and the imam.

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Founded in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran is a unique system in the Islamic political tradition. In this system, which forms the basis of the Iranian Constitution, the highest authority is represented by the cleric, who is called “veliyy-i faqih” and “religious guide”. In this respect, the Islamic Republic of Iran is the only state today dominated and ruled by the clerical class. In addition to the religious guide, who holds the legislative, executive and judiciary powers in the country, with the constitutional revision in 1989, the prime ministry was abolished, and the president became the second highest office of the state. The president, who is also the head of the executive power, is directly elected by the people every four years. In this respect, the president is the highest state official directly elected by the people.

“ Although Khomeini used the term republic to refer to the new regime, he refrained from using the word democracy. He warned the people against the word democracy because it was a Western term. ”

The political bodies that distinguish the velayat-e faqih system from others are the Assembly of Experts (Majlis-i Hubregân) and the Islamic Shura Assembly (Majlis-i Shûrâ-yi Islâmî), which are also elected by the people. The two assemblies have varying numbers of members and different duties. The Assembly of Experts is also the authority that appoints the religious guide. Although its powers include supervising and dismissing the religious guide, in practice, since six of these members are appointed by the guide, it cannot be said that a full supervision process is carried out. The Islamic Shura Council is the legislative body whose members are directly elected by the people and represent the nation. The people can choose the members of the assembly themselves, and in cases where the assembly complains about the functioning of the executive and judiciary, it can submit its complaint in writing to the National Shura Assembly on the basis of Article 90 of the Constitution. In addition to these institutions, the Council of Guardians (Shûrâ-yi Nigahbân), which oversees the religious functioning in the country and ensures that

the velâyat-e faqih system operates in accordance with the Shari’ah, is also very significant. This council determines the functioning of sharia rules in the country as well as the presidential candidates to be submitted to the people’s election. The Majma-i Teşhîs-i Maslahat-ı Nizâm (Majma-i Teşhîs-i Maslahat-ı Nizâm) is assigned the task of resolving any possible problem between the Council of Guardians and the Islamic Shura Council (Taflioğlu, 2009, pp. 129-134). Although there is no theoretical obstacle to women’s candidacy for the presidency within the system in question, no woman has been approved as a candidate in practice. However, women can be members of parliament.

In the velayat-e faqih system, the nation is one of the three pillars on which the concept of sovereignty is grounded. During the revolution, Khomeini’s frequent references to the people on the issue of sovereignty was one of the biggest reasons for his popular support. Indeed, as stated in the first article of the Constitution, Khomeini established the Islamic Republic of Iran with overwhelming popular



Islamic Consultative Assembly (Iranian Parliament)

**“ Although it is possible for the people to participate in the functioning of the Islamic Republic of Iran through elections, it is understood that the above-mentioned control mechanisms and institutions in decision-making processes restrict the power of the people. ”**

support by obtaining the approval of 98.2% of the voters in a referendum held immediately after the revolution. This involvement of the people in the governance process ensured that the people, as well as the representatives of the innocent imams, had a voice in the government through democratic means. However, it should be noted here that although Khomeini used the term republic to refer to the new regime, he refrained from using the word democracy. He warned the people against the word democracy because it was a Western term and emphasized that the people's desire was not a democratic republic but an Islamic republic (Khomeini, 1979, p. 218). With this process, the people became involved in politics either directly or indirectly through elections.

Although it is possible for the people to participate in the functioning of the Islamic Republic of Iran through elections, it is understood that the above-mentioned control mechanisms and institutions in decision-making processes restrict the power of the people. The fact that half of the members of the Assembly of Experts, which elects the religious guide, are appointed by the religious guide, thus the religious guide cannot be supervised in practice, the Guardian Council has a wide range of authority, and political parties cannot carry out healthy propaganda activities all limit the participation of the people and prevent the democratic processes from being conducted in a healthy way. The last presidential election in Iran was held in 2021 under the shadow of these problems. Among the Conservative and Reformist candidates who applied for the presidency, no Reformist candidate was nominated, which drew reactions from prominent politicians, including President Rouhani (Caner, 2021, p. 11). One of the possible consequences of this situation was that the election was held with a very low turnout. As a result, it is seen that Shī'a's political approach has undergone a significant transformation due to the

conditions encountered in the historical process from the period of its first emergence to the present day, and in this process, the ulema have gradually taken the position of rulers. While no political administration was considered legitimate in the early periods, it is quite surprising that it has evolved into a political concept in which the faqih sits at the head, the people are included in the process through elections, and even voting is considered a religious duty. Although it still has its criticisms and serious problems, it can be argued that the velayat-e faqih system, is a system that paves the way for the participation of the people in politics and gives them the right to elect members of parliament and the president.

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# The Impact of Authoritarian Regimes on Civil Institutions in Central Asia



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In present times, Central Asia stands as a region of great significance in global politics, with its rich cultural heritage and abundant natural resources. This analysis aims to explore the impact and influence of the current domestic political dynamics on civil society in the Central Asian countries, which gained their independence following the dissolution of the USSR. To achieve this, it is important to provide a historical overview of the authoritarian inclinations in the regions.

The post-USSR era brought significant changes to the region, as Central Asian states embarked on a search for new political and economic models. Each country in Central Asia took a different path away from Soviet socialism and totalitarianism, towards a relatively capitalist economy and liberal democratic practices. The transformation, especially in terms of its political nature, varied among these countries. During the early years of the post-Soviet transition, Kyrgyzstan made relatively swift progress towards liberal democracy compared to its regional counterparts, while Tajikistan experienced a civil war. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, on the other hand, became emblematic examples of totalitarian state practices, with their own unique challenges. The process of becoming independent states, for which they were ill-prepared, has posed significant difficulties in terms of political structuring, nation-building, and modern nation-state formation, which continue to shape the region's landscape to this day.

## The Authoritarian Legacy of the Soviet Union

Central Asian governments, despite their individual differences, share certain formal similarities due to their common political and social conditions. One prominent similarity is the prevalence of the Presidential System in most countries of the region. Additionally, the political landscape in Central Asia is characterized by the intertwining of personalized political power and patriarchal cultural structures, which serve as the foundation of the region's politics. The historical background of one-man rule has deeply rooted it within the social culture, making it another defining feature of Central Asian politics. The early period of independence also witnessed efforts to foster national consciousness, which further solidified the dominance of strong, one-man governments. Consequently, the current state of Central Asian governments remains highly authoritarian, and in some cases, even totalitarian,



**The current state of Central Asian governments remains highly authoritarian, and in some cases, even totalitarian, with limited signs of significant change.**

with limited signs of significant change. The current situation in Central Asian governments remains largely unchanged, characterized by a strong authoritarian or even totalitarian approach. Despite the appearance of democratic functioning in political institutions, these countries continue to uphold the Soviet legacy of authoritarian rule. This assertion is reinforced by the findings of the Freedom House 2021 report, which clearly supports this viewpoint. According to the report, Central Asian states have made minimal advancements in democracy since the 1990s. The political regimes in most countries within the region are considered consolidated or deeply entrenched authoritarian systems. All nations in the area are classified as “not free,” with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan ranking as the least free. Although Kyrgyzstan exhibits comparatively more democratic elements, its progress has been marred by popular uprisings against Kurmanbek Bakiyev in 2010, similar to the Colour Revolutions, as well as subsequent ethnic violence in the Osh region. In this context, the transition to democracy in the post-Soviet era has not made the Central Asian states freer, more prosperous, stable, or advanced in terms of change. On the contrary, it is evident that the region’s countries have become even poorer in terms of development and liberties. Indeed, it is necessary to emphasize that factors such as media freedom, transparency in elections, judicial independence, and the presence and role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) that indicate a country’s adherence to democratic values are lacking in Central Asian politics. Therefore, it can be concluded that the transition to democracy has not brought about the desired improvements in the region.

One of the reasons for the persistence of authoritarian/totalitarian regimes in the region is not only the political and social history of the countries but also regional and global dynamics. The relationships between the regional countries and major global powers with authoritarian regimes such as Russia and China, as well

as factors like Western fatigue with democracy and the COVID-19 pandemic, further strengthen authoritarian/totalitarian practices in the region. For instance, despite the World Health Organization declaring COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 10, 2020, and countries worldwide making efforts to find solutions such as vaccination and mandatory mask usage in public spaces, there have been reports from Turkmenistan that discussing the disease is prohibited and mask usage is banned. These reports carry a sense of dark humour within the global community.

## **The Permissible Boundaries of Civil Society under Authoritarian Regimes**

When examining the influence of authoritarian regimes on civil society, the subject of this analysis, it becomes apparent that Central Asian countries have presented numerous challenges to civil society organizations (NGOs) since gaining independence. While the dynamics of civil society initiatives differ in each country, there is a general similarity in the development model of NGOs across the region. Initially, the pre-independence Soviet-style organizations served as the earliest examples of NGOs in these countries. These organizations aimed to adapt to the new political climate by pursuing policies aligned with the respective governments. Particularly in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, where repressive governments prevail, these organizations hold a more prominent role. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, some NGOs were established by the government itself and referred to as “Public Associations/Enterprises/Unions.” Conversely, civil society in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan exhibits a more democratic nature compared to the aforementioned countries, allowing for a wider range of roles. Despite the increase in the number of NGOs in the region, there has been limited qualitative change. In



**The overall landscape of NGOs in Central Asia is characterized by functions that support government policies, contribute to national consciousness, and avoid challenging national policies.**



fact, the overall landscape of NGOs in Central Asia is characterized by functions that support government policies, contribute to national consciousness, and avoid challenging national policies. Therefore, it is evident that civil society in Central Asia is molded by the pressures imposed by authoritarian and/or totalitarian regimes, making it difficult to discuss a civil society based on traditional principles.

Repressive tactics employed by Central Asian governments against civil society are influenced by several factors. Firstly, the rapid development and organization of NGOs during the process of independence, supported by international actors, have been met with suspicion. Unlike in Western countries, civil society organizations in the region lack extensive experience, and their criticism of government actions has led authoritarian regimes to brand them as “enemies” or “agents of foreign powers.” This perception was further reinforced by the Color Revolutions that occurred in the early 2000s, where civil activists involved in those movements were viewed as potential threats to regime security and stability. Consequently, regional governments have adopted approaches that intimidate and marginalize civil society, including imposing restrictions on CSO activities, limiting their access to foreign funding, and even attempting to hinder their existence altogether. Undoubtedly, legislation concerning civil society organizations (CSOs) in many countries of the region has been deliberately crafted to undermine their influence. Another significant challenge faced by legally restricted civil society is the portrayal of CSOs as foreign agents, a narrative that is greatly influenced by Russian and Chinese media. The trust placed in Russian and Chinese media within the region, coupled with the strategic relations established with these countries, presents a major obstacle to the strengthening of civil society. NGOs receiving foreign funding, particularly those supported by the United States and the European Union, are often depicted

as instruments of foreign powers by Russian and Chinese media. The prominence of Russian media in Central Asia remains evident, especially considering the continued prevalence of the Russian language.

It is evident that civil society organizations (CSOs) in Central Asian countries tend to collaborate with local and central government institutions, exhibiting little resistance to government policies and often working in tandem with them. CSOs critical of the government face limitations through legal barriers and practices that support government-created CSOs. In contrast to Western literature, CSOs in Central Asia have not attained the role of legitimate political actors involved in decision-making processes. The authoritarian and/or totalitarian nature of the regional governments is a primary factor contributing to this situation, along with insufficient financial resources, stringent legal regulations, and global and regional interactions. However, the current state of civil society in the region is more advanced and institutionalized compared to the past, with a crucial role to play in strengthening democracy. The excessive bureaucracy and sluggish decision-making processes of authoritarian and/or totalitarian regimes have increased the demand for problem-solving practices offered by civil society. The COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasized the importance of civil society by showcasing its power and mobilization capabilities. This has led to a growing recognition of civil society’s transformative potential within society.

Furthermore, the presence of a strong civil society discourse in government policies indicates a shift in intellectual perspectives. However, it remains uncertain whether this evolving intellectual perception of civil society in Central Asia will translate into practical applications. In conclusion, the question of whether the gradual change and development of the intellectual perception of civil society in Central Asia will lead to tangible outcomes still awaits a definitive answer.

# The Role of Islamic Social Finance in Humanitarian Crises



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## Introduction

Humanitarian crises have become increasingly prevalent today, demanding effective and innovative solutions to alleviate suffering and support affected communities. This essay explores the role of Islamic social finance in addressing humanitarian crises. It delves into the historical background of Islamic social finance, highlighting its deep roots in Islamic teachings and its focus on building resilient communities. The essay also showcases pioneer organisations such as the Islamic Development Bank and Islamic Relief Worldwide that have significantly advanced Islamic social finance. It highlights Muslim awareness of Islamic social finance and the interest among Muslims in implementing its principles. The essay also examines the roles of microfinance examples and crowdfunding platforms, such as LaunchGood, in facilitating Islamic social finance for humanitarian causes. Finally, it discusses the positive impact of Islamic social finance during recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and Turkey's 2023 earthquakes.

## Definition of Islamic Social Finance

Islamic social finance refers to financial mechanisms and practices rooted in Islamic principles that address social and humanitarian needs within Muslim communities and beyond. Those financial mechanisms are guided by Islamic principles, including Zakat, Sadaqah, Waqf, and Qard al-Hasan. These instruments promote social welfare, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development. Unlike conventional finance, Islamic social finance prioritises equitable resource distribution and addressing societal needs.

*Zakat*, a mandatory form of giving, involves collecting and distributing a specified portion of wealth to assist the poor and those in need. On the other hand, *Sadaqah* is voluntary giving beyond the obligatory *Zakat*, often contributing to various charitable causes. *Waqf* refers to the endowment of assets such as land, buildings, or funds, with the income generated being utilised for charitable purposes. *Qard al-Hasan* refers to interest-free loans given to needy individuals or communities, promoting financial inclusion, and reducing economic disparities.

## Historical Background of Islamic Social Finance

Islamic social finance has deep historical roots dating back to the era of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

# “Islamic social finance is implemented globally through various organisations and institutions promoting social welfare.”

and the early Islamic period. The Prophet<sup>1</sup> emphasised the importance of charity and generosity, setting a precedent for the practice of Islamic social finance. The institution of Zakat, one of the five pillars of Islam, was established to provide for people in need and promote wealth redistribution. Additionally, the concept of Waqf emerged during the early Islamic period, establishing endowments to support various societal needs, such as education, healthcare, and social welfare.

## Muslims' Awareness of Islamic Social Finance and Interest in Practices

Muslims have a significant level of awareness and knowledge regarding Islamic social finance. The teachings of Islam encourage Muslims to engage in acts of charity and give to those in need. Efforts are being made by religious scholars, organisations, and educational institutions to promote understanding and facilitate the implementation of Islamic social finance principles.

Islamic social finance refers to financial practices and instruments that comply with Islamic principles and values. It includes concepts such as Islamic banking, Islamic microfinance, Islamic insurance (Takaful), and Islamic philanthropy. These practices are based on Shariah (Islamic law), which prohibits the charging or paying interest (riba) and promotes social welfare and ethical conduct.

Muslim awareness of Islamic social finance varies depending on factors such as geographic location, cultural background, and level of education. (D. Hadji Latif, 2019) Muslims are generally familiar with the basic principles of Islamic finance, including the prohibition of interest. Islamic banking has gained significant attention and popularity worldwide in Muslim-majority countries and communities.

## Implementing Islamic Social Finance and Pioneer Organisations Worldwide

Islamic social finance is implemented globally through various organisations and institutions promoting social welfare. Notable examples include the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and Islamic Relief Worldwide. Islamic Development Bank (IsDB): Established in 1975, the IsDB is a multilateral development financial institution based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It aims to foster economic development and social progress in member countries by providing financial assistance and support for various projects and initiatives. The IsDB promotes Islamic finance principles and has been instrumental in advancing the growth of Islamic banking and finance globally (“About IsDB,” n.d.).

*Islamic Relief Worldwide:* Islamic Relief is an international humanitarian organisation that aids and supports needy communities. It operates in over 40 countries and implements various development projects and relief programs. Islamic Relief promotes Islamic social finance principles by incorporating Zakat and Sadaqah in its projects and fundraising efforts (“About the Islamic Relief,” n.d.).

These are just two examples of organisations that have played a pioneering role in Islamic social finance. Numerous other Islamic banks, microfinance institutions, and philanthropic organisations globally are dedicated to promoting and implementing Islamic finance principles.

## Mobilising Resources for Humanitarian Crises

Islamic social finance offers a unique approach to mobilising resources during humanitarian crises, ensuring efficient allocation and distribution.

1 Prophet Muhammad(saw) said, “Protect yourself from hell-fire even by giving a piece of date as charity.” (Al-Bukhari and Muslim). “Do not show lethargy or negligence in giving alms and charity till your last breath.” (Bukhari and Muslim)

*LaunchGood, a mass funding platform, extends financial and social support to Muslims across the globe.*



- Zakat as a Catalyst: Zakat can be a significant catalyst in mobilising resources during crises. By implementing proper collection and management systems, zakat funds can be channelled toward critical areas such as healthcare, food security, shelter, and education for affected communities.
- Waqf as a Sustainable Resource: with its perpetual nature, Waqf provides a sustainable and continuous funding source. During crises, waqf assets can be strategically utilised to address urgent needs, while the income generated can support ongoing relief efforts and sustainable development. Especially in the Ottoman era, Waqf's works flourished, contributing to the establishment of educational institutions, hospitals, and charitable organisations for the benefit of the community (Abdul Latif, Nik Din, & Mustapha, 2018).
- Sadaqah as Immediate Assistance: Sadaqah is an immediate assistance mechanism during humanitarian crises. It enables individuals to respond swiftly to emergencies, providing essential relief to affected populations. Sadaqah funds can be utilised for emergency healthcare, shelter, and other immediate needs.
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### **Importance of microfinance for tackling humanitarian crises**

Microfinance addresses humanitarian crises by empowering individuals and communities to rebuild their lives with dignity and resilience. In the wake of natural disasters or conflicts, access to traditional banking services may be severely disrupted, leaving people unable to sustain themselves and their families. Microfinance institutions step in to fill this gap, offering small loans, savings accounts, and financial services tailored to the unique needs of those affected by crises. By providing individuals with access to capital, microfinance enables them to start or revive small businesses, secure livelihoods, and regain control over their futures. This helps the immediate recovery process and lays the foundation for long-term economic stability and self-sufficiency in affected communities.

Through its empowering and inclusive nature, microfinance becomes a powerful tool for combating the impacts of humanitarian crises and fostering sustainable development. Turkish institutions working hard to solve many regional humanitarian problems contain exceptional examples of microfinance applications. Since the Syrian civil war began, the Turkish Red Crescent has provided vocational training courses and working opportunities, especially for refugee women (Sabah, 2019). The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) supports many

*The opening ceremony of the hospital in Somalia, which was established with the support of TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency).*



peer-reviewed microfinance studies to mitigate the effects of the crises (TİKA, 2022).

Besides these institutions, South Asia and Southeast Asia are the first regions that come to mind regarding microfinance applications worldwide. Akhuwat, one of the successful microfinance implementing institutions, has been leading the way in this field since 2001, especially in Pakistan, with its 800 branches (Akhuwat, 2022). Akhuwat continues to make programs to alleviate the crises in its region, especially during natural disasters.

## **The Crowdfunding Platforms' Roles in Humanitarian Crises**

Crowdfunding platforms have emerged as valuable tools for Islamic social finance, providing platforms such as LaunchGood. LaunchGood is a global crowdfunding platform focused on Islamic charitable projects. It enables individuals to raise funds for various causes such as disaster relief, healthcare initiatives, education, and community development. By fostering a sense of community and transparency, LaunchGood facilitates impactful giving. The platform ensures that campaigns adhere to Islamic values and principles, promoting ethical fundraising practices. It also provides a platform for individuals to engage with projects. It causes that resonate with their values, promoting a sense of ownership and shared responsibility within the global Muslim

community. The recent Sudan military crisis could be a new example of this. LaunchGood immediately started to flash campaigns with its partners to tackle the crisis's adverse effects (Sudan Crisis | LaunchGood, 2023).

## **The Positive impact of Islamic Social Finance During Recent Crises**

Islamic social finance has demonstrated its positive impact during recent crises, including the Covid era and Turkey's 2023 earthquakes. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, NGOs such as Islamic Relief and Muslim Hands launched initiatives to provide healthcare equipment, food aid, and support to affected communities globally (Muslim Hands, 2020). These organisations efficiently channelled resources to provide emergency relief and essential services by leveraging Zakat and Sadaqah. The Islamic Development Bank Group, with the Islamic Solidarity Fund initiated by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, has launched a \$2.3 billion aid program, primarily to distribute to underdeveloped member countries, in line with the Covid pandemic period measures and needs (OIC, 17.05.2020). Aid to Gambia and Lebanon can be an example in this context (UNA-OIC, 13.08.2020),(UNA-OIC, 21.10.2020).

During the Türkiye 2023 earthquakes, Islamic social finance institutions mobilised resources to provide immediate relief, including shelter, medical aid, and

rebuilding efforts. Qatar Charity, Turkish Red Crescent, and local organisations facilitated effective responses and long-term recovery programs (Qatar Charity, 2023) (Kızılay, 2023). Qatar was on the ground to help earthquake victims with almost all its institutions. Qatar renovated and furnished 10,000 mobile homes used in the 2022 World Cup and sent them to earthquake victims (AlJazeera, 2023).

As an example of the collective aid movement during the earthquake, Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon earthquake survivor campaigns, which LaunchGood led, can be an example. With the earthquake help call that started quickly, more than 8.5 million dollars of aid was collected and continues to be collected with more than 70 campaigns (Earthquake Relief | LaunchGood, 2023). Most aid is delivered to those in need with local partners.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Islamic social finance addresses humanitarian crises by mobilising resources, promoting equitable distribution, and fostering sustainable development. It empowers communities, strengthens social cohesion, and has a deep historical foundation in Islamic teachings. Pioneer organisations like the Islamic Development Bank and Islamic Relief Worldwide have been instrumental in advancing Islamic social finance principles globally. Muslims have shown awareness and interest in Islamic social finance, with ongoing efforts to promote understanding and implementation. Crowdfunding platforms like LaunchGood facilitate impactful giving and community engagement. Recent crises have demonstrated the positive impact of Islamic social finance in providing relief and supporting long-term recovery. Islamic social finance is a powerful tool for addressing humanitarian challenges and fostering resilient communities.

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# Sudan: From Revolution to Chaos



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Since April 15, 2023, the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which are part of the country's security structure, have been engaged in armed conflicts in civilian residential areas. This ongoing conflict has resulted in damage to public and private buildings and the destruction of infrastructure, leading to civilian casualties. Despite temporary ceasefires, the relentless fighting has deepened the humanitarian crisis in the country. In addition to those affected by the conflict, individuals in need of medical treatment, particularly chronic patients, are unable to access healthcare facilities due to the damage inflicted upon hospitals. With the destruction of public buildings, banks, schools, and hospitals, Sudan is on the verge of state collapse.

Although Sudan has experienced two major civil wars from 1955-1972 and 1983-2005, followed by a significant crisis in the Darfur region, the current crisis the country is facing today is unparalleled in Sudan's post-independence history. The reason for this is that the crisis is taking place right at the centre, in the capital city of Khartoum, which is home to nearly 10 million people. Previous major crises in Sudan after independence were mostly experienced in the periphery, far away from the capital, and their impact in Khartoum was limited. The Southern issue, as well as the problems in Darfur and South Kordofan, were predominantly located in distant areas from the capital. However, today a different crisis is unfolding, with conflicts occurring in the heart of the country. It may not be entirely accurate to classify Sudan's current situation as a civil war, as it is more of a struggle within the security forces rather than a war involving the population as a whole. Nevertheless, considering the extent of the destruction that has occurred, it is not an exaggeration to say that the conflicts have had an impact similar to that of a civil war. The atmosphere in Khartoum and the provinces where the conflicts persist resembles that of an internal war.

## Key Actors of the Conflict in Sudan

It is possible to draw a parallel between the attack of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), which fought for independence in the south, in terms of scale and capacity. The SPLM, which had a comparable



number of soldiers to the Sudanese army, was able to achieve independence in the southern provinces after a 20-year struggle. However, the SPLM pursued an ethnic and cultural cause. The current conflicts, on the other hand, do not involve religious, cultural, or ideological rhetoric. Instead, they represent a senseless war driven by the ambitions of seizing political and economic power, instigated by external actors.

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which have engaged in conflicts with the official Sudanese army, form a structure that is involved in seeking personal gains. They have established relationships with the UAE-Saudi alliance, providing mercenaries to Libya and Yemen, controlling arms and car smuggling, engaging in real estate investments, and most importantly, controlling significant gold mines. With their military force of around 100,000, the RSF acts as a force within the army and a state within the state in Sudan. This massive structure, which is planned to be integrated into the Sudanese army, is reluctant to give up the gains it has achieved so far. Its leader, Mohammed Hamdan Dogolo, also known as “Hemeti,” aims to seize sole power and exploit all of the country’s resources. The RSF recruits the majority of its forces from related Arab tribes in Darfur, resembling a family-run business with armed members.

The origins of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and Hemeti lie in a paramilitary militia organization in

Darfur, which was organized and provided logistic support by the state intelligence agencies. These militias, known as the Janjaweed, were initially formed to suppress separatist armed groups in Darfur. During Omar al-Bashir’s regime, in 2013-2014, they were transformed into Border Guards and later into the Rapid Support Forces. This structure has familial ties with Libya and Chad. If this structure were to be dismantled, it could lead to the emergence of other security issues in Sudan and create complications in neighbouring countries.

It is evident that the military’s intervention in politics and its monopoly over economic resources in Sudan are quite apparent. Except for the periods 1956-1958, 1964-1969, and 1985-1989, when civilians briefly held power, the military has predominantly been in power in Sudan since gaining independence from British-Egyptian colonialism in 1956. This pattern did not change after the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir in 2019, as the establishment of the Sovereignty Council included a military-dominated structure with the inclusion of civilians. The leaders of this structure, Abdelfattah al-Burhan and the second-in-command, Hemeti, who leads the RSF, represent the two conflicting sides in Sudan today.

Sudan, where military structures assert themselves in the political arena and coups occur frequently, has a fragile structure with intense religious and ethnic sensitivities. The previous internal wars and





crises have highlighted these fragile fault lines. In such a context, a structure in which civilian entities are excluded from politics and monopolization of economic resources is evident, it is clear that Sudan cannot be led towards a bright future. The transition period that began with the end of Omar al-Bashir's era, characterized by expectations of civilianization and democratization, unfortunately, accompanies a chaotic environment. The process that started with revolutionary cries has now evolved into an internal war dominated by coups and military involvement. Undoubtedly, the convergence of economic and political crises has made the solution extremely challenging, creating a difficult environment.

In 2011, after 20 years of war, South Sudan's secession from Sudan through a referendum resulted in a significant economic loss, as Sudan lost two-thirds of its oil revenue. The petroleum sector, which had become the main driver of the country's economic growth, suffered a major blow. Despite efforts to accelerate agricultural and gold production in the aftermath of this blow, these initiatives proved insufficient in the short term, and the country fell into a severe economic crisis. In the final days of 2018, protests erupted due to high cost of living, bread and fuel shortages, later gaining momentum and creating an atmosphere reminiscent of the Arab Spring. Omar al-Bashir, who turned a deaf ear to these demands, was unexpectedly ousted from

power by a military coup. With the end of a 30-year rule, a hollowed-out state structure was left in the hands of the military.

## The Role of International Actors in Sudan

Sudan, being rich in gold and oil, is a country that should be an agricultural powerhouse with approximately 200 million feddans of arable land. It has 110 million heads of cattle and holds 42,000 tons of fish reserves. The country is a major producer of "gum Arabic", which is used in the pharmaceutical industry, accounting for 80% of global production, mostly exported to the United States. Sudan also cultivates agricultural products such as sesame and cotton. Its location in the Nile basin and its coastal proximity to the Red Sea give Sudan strategic importance both in the context of Africa and the Middle East. The country serves as a bridge, resembling a crossroad between African and Middle Eastern cultures. Therefore, in addition to China, the United States, Russia, and European countries, countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Israel, and in recent years, Türkiye, have shown significant interest in Sudan.

It is observed that the United States, China, Russia, the UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany are competing forces in Sudan, and instead of openly supporting the

conflicting parties, they pursue less risky strategies and maintain collaborations with both sides. These foreign actors, who have played a role in legitimizing military factions that would maximize their own interests, have not acted in Sudan's best interests during the transitional period. In the post-Omar al-Bashir era, it can be seen that the Rapid Support Forces (RSP) have developed close relationships with Haftar, the UAE, Israel, and Wagner. On the other hand, the generals in the army have maintained their traditional relations with Egypt and have occasionally had contacts with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Wagner, and Israel. The continuation of the conflict in this manner only delays the process of civilianization and the realization of legitimate demands of the people in the country.

Indeed, China has been purchasing oil from this region since 1999 and has also undertaken numerous infrastructure projects in Sudan. The Sudanese market is filled with Chinese goods, ranging from electronics to plastics. During Omar al-Bashir's regime, China enjoyed privileged status due to the US embargo, and it engaged in arms sales and military technology transfers. However, with the instability following the fall of the Bashir regime and the lifting of the US embargo, China began to lose its privileged position. In 2021, Sudan took a normalization step under US guidance, and Israel, as an unseen actor behind the scenes, has made its presence felt. Israel, through its engagement with both military officials and the Rapid Support Forces (RSP), sees strategic importance in securing the Red Sea, using Sudan's airspace, and accessing the country's energy and mineral resources. Israeli officials have visited Khartoum occasionally in recent years or met with the command structure in Sudan through Egypt and the UAE.

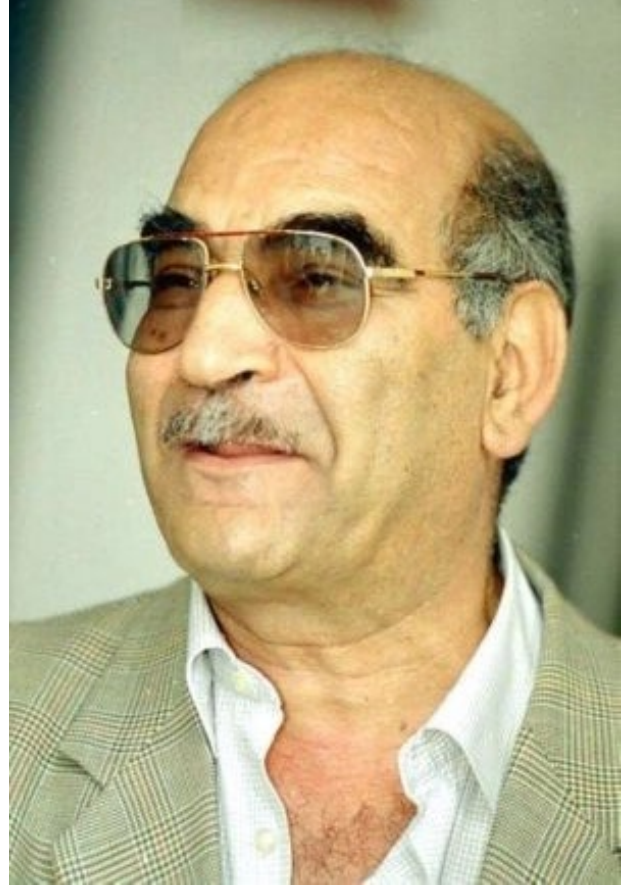
Russia's relations with Sudan have been noteworthy since 2014. Moscow maintained good relations with Omar al-Bashir and continued to maintain its position in Sudan even after the regime change in 2019. It is known that the Rapid Support Forces (HDK) and the Sudanese military intelligence have relationships with Wagner, and they sell gold from the

controlled gold mines to Meroe Gold and M-Invest, which are close to Wagner, in exchange for money and weapons. Furthermore, it is a known fact that Russia has been trying to establish a military base in Port Sudan.

It is essential to take action without delay to prevent a country of great importance in the Islamic world from being pushed towards the group of unstable and chaotic countries such as Somalia, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. Unfortunately, it can be observed that the Islamic world, which is trapped in its own internal agenda or engaged in artificial issues, has not shown sufficient interest in Sudan and has practically abandoned the country to its own fate. The forces of Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Haftar, who are important actors, appear to be seeking to redesign the region where Sudan is located according to the strategic interests of global actors.

Today, it is observed that the conflicts in Sudan are intensifying in the capital, Khartoum, and the Darfur region. Possible scenarios do not indicate a bright future for Sudan. The first scenario is the failure of permanent peace and mediation efforts, leading to a prolonged conflict. In this case, the complete collapse of the state, polarization of the neutral population, and further escalation of chaos are expected. The second possibility is that mediation efforts result in a political and economic power-sharing agreement, allowing the parties to continue governing from where they stand. Another possibility is that one side emerges victorious over the other. In this case, it could either mean the dissolution of the military and the handover of power to the civilian government or the military suppressing and dispersing the civilian leadership. If the civilian leadership manages to defeat the military and seize control, it would be an indication of a dark period for Sudan. On the other hand, if the civilian structure is dispersed, it may lead to the emergence of numerous micro-conflict areas in the country. The chronic issues in Darfur and Kordofan, where the civilian leadership has a presence, could particularly worsen in such a scenario.

# Inviting Critical Thinking: The Thought of Jabiri



Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri was born in 1936 in Morocco, into a rural Berber family. His father, a member of the National Liberation Movement, had been sentenced to imprisonment and exile by the French. At the age of ten, Jabiri encountered Muhammad Faraj, a reformist resistance mosque imam. From a young age, he delved into the study of Islamic sciences and the Arabic language from their original sources, actively engaging in resistance and politics. During his youth, he played a prominent role in leftist resistance parties, pioneering the publication of magazines and newspapers, and facing challenges such as arrests and imprisonment. Although he pursued studies at universities in Damascus and Paris, he ultimately completed his formal education at Rabat University in Morocco. He worked as a teacher and inspector, and authored philosophy textbooks for schools. Afterwards, he fully dedicated himself to academia, research, and writing, leaving behind all other endeavours to focus solely on this domain. Considering all of these factors, it is evident that he adeptly merged religious and intellectual principles with reformist tendencies, which were reflected in his scholarly research. Additionally, he remained cognizant of the conditions prevalent in his country and the occupied Arab-Islamic world. Moreover, Jabiri drew inspiration from the reformist Arab thinkers of the modern era, although his own name ultimately eclipsed and overshadowed theirs.



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With an amalgamation of Islamic and philosophical viewpoints, his works present a comprehensive outlook on the social sciences, considering them in the light of their historical development and real-world implications. As a result, these texts aspire to bridge the past and the future, grounded in meticulous research and characterized by a profound critical intellect. Among his works that have been translated into Turkish and gained prominence in Türkiye are: Ibn Khaldun's *Thought: Asabiyyah and the State*, *Our Philosophical Heritage*, *Reconstruction in Contemporary Arab Thought*, *Introduction to the Qur'an and Understanding the Qur'an Commentary*, and a series of four books titled "Intellectuals in Arab-Islamic Civilization" under the heading of "Critique of Arab Thought." This series consists of the following books in order: *Formation of Arab Reason*, *Structure of Arab Thought*, *Political Arab Thought*, and *Ethical Arab Thought*.

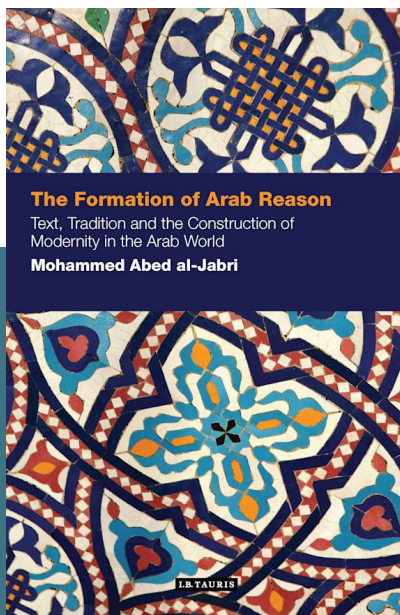
The usage of the term Arabic in the titles of his works stands out, considering that he delves into Islamic sciences and Islamic history. Even though these works have been translated into Turkish and widely read in Türkiye, the question arises: Why does he employ the term Arabic? In an article he wrote in relation to the Turkish translation of the second book in the "Critique of Arabic Thought" series, the author provides three reasons for this choice. Firstly, the Islamic intellect encompasses not only books written in Arabic but also works in Turkish, Persian, and other languages, of which he may not be familiar. Secondly, in his homeland, despite his Berber background, the terms "Arab" and "Islam" are used interchangeably without a clear distinction. Thirdly, had he used the term *Critique of Islamic Thought*, it might have been misconstrued as a criticism of the religious aspect of Islam, which is not his intention. Instead, his critique primarily focuses on the intellectual history of Islam, predominantly based on Arabic written works, thus making it relevant to our understanding. In fact, he has made a significant contribution that anyone interested in this intellectual history cannot ignore, leaving a lasting imprint on history. So, what are the key highlights of Jabiri's critique?

In the first book of his four-part series, titled "Formation of Arab Thought," which aims to analyse the epistemological foundation of Arab culture and the development of the "Arab intellect," it is essential

to grasp the concept of the "tedvin asrı" (era of formation). This era goes beyond the mere origin of Islamic sciences and Arabic linguistics; it represents the period in which the overall cultural structure, which has served as the enduring framework for Arab-Islamic thought and culture, took shape and has maintained its dominance throughout history. According to the author, the Arab-Islamic intellect emerged during this era and has remained largely unchanged, exerting its influence over subsequent centuries. Although it has experienced growth and progress, its fundamental structure, in the author's perspective, has remained unaltered. Consequently, Jabiri characterizes the trajectory of Arab-Islamic culture as a "static movement."

Within the pages of this book, the reader will encounter three additional concepts that go beyond the notion of the era of invention: *Beyan*, *Burhan*, and *Irfan*. *Beyan* encompasses the language and religious sciences that have emerged from the Arab-Islamic intellect. Essentially, the "beyanic thought system" encompasses disciplines such as lexicography, grammar, syntax, prosody, rhetoric, jurisprudence, exegesis, hadith, theology, and their respective methodologies. *Burhan*, although rooted in Greek philosophy, specifically refers to Aristotelian philosophy and logic, as well as their areas of influence, emphasizing a knowledge grounded in evidence. *Irfan*, on the other hand, signifies the infiltration of Manichaean, Hermetic, Mystic, and Neo-Platonic perspectives into Islamic culture, encompassing their influences, extensions, as well as the incorporation of Gnostic and dualistic beliefs. Thus, these three distinct systems of knowledge contribute to the formation of Arab intellect, prompting the author to critically examine them individually and engage in self-criticism through a structural analysis.

While reading Jabiri, one of the essential concepts to be considered is "crisis." The emergence of a distinct intellectual history within a grand civilization relies heavily on the interconnectedness of different systems of thought. However, Jabiri posits that an intellectual crisis arises when incompatible foundations coexist, and remarkably, this crisis has persisted throughout history without resolution. He suggests that the fusion of the "religious rational" represented by the beyanic intellect and the "rational irrational" embodied by the irfani-mystical currents has resulted in an inharmonious amalgamation, rendering the Arab-Islamic



***Jabiri asserts that renewal does not start from scratch but can be built upon a pre-existing foundation, rooted in our cultural heritage.***

intellect ineffective. Notably, the deliberate decision to translate Aristotle, motivated by Caliph Mamun's symbolic dream, was a planned endeavour aimed at overcoming this crisis. Referred to as the "crisis of foundations," this phenomenon traces its origins back to the era of invention and continues to exert its influence in contemporary times.

## **What does the Arab intellect represent?**

In the second book of the series, "The Structure of Arab Intellect," the author delves deeper into the tripartite classification of Beyan-Burhan-Irfan. Within this context, the author explores various intellectual authorities that have exerted influence on the Arab-Islamic intellect. These authorities can be summarized as follows: the authority of the predecessor, signifying the dominance of the past over the future, and the authority of the text, highlighting the significance of the original source and its interpretations. In contrast, the mystical knowledge system, which places willpower above reason and asserts that the divine cannot be fully grasped through intellect alone, emerges not as an absolute truth but as a subjective claim unique to each individual, with its validity contingent upon their judgment and choice. The irfani intellect has not only infiltrated realms such as Sufism, ethical and literary traditions, and Batini-Ismaili currents but has also left an imprint on the philosophical thoughts of scholars like Farabi and Ibn Sina.

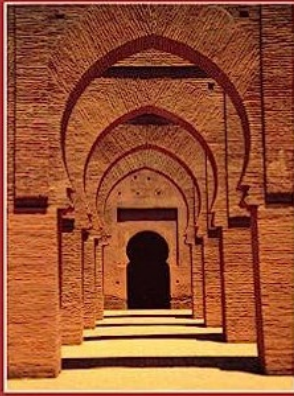
According to Jabiri, these are the factors that give rise to a crisis in the structure of Arab-Islamic intellect. These distinct knowledge systems were not clearly

separated; instead, they often intertwined with each other in intricate ways. However, does Jabiri provide a solution to this crisis? According to Jabiri, to overcome this crisis and revitalize Arab-Islamic thought, we should incorporate the critical approach of Ibn Hazm, the rationalism of Ibn Rushd, the methodology of Shâtibi, and the historiography of Ibn Khaldun, thereby reconstructing our trajectory. Jabiri asserts that renewal does not start from scratch but can be built upon a pre-existing foundation, rooted in our cultural heritage. However, the issue at hand goes beyond mere selection and adoption of historical elements. The key question is: "How should we understand and where should we commence in order to bring about change and awakening?"

In the realm of Arab Political Intellect, in addition to the aforementioned concepts, we encounter a threefold conceptual framework comprising "doctrine, tribe, and spoils." These elements serve as determinants of Arab political thought. Jabiri's historical analysis is inherently political, and in this book, we witness its heightened depth. He interprets all religious-historical events by contextualizing them within their political backdrop, extensively examining the era of the four caliphs, as well as the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. These analyses go beyond a mere historical account; rather, the author envisions a reconstructive endeavour that encompasses an original framework, aiming to counter imperialism and cultural dominance in the contemporary world, drawing insights from historical experiences.

The solution he proposes involves transcending the influence of tribal dynamics in society and establishing a novel social organization through political parties, unions, independent associations, and constitutional

Arab-Islamic Philosophy  
A CONTEMPORARY CRITIQUE



by Mohammed 'Abd al-Jabiri  
translated from the French by Aziz Abbassi

***Jabiri asserts that secularism is not a suitable approach for the Arab-Islamic world. Instead, he highlights the significance of democracy and rationalism, aiming to rebuild based on the principles of Islamic heritage.***

institutions. It also entails transforming the concept of “spoils” into a productive and equitable economy, moving away from a rent-based system, and fostering the creation of shared markets to bolster economic strength. Furthermore, the transformation of “doctrine” involves elevating it to a realm of pure thought, fostering the development of intellectual freedoms instead of succumbing to sectarian divisions. Above all, the author emphasizes the importance of advocating for the unity of the Arab world.

In Arab Ethical Intellect, the author once again conducts an archaeological excavation to delve into the sources of this intellect, concluding that it emerges from the convergence of five distinct sources. What was referred to as the crisis of foundations in previous books is transformed here into a crisis of values. Accordingly, the Persian heritage emphasizes the “ethics of obedience,” the Greek heritage highlights the “ethics of happiness,” the Sufi heritage embodies the “ethics of self-annihilation,” the pure Arab heritage embodies the “ethics of nobility,” and the Islamic heritage emphasizes the principle of “righteous deeds” or “benefit.” In essence, this book serves as a continuation of the previous one, aiming to expose the political weaknesses that dominate Arab ethical intellect. In doing so, Jabiri seeks to investigate the roots of our current problems.

The ethics of obedience inherited from the Persian legacy has created a tradition where everything is sacrificed for the sultan, resulting in a societal structure that undermines human dignity. On the other hand, the Greek moral philosophy, which emphasizes individual happiness, the Arab tradition centred around nobility, and the Islamic ethics that prioritize righteous deeds and benefit, could have formed a

strong foundation for Arab Ethics. However, with the support of governments and sultans, and the influence of certain scholars and writers, a distorted understanding emerged. On one hand, the mystical heritage of Sufism, influenced by hermetic traditions, propagated the notion of “self-annihilation” (fenâ), where everything is destroyed. On the other hand, the ethics of obedience based on the Persian heritage resulted in the disregard of individuals, fostering the belief that “everything is for the sultan.”

Jabiri suggests that contemporary guidance can be found in works that approach ethical issues through scientific and psychological perspectives. These texts, known as “ethical medicine,” include works by Sabit b. Sinan, Ibn al-Haytham, Kindi, and Razi. In contrast, the philosophical orientation influenced by Greek heritage sometimes succumbs to Kisra values, attempting to transform the “Virtuous City” into a Kisra state, as seen in the works of Al-Farabi. The author poses the question, “When will the Arab-Islamic dream break free from this Ardashir model?” Additionally, it partly aligns with Ibn Bajjah’s project of self-governance. Among the recommended works for the reconstruction of Islamic ethics, Ibn Rushd’s summary of Plato’s work and Ibn Bajjah’s book hold significance. These texts by Ibn Rushd and Ibn Bajjah offer liberation from the ethics of obedience associated with Ardashir and the pacifying ethics of the Sufis. On the other hand, encyclopedic and quotation-oriented works compiled by figures like Âmirî, Miskawayh, and others within philosophy encompass the ethics of obedience, rendering them unsystematic and negative examples within Jabiri’s reconstruction framework.

Sufism, in Jabiri’s view, has undergone an ethical dissolution under the influence of mystical traditions

that entered the Islamic world from external sources. Jabiri, emphasizing the concepts of nobility and generosity in the pure Arab heritage, highlights Muhasibi in the Pure Islamic Heritage, underlining the distinctiveness of Muhasibi's ascetic aspect from other Sufi movements. In other words, if there are sources in Sufism that Jabiri can approve of, Muhasibi is at the forefront. However, Muhasibi also stands outside the mainstream of Sufism and follows an original Islamic path. According to Jabiri, the initial works of the project that can be referred to as "Islamic ethical thought" are found in Muhasibi's writings. Jabiri also criticizes the lack of originality and the existence of a mixed system in the moral works of Rāghib al-Isfahani, Māwardi, and Ghazali, as well as the Islamization of elements derived from Persian heritage and Greek ethics. The individuals Jabiri primarily highlights and praises as illuminating figures for contemporary times in terms of Islamic ethics are Muhasibi, as mentioned earlier, emphasizing the ethics of righteous deeds (*salih amel*) and making the concept of benefit (*maslahat*) the essence of ethics and politics, and also Ibn Taymiyyah.

In the section of the book that addresses the "crisis of values," it explores the progression of a crisis starting from the Great Fitna, leading to the questioning of the very notion of "faith" within individuals' consciences. Additionally, this section reveals how all power-holders aiming to subject the people to despotic governance have exploited this fear of unrest. Jabiri firmly rejects absolute obedience to authority by asserting, "Moreover, this excessive emphasis on 'avoiding discord' has paradoxically justified accepting a life of subservience and degradation, which in itself constitutes discord!"

Drawing from this perspective, Jabiri proposes a renaissance of the Arab-Islamic world, with the aim of shaping its future by aligning with Western thinkers like Ibn Rushd instead of embracing eclectic schools in the East. This revival would be rooted in critical rationalism. To achieve this, it is crucial to dismantle the existing sultanates and military-based dictatorships in the Arab world, paving the way for democratic governance. Additionally, there is a need to replace the spiritual inclinations influenced by Eastern mysticism with an intellectual culture founded on critical thinking. Furthermore, it calls for the development of a new approach to jurisprudence that addresses

contemporary needs, moving away from a reliance solely on the authority of predecessors and texts.

Jabiri asserts that secularism is not a suitable approach for the Arab-Islamic world. Instead, he highlights the significance of democracy and rationalism, aiming to rebuild based on the principles of Islamic heritage. According to Jabiri, although democratization is essential, he firmly opposes the adoption of secularism. Jabiri dismisses the idea of an apolitical Islam, recognizing that it would result in a clerical form of the religion that lacks involvement in political affairs. Furthermore, Jabiri sets himself apart from historical thinkers like Hasan Hanafi, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Muhammad Arkoun. In defining his position, he critiques reformists such as Afgani, Abduh, and the Muslim Brotherhood for their perceived lack of significant accomplishments. He also accuses advocates of liberal-secular Westernization of being out of touch with societal realities, and Islam-West synthesizers of failing to offer a substantial framework. Jabiri identifies as an independent thinker primarily concerned with epistemology. Jabiri sees the existing Arab-Islamic epistemology as an obstacle to progress. The way to overcome this is through a departure from this epistemology and the realization of the reconstruction we have mentioned above.

Jabiri simultaneously criticizes both the sterile cycles and deadlocks of contemporary Salafi thought and the spiritual tendencies of Sufi schools that undermine the effectiveness of reason. In other words, he offers simultaneous criticism towards both opposing ends. However, Jabiri's works do not extensively delve into the critique of modern Western thought.

Jabiri has faced criticism as much as he has gained supporters. Taha Abdurrahman is one of the most notable critics of Jabiri, and this shouldn't come as a surprise. While one of them, drawing from Ibn Rushd's rationalism, distinguishes philosophy and religion, considering them as separate entities and valid sources of truth, the other, in contrast, aims for a different kind of renewal based on Ghazali. Furthermore, Taha Abdurrahman provides the critique of contemporary Western thought that is absent in Jabiri's works. Both perspectives offer possibilities for us to further explore. Therefore, let us not hesitate to engage with and contemplate both viewpoints, as we embark together towards new horizons.

*“Intellectual world of Muslim communities is dynamic and interconnected.”*

**An Interview with Prof. Dr. Lütfi Sunar on the Intellectual Production of Muslim Communities**

**The series ‘Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World’ is an extensive publication comprising 11 volumes, providing a comprehensive perspective on the intellectual realm of Muslim communities. What motivated the necessity for such a comprehensive endeavour? In the context of Türkiye, what specific need does this work fulfil?**

The purpose of the series “Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World” is to foster a nuanced comprehension of the diverse perspectives within Muslim societies. Our objective in these works is to incorporate the intellectual, philosophical, and political developments of societies that share similar historical and cultural processes with Türkiye into our intellectual landscape.

These works hold a pioneering status within their respective fields. They assess the intellectual, academic, and cultural agendas of contemporary Muslim communities and groups, while also offering insights for the future.

Public discourse often tends to generalize Muslim communities, leading to misconceptions and stereotypes. The works in this series are designed to challenge these stereotypes by showcasing the intellectual diversity within these communities. Moreover, we aspire for these works to illuminate ongoing dialogues, debates, and transformations within the intellectual circles of Muslim communities.

This comprehensive undertaking will provide scholars with a profound and diverse intellectual perspective, contributing to academic studies on Islam and Muslim societies. Consequently, it will contribute to a more refined and nuanced understanding of the contemporary Muslim world. When it comes specifically to Turkey, it is a country with a rich intellectual history and a dynamic contemporary society, predominantly Muslim. Due to its strategic geographical location, it serves as a bridge between the East and the West. Therefore, intellectual currents in Türkiye reflect a unique synthesis of diverse influences. A comprehensive work like this series provides an invaluable resource in contributing to contemporary thought in Türkiye, challenging simplistic or monolithic views about Turkish society and intellectual traditions. These works will help to realize the diversity, changes, continuities, and intersections in the Turkish thought with broader trends in the Muslim world.



***Therefore, engaging in social movements, establishing relationships with scientific and social institutions, or being part of religious communities can indeed be seen as concrete activities that are integral to “thought.”***



**We would like to understand the significance of the concept of “thought” in this series. Can the concrete activities of Muslims in the public domain, such as social movements, academic and social research institutions, and religious communities, be regarded as integral components of “thought”?**

In an academic context, “thought” is generally used in a broad sense to encompass a range of intellectual activities and outputs. Although the term is sometimes narrowly interpreted to refer only to philosophical or theoretical discourse, in a study like “Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World,” it is likely to be understood in a much broader sense. In this sense, we have approached thought in these works to include social, political, and economic thought. For example, the underlying ideas and philosophies behind social movements, the intellectual foundations and purposes of scientific and social institutions, and the theological and ethical frameworks guiding religious communities have been evaluated within this scope.

In this context, I believe that thoughts not only encompass abstract or theoretical ideas but also the ways in which these ideas are manifested in the world. In this sense, it is of great importance to me to understand how thoughts shape and are shaped by social, cultural, political, and institutional realities. I acknowledge that thinking is not solely a mental activity but deeply intertwined with the lived realities of individuals and communities.

Therefore, engaging in social movements, establishing relationships with scientific and social

institutions, or being part of religious communities can indeed be seen as concrete activities that are integral to “thought.”

These activities reveal the practical manifestations of intellectual currents in Muslim societies and also influence these currents. Understanding them, including the specific context of Turkiye mentioned in the previous statement, will provide valuable perspectives on the dynamic interaction of ideas and actions in the contemporary Muslim world.

**The extensive 11-volume work showcases contributions from Muslim thinkers and intellectuals hailing from diverse corners of the world, including Bosnia to Malaysia, and Europe to Iran. This remarkable participation highlights the richness and diversity of contemporary Muslim thought. Moreover, the significance lies in the valuable potential of enhanced communication, connectivity, and collaborative platforms among these Muslim intellectuals. Considering the present era, what positive impacts does the interconnectedness of Muslim thinkers have on the progression of Muslim thought?**

The exchange of ideas among Muslim thinkers from diverse geographical and cultural contexts will make valuable contributions to the advancement of contemporary Muslim thought in several ways.

One of the most significant contributions is the discovery of the diversity of perspectives within the Muslim world. This kind of dialogue promotes a more nuanced and inclusive understanding, allowing for a

greater range of diverse perspectives. By doing so, it challenges tendencies towards homogenization and reveals the richness and diversity of contemporary Muslim thought.

Furthermore, these works also reveal the cross-interaction of ideas within Muslim societies. These interactions allow thinkers to be influenced by each other's works and consequently develop new perspectives or approaches. In this way, we stimulate intellectual growth and renewal.

In the present day, Muslim communities worldwide face common challenges such as reconciling tradition with modernity or negotiating their place in a globalized world. These works address the shared issues of Muslim societies. In these works, we aim to expand mutual exchange of ideas between communities and create a platform for thinkers to learn from each other's experiences and perspectives in order to collectively solve problems.

These dialogues also foster a sense of solidarity and mutual respect among Muslim thinkers. By strengthening intellectual connections between Muslim communities, we aim to build a broader sense of solidarity and network. In this way, we seek to highlight the impact of ideas across different societies.

Lastly, by creating shared platforms where Muslim thinkers can share their perspectives with a wider audience, it is evident that Muslim communities can contribute to global thought and understanding. Considering the global nature of ideas in today's world, it is crucial for the intellectual works and ideas

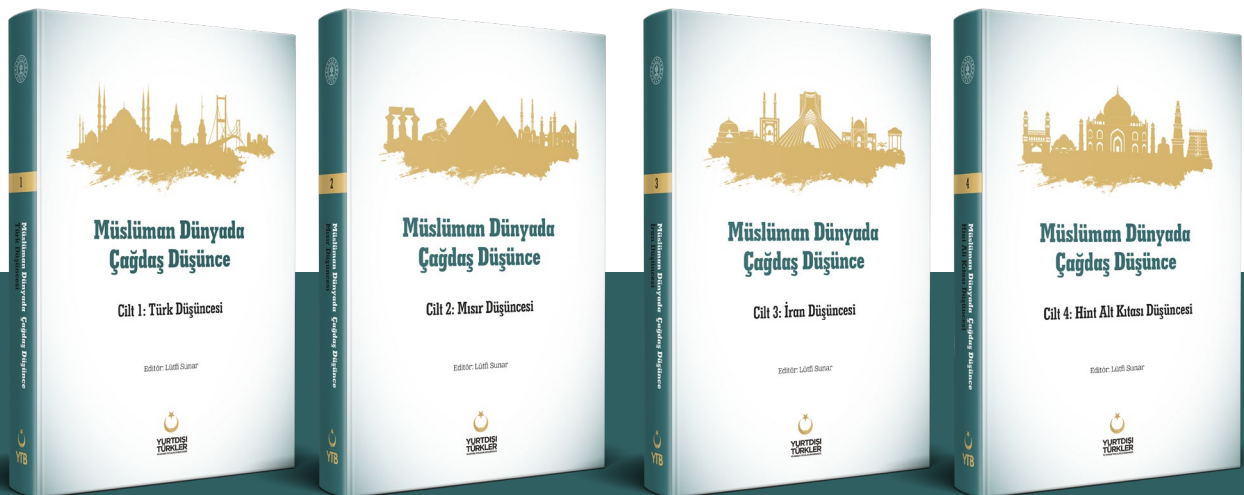
of Muslim intellectuals to circulate more rapidly and reach a wider audience. There is a need for greater dissemination of the thoughts and works generated within the Muslim world to the global arena. This will facilitate the breaking of biases and the formation of a more accurate representation of Muslim societies.

In summary, promoting connections and dialogues among Muslim thinkers worldwide will significantly contribute to the dynamism, depth, and impact of contemporary Muslim thought.

**During the modern era, there is a prevailing belief that intellectual production has decreased within Muslim societies. Do you believe there has been a disruption in the generation of ideas among Muslim communities, or have Muslims persistently pursued diverse intellectual endeavours despite varying circumstances?**

When evaluating "intellectual production" in Muslim societies or any society, it is important to consider how the concept of "intellectual production" is defined and which criteria are used to measure it. Since the Muslim world encompasses a wide diversity of countries, cultures, and traditions, generalizations can be misleading.

Some argue that there has been a decline, particularly in specific traditional domains of intellectual endeavour such as philosophy, theology, and science, compared to the period known as the Islamic Golden Age (8th to 14th centuries). However, it is important to understand that intellectual production does not occur in a vacuum. Intellectual outputs are shaped



by a complex set of socio-political, economic, and cultural factors. In the modern era, Muslim societies have undergone significant changes and faced numerous challenges, including colonialism, political turbulence, and economic constraints, which have also impacted their intellectual landscapes.

It is also important to note that in the modern era, intellectual contributions can take different forms compared to previous periods and may not always be recognized or evaluated in the same way. For example, significant outputs have been observed in areas such as literature, poetry, and various forms of cultural expression. Muslim societies have made important intellectual contributions in these domains. Additionally, there has been significant interaction with modern disciplines such as social sciences, law, politics, and more.

Furthermore, the modern period is characterized by a lively and complex debate on the relationship between Islam and modernity, the role of Islam in the public sphere, and issues related to human rights and democracy. Therefore, we can say that Muslim communities continue to engage in various intellectual endeavours under different conditions, which may not be traditionally recognized as “intellectual production.”

**The subcontinent of India, as well as regions like South Africa, are often associated with poverty in today’s world. These regions have historically been significant for Muslims in terms of identity formation and intellectual production through post-colonial resistance. Despite the political and economic challenges faced in these areas, we can observe that thought continues to flourish and persevere. You have also dedicated two volumes of the 11-volume series to these regions. What can**

### **you say about Muslim thought that continues to thrive in the background despite war and poverty?**

The subcontinent of India and regions like South Africa have indeed played significant roles in shaping contemporary Muslim thought. Despite challenging economic and political conditions such as poverty and conflict, these regions have maintained vibrancy in intellectual production. While there are numerous sources for this, we can particularly mention a few reasons below.

Challenges often give rise to resilience and innovation. Confronting challenges can prompt individuals and societies to question existing ideas and norms, reinterpret them, and explore innovations. In this sense, the early encounter with modernity and the legacy of struggle against colonialism in South Asia have created important dynamism for intellectual development.

On the other hand, these regions have a rich and powerful intellectual history. For example, the Indian subcontinent has been a significant centre of Islamic thought for centuries, making notable contributions in fields such as philosophy, theology, law, and spirituality. This intellectual heritage continues to inspire contemporary thought and provide knowledge to this day.

Poverty, the realities of war, and post-colonial struggles are important aspects of contemporary life in these regions. Dealing with these challenges has led to a rich perspective, inspiring experiences, and comprehensive ideas. For instance, thinkers from these regions have made pioneering contributions in areas such as social justice, economic equality, peacebuilding, and governance based on Islamic principles.



***Promoting connections and dialogues among Muslim thinkers worldwide will significantly contribute to the dynamism, depth, and impact of contemporary Muslim thought.***



These regions are also characterized by a high degree of cultural synthesis, as Islamic thought interacts with other cultural and intellectual traditions. Historically, these societies have been multicultural, embracing religious diversity and social differences, which have kept intellectual life vibrant and diverse. While occasionally leading to intense conflicts, it is known that this dynamism has resulted in a cultural synthesis capability.

Finally, intellectual activity is an important aspect of identity construction. In the context of ongoing struggles for religious, ethnic, and national identities, as well as post-colonial identity formation, engaging in thought production and expression becomes a way for individuals to affirm their identities and negotiate their place in the world.

While the challenges faced by these regions are undeniably significant, they also provide a context in which dynamic and resilient intellectual traditions can flourish. Giving these regions their deserved place in the “Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World” series aims to underline the significant contributions they have made to global Muslim thought.

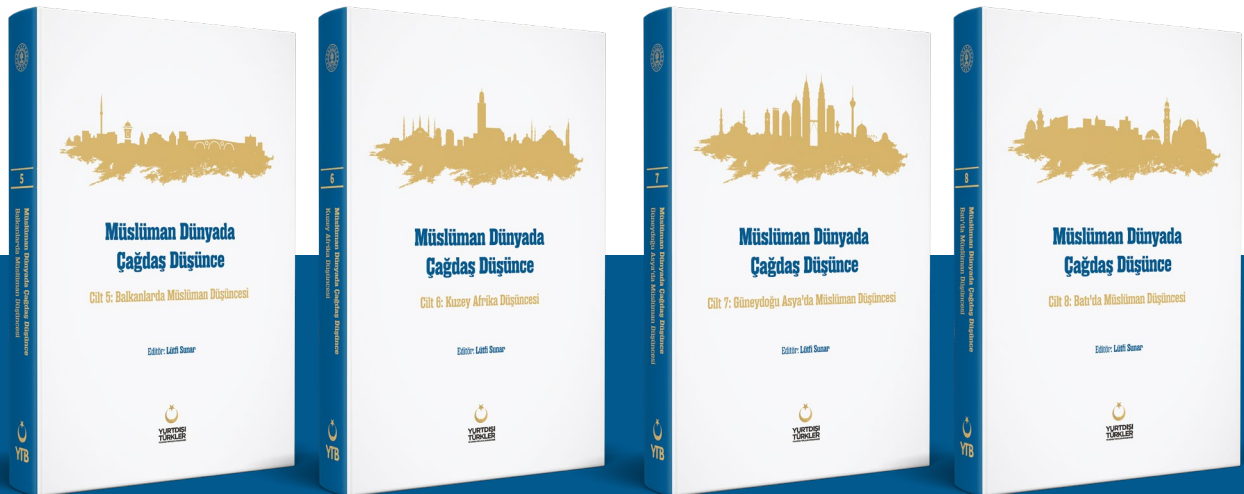
**In the “Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World” series, you not only feature pioneering figures but also highlight the contributions of popular movements and scholarly institutions. By considering thought in a broader context alongside individual personalities, you have distinguished the work from similar studies. What are the key points that differentiate this series from other similar works?**

Our works differentiate significantly in terms of perspective, content, and analysis from what has been produced to date. We have strived to achieve this distinction not only through the texts and authors featured in our works but also through the shaping of their content. In this regard, I can list the following features that set apart the “Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World” series:

**Comprehensive Approach:** The series takes a comprehensive approach, in contrast to many studies that focus solely on individual academics, philosophers, or theologians. It considers not only pioneering figures but also broader social and intellectual movements, academic organizations, and institutions that contribute to the intellectual landscape.

**Incorporation of Diverse Perspectives:** Covering a range of regions from the Indian subcontinent to South Africa, this series encompasses a wide spectrum of perspectives within the Muslim world, highlighting its rich diversity and demonstrating how intellectual production has been shaped by different geographic and cultural contexts.

**Focus on the Present and Current Issues:** While many works in this field concentrate on the pre-modern historical contributions of Muslim societies (such as the Islamic Golden Age) or their reactions to modernization, this series specifically focuses on contemporary thought that remains vibrant today, addressing current issues and trends that shape Muslim societies.



**Integration of Various Disciplines:** We aimed to integrate various disciplines and fields of thought, such as philosophy, theology, law, science, literature, and art, in these works. By doing so, readers can gain a more comprehensive picture of intellectual production in the Muslim world.

**Intersection of Thought and Practice:** These works give special emphasis to the interaction between thought and practice by featuring popular movements and academic organizations. They highlight how intellectual ideas are concretized in social and political action.

In summary, the “Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World” series stands out with its comprehensive and inclusive approach to exploring contemporary intellectual production in the Muslim world, its focus on diversity and the integration of thought and practice, setting it apart from other works in the field.

**The production of knowledge and ideas is not confined to a specific geographical area. How has the intellectual accumulation generated in Muslim societies interacted with which regions in terms of geographical influence?**

In these works, we have examined contemporary thought in Turkey, Iran, Egypt, the Indian subcontinent, the Balkans, North Africa, Southeast Asia, the West, the Turkic world, the Arab world, and Sub-Saharan Africa. With contributions from 127 authors representing 30 countries, these works are pioneering in their respective fields. They evaluate the intellectual, academic, and cultural agenda of Muslim societies and communities today, while providing a perspective for the future.

The intellectual world of Muslim societies is dynamic and interconnected. It not only reflects the rich tapestry of internal dialogues and exchanges but also

engages with global trends and discourses.

In the Muslim world, there are numerous conversations and debates that encompass various regions and cultural contexts. These include discussions on different interpretations of Islamic law and theology, debates about the role of Islam in politics and society, and conversations on topics such as gender, human rights, and religious pluralism. For example, the work of thinkers in the Middle East has resonated with and influenced their counterparts in South Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

Furthermore, Muslim intellectuals often engage with global intellectual trends and debates. They incorporate knowledge from modern philosophy, social sciences, and critical theory into their work. Many thinkers also address global issues such as democracy, climate change, economic inequality, and more. Additionally, many Muslim scholars actively participate in intercultural dialogues that promote mutual understanding and enrich intellectual perspectives. Therefore, when understanding contemporary thought, it is important to consider not only the internal interactions within the Muslim world but also its relationship with the global community.

Today, Muslims have an impact and influence that extends beyond their historical geographical boundaries. Muslim diaspora communities around the world often serve as bridges between different cultures and intellectual traditions. For instance, Muslim thinkers in Western countries integrate their cultural heritage with Western philosophical and social scientific traditions. Therefore, in these works, we have brought together the intellectual efforts of Muslim communities from all around the world, including Europe, America, Africa, and Russia, not just focusing on Muslim-majority countries.



***We can say that Muslim communities continue to engage in various intellectual endeavours under different conditions, which may not be traditionally recognized as “intellectual production.”***



In this context, it is necessary to consider not only local ideas but also the accumulation of global intellectual networks, academic communities, publishing houses, and universities. Muslim scholars are actively participating in academic networks that span different countries and regions. It is no longer possible to outline a framework of thought without considering the impact of scientists and intellectuals who publish in international journals, participate in global conferences, and collaborate with colleagues from around the world on research.

These interactions facilitate the exchange of ideas, promote mutual understanding, and contribute to the dynamism and richness of contemporary Muslim thought. Therefore, in these works, we not only consider geographical inclusiveness but also the diversity created by relationships and interactions. Different perspectives and traditions, as they encounter and sometimes clash with each other, can bring challenges and tensions, but they also offer opportunities for growth and enrichment.

**The intellectual accumulation spanning a wide geography from Turkic states to Iran, from the Balkans to Southeast Asia is examined in the 11-volume series. What are the common grounds in the intellectual thought produced in these regions? What common trends have caught your attention?**

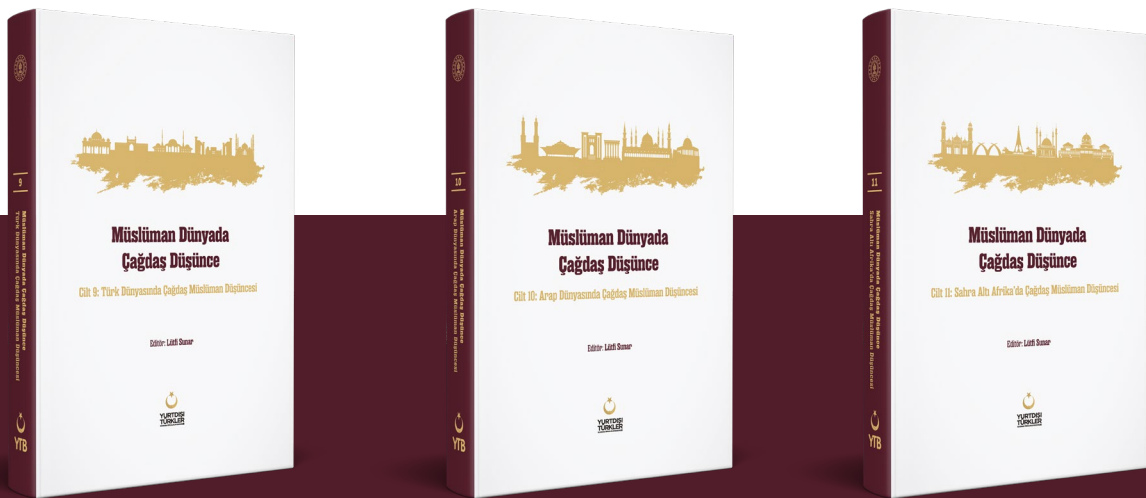
Despite geographical and cultural differences among Muslim societies and thinkers, there are notable common grounds and trends that can be observed.

First and foremost, adherence to common Islamic sources is of significant importance. Across the vast geography of the Islamic world, a commitment to universal principles found in Islamic texts such as the Quran and Hadiths is often a significant common ground. Within the framework of these texts, diverse interpretations and understandings have been developed.

Furthermore, interaction with the modern world emerges as another common ground. Muslim societies and thinkers have actively grappled with the challenges and opportunities presented by the modern world since the early 19th century. This has led to contemplation and discussions on how Islam relates to modern science, technology, democracy, human rights, and economic justice.

In this sense, the encounters of Muslim societies and thinkers, both among themselves and with other societies, have given rise to a rich and intriguing cultural synthesis. Islamic thought often forms a unique synthesis as it encounters various cultures and traditions. For example, Turkish, Iranian, Balkan, and Southeast Asian societies have expressed Islam in ways specific to their cultural contexts. These expressions have gradually influenced other societies through translations and social movements over time.

**If we approach the question from a different angle, we can examine the influence of local dynamics on intellectual development. How have these local**





**dynamics shaped the intellectual accumulation?  
For instance, in what ways does the intellectual  
production in Southeast Asia differ from that in  
North Africa?**

Local dynamics encompassing historical, cultural, socio-economic, and political factors can significantly shape intellectual production in a specific region. In this context, as you mentioned in your question, there are certain fundamental frameworks through which the intellectual production in Southeast Asia might differ from that in North Africa.

Southeast Asia has a distinct cultural context that has been shaped by interactions between indigenous traditions and various foreign influences, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Western colonial powers. On the other hand, North Africa has been shaped by its proximity to Europe, its historical ties as part of the Islamic and Arab world, and influences

from Sub-Saharan Africa. These different cultural contexts have led to unique intellectual developments, influencing how Islam is understood and practiced in each region.

Different historical experiences can also shape intellectual production. For example, colonialism and post-colonial nation-building experiences have had a significant impact on intellectual discourse in both regions, but in different ways. In Southeast Asia, this is reflected through an emphasis on syncretism, pluralism, and the negotiation of Islam with national and ethnic identities. In North Africa, intellectual discourse has been marked by topics such as Arab nationalism, Islamic political movements, secularism, and Islamist debates.

The political context also contributes to the shaping of intellectual production in different ways. For instance, North Africa has witnessed significant political

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***In Southeast Asia, this is reflected through an emphasis on syncretism, pluralism, and the negotiation of Islam with national and ethnic identities. In North Africa, intellectual discourse has been marked by topics such as Arab nationalism, Islamic political movements, secularism, and Islamist debates.***

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***Muslim societies play a significant role in supporting global peace. The fundamental principles of Islam, such as justice, compassion, and respect for all human life, can serve as guiding principles for participation in peacebuilding efforts.***

upheavals in recent years, including the Arab Spring, which has influenced intellectual discourse on topics such as democracy, human rights, and the role of religion in politics. On the other hand, relatively stable political environments in countries like Malaysia and Indonesia have fostered intellectual discourses that reflect these different political realities.

Each region has its own scientific traditions and centers of learning that can influence the style and content of intellectual production. For example, the Islamic scholarly tradition in places like Al-Azhar University in Egypt differs in emphasis and approach from the traditions found in Southeast Asian centers of learning.

In conclusion, while there are common themes in intellectual production across the Muslim world due to shared beliefs and some common experiences, local dynamics significantly shape the contours and content of this production, leading to a rich diversity.

**We would like to draw attention to Egyptian thought. Even though Egypt has been attracting attention due to autocracy and coups, you are emphasizing the intellectual accumulation of the country. In your opinion, beyond political events such as coups, revolutions, and elections, what kind of continuity does have in Egypt and other countries?**

Egypt possesses a rich intellectual tradition that surpasses and prioritizes its contemporary political challenges. This intellectual tradition manifests itself in various ways:

Egypt, particularly Cairo where Al-Azhar University is located, has long been a significant centre for Islamic studies. Scholars in Al-Azhar and other institutions have produced a wealth of religious, philosophical,

and legal thinking throughout the centuries. This scholarly tradition continues to thrive even in the face of political upheavals.

Egypt has also been a prominent centre for Arab literature and artistic production. From classical poetry and literature to modern novels, cinema, and music, this cultural output represents and shapes societal values, identities, and debates—an intellectual form of production.

Egypt has a history of influential public intellectuals who contribute to political and social thought. Even during periods of autocracy, Egyptian thinkers have continued to engage with topics such as nationalism, socialism, Islamic political thought, human rights, and democracy. The works of these intellectuals often reflect the struggle for political and social reform.

The continuity of intellectual thought in Egypt demonstrates the resilience of its intellectual tradition. Political events such as coups and revolutions can shape the intellectual landscape, influencing the types of ideas expressed and how they circulate. However, these events do not eliminate enduring forms of intellectual activity that persist in the face of changing political conditions.

Similar patterns can be observed in other countries, where strong intellectual traditions continue despite political upheavals or pressures. The specific manifestation of this continuity varies greatly, reflecting each country’s unique historical, cultural, and socio-political context.

**The world is encountering technological innovations every day, and this brings about various intellectual encounters. Do Muslim societies generate or have the potential to generate comprehensive and**



**original ideas on globally relevant topics such as artificial intelligence, the space age, and the climate crisis? In other words, how can Muslim societies contribute to generating thoughts for the world by keeping up with the pulse of the time?**

As mentioned above, Muslim societies are making valuable contributions to global debates today. They offer unique and valuable perspectives on many urgent issues worldwide. However, there are certain areas where their contributions stand out more prominently.

Muslim societies play a significant role in supporting global peace. The fundamental principles of Islam, such as justice, compassion, and respect for all human life, can serve as guiding principles for participation in peacebuilding efforts. Drawing from their diverse cultural and historical experiences, Muslim societies can offer unique perspectives on conflict resolution, reconciliation, and social healing. They can take the lead in facilitating interreligious and intercultural dialogues, promoting mutual understanding, and challenging prejudices.

In regions affected by conflicts, Muslim societies can advocate for peace by rejecting violence, promoting inclusive governance, and supporting initiatives that address the root causes of conflicts, such as poverty, inequality, and social injustice. On the global stage, countries with Muslim-majority populations can engage in mediation in conflicts, support international law, and advocate for disarmament and nonviolence. By doing so, Muslim societies can contribute to a more peaceful, just, and inclusive world.

Muslim societies have significant potential to contribute to sustainable development guided by the principles of social equity, environmental stewardship, and economic justice, which are integral parts of Islam. The concepts of “tawhid” (unity) and “ihsan” (excellence) within Islam can inspire sustainable practices that respect the environment, ensure

fair distribution of resources, and promote social well-being. Countries with a majority Muslim population, with their young demographics and emerging economies, can support sustainable development by investing in green technologies, education, health-care, and infrastructure development that balances progress and conservation.

Islamic finance, emphasizing risk-sharing and discouraging exploitation, can offer innovative and ethical approaches to financing sustainable development projects. Additionally, the tradition of “zakat” (obligatory charity) and “sadaqah” (voluntary giving) can be utilized for social development initiatives and addressing poverty and inequality within and among nations. Therefore, with an individual and collective perspective, Muslim societies can significantly contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Muslim societies have the potential to offer valuable perspectives and strategies for addressing global socio-economic inequalities. Rooted in principles of social justice, human dignity, and the obligation of “zakat,” these societies can advocate for and implement economic models that prioritize justice and equal distribution of resources. For instance, the Islamic finance system, which discourages usury (riba) and promotes risk-sharing, can offer alternatives to traditional practices that often exacerbate wealth inequalities.

Additionally, countries with a majority Muslim population can express their concerns about global inequalities and exert pressure for reforms in global economic governance through active participation in South-South cooperation and international forums. Lastly, Muslim societies, leveraging their unique positions at the intersection of multiple world regions, can serve as bridges that promote understanding, dialogue, and collaboration among nations to collectively address socio-economic inequalities.

# Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World

In an era characterized by globalization, where geographical and physical boundaries have largely diminished in significance, there is no doubt that the relationships forged between societies and individuals are of great importance. In the contemporary world, Western civilization, with its cultural and technological dominance, exerts influence over societies and their interactions. For instance, until recently, Hollywood movies have been the most widely viewed films in our country and other regions. Conversely, the film industry from other regions often resides on the outskirts of the mainstream and receives relatively less recognition. In numerous instances like these, “developing” countries often embrace “developed” countries as ideals from various angles, while remaining largely oblivious to the rest of the world. Particularly in regions and countries with Muslim populations, their historical experiences and the impact of colonialism have hindered their ability to showcase their tangible and intangible creations on a global scale. To address this gap and provide a comprehensive exploration of the historical legacy and contemporary intellectual output of Muslims, the “Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World” series emerges as a valuable endeavour poised to bridge this divide.

The book project, with Prof. Dr. Lütfi Sunar as the editor, has received support from the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities. Originally published in 2020 as a four-volume series, the books shed light on the contemporary thought of four distinct regions: Turkish Thought, Egyptian Thought, Iranian Thought, and Indian Subcontinent Thought. Alongside these initial four volumes, the second set of four volumes was published in 2022, delving into contemporary Islamic thought in the Balkans, North Africa, Southeast Asia, and Western regions. In conclusion, three additional volumes were incorporated in the year 2023. The newly introduced volumes are sequentially titled “Turkic World,” “Arab World,” and “Sub-Saharan Africa.”

## Turkish World, Arab World, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In the ninth volume, titled “Turkish World,” experts in the field delve into a range of contemporary issues and agendas in regions and countries with substantial Turkish populations. Through 13 articles, they provide insightful analysis and exploration. Additionally, this volume includes a chronological map that highlights the intellectual ideas emerging from six different countries, such as the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan, spanning the last two centuries. Moving forward, the tenth volume delves into contemporary issues within the Arab world, featuring 11 articles that cover a range of topics, complemented by a concluding chronological study. This section offers valuable insights into the intellectual journey of more than seven countries that have significantly influenced the concept of the Arab World, including Syria and Lebanon. Lastly, in the final volume, the book scrutinizes the contemporary thought of Sub-Saharan Africa, a region that

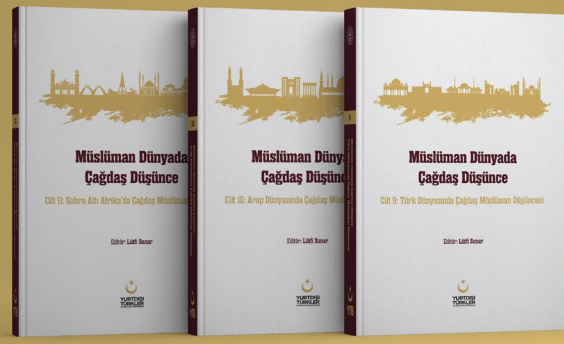


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**The “Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World” series takes on great importance in illuminating the historical and intellectual partnerships among Muslim communities, opening new horizons of understanding.**



has remained relatively unfamiliar until now. This section encompasses 12 articles and a chronological study, unveiling the intellectual development over the past 150 years. Our capacity to recognize and build connections with something is fundamentally tied to the knowledge we possess about it. Just as we may hesitate to interact with unfamiliar individuals, we also approach unfamiliar societies with caution. This situation holds true for the Muslim world, particularly in the last 150 years. Despite sharing similar historical experiences, language, religion, and culture, societies that have such commonalities often give the impression of being disconnected today. From this perspective, the “Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World” series takes on great importance in illuminating the historical and intellectual partnerships among Muslim communities, opening new horizons of understanding.

### **Extent and Distinctive Elements of the Work**

First and foremost, it is important to highlight the multidimensionality as a key feature of these books. Unlike many works that focus solely on the political or ideological events of a specific region, this book strives to transcend such limitations. Alongside political and ideological explanations, it also incorporates cultural and artistic elements. For instance, in the ninth volume, the esteemed literary figure Cengiz Aytmatov from the Turkish world is extensively discussed. Moving to the tenth volume, an assessment is made through the lens of the undeniable importance and popularity of Umm Kulthum and Fairuz in the Arab world. As for the eleventh volume, it encompasses two distinct analyses, delving into African cinema and postcolonial African literature. Getting to know societies undoubtedly requires an understanding of their culture and art. Any work that neglects these realms will inevitably be lacking. Therefore, the inclusion of artistic, literary, and cultural topics in these books serves to fill this gap. From this standpoint, we are presented with a more comprehensive perspective that goes beyond mere political and ideological evaluations. An additional point of significance is the inclusion of diversity within this study. Previous research has predominantly focused on select countries and actors, often

neglecting others. However, the present work devotes attention to numerous countries, subjecting them to scrutiny by experts in their respective fields. This approach highlights the study’s importance in terms of encompassing a diverse range of perspectives. Furthermore, the diversity of the author team deserves attention within the context of this discussion. Comprising representatives from over ten different countries, the team contributes to the overall diversity and inclusivity of the project. Authors, predominantly writing about their own countries, provide valuable insights into the internal dynamics and societal nuances of their respective nations. Consequently, this contributes positively to the content and richness of the book.

Another aspect worth mentioning is the breaking of the Orientalist influence, which can be regarded as the third point. Orientalism, roughly described as the Western construction of an imaginary portrait of the East within its own mental world, remains one of the significant challenges facing the Muslim world in recent years. This project aims to promote a real, rich, and dynamic world in contrast to the constructed Orientalist portrayal. The tenth and eleventh volumes of this series rectify the distorted knowledge and misconceptions regarding Africa and the Arab world, replacing them with accurate information. From this perspective, these books specifically challenge the Orientalist narrative. Presenting the accumulated knowledge of the Muslim world through the voices of Muslims themselves undermines the dominant Orientalist perspective and provides Muslims with the freedom to express themselves. This opportunity allows the Muslim world to attain “intellectual independence.”

In conclusion, this three-volume work, published in addition to the initial eight volumes, addresses the intellectual developments in the remaining parts of the Muslim world. Methodologically, it provides a broader scope and perspective compared to existing studies by employing multidimensionality. The embraced diversity in terms of countries and authors enhances the richness and authenticity of the books. Lastly, serving as an attempt by Muslims to comprehend and articulate themselves, these books challenge the authority of the Orientalist perspective and provide a sense of freedom to Muslims.

# Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World

Janmohamed, S. (2016). *Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World*. I.B.Tauris.



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In her writings, Shelina Zahra Janmohamed places a primary emphasis on topics concerning young Muslims, Muslim women, and the social and religious trends within the Muslim community. She is the author of the books “Love in a Headscarf” and “Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World.” Selected as one of the world’s 500 most influential Muslims and one of the UK’s 100 most powerful Muslim women. With her extensive experience spanning many years, the author remains actively involved in various areas such as brand implementation, marketing, advertising, and writing.

The book “Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World” is based on the author’s personal experiences and accumulated knowledge. By drawing from the stories and voices of Muslims, the author strives to shed light on various aspects. The author contends that studies and analyses on Muslim behaviour often fail to capture the multifaceted nature that extends beyond politics and theology. Within the pages of this book, the author directs their attention towards diverse Muslim experiences, attitudes towards the behaviours exhibited by Generation M, and the unique cultures and identities that emerge from these dynamics.

The author begins the book by addressing questions such as what is Generation M, what are its sources of inspiration, and what are its perceptions of identity and lifestyle practices. According to the author, Generation M refers to Muslims who shape their lives without concealing their identity while embracing modernity. They are a generation that embodies consumerism, entrepreneurship, digital fluency, and places importance on education and activism, while also valuing religious practices in their daily lives.

The emergence of this generation can be attributed to factors such as women’s movements, evolving identity structures, and the influence of social media and the internet. They seek to transform their lives and the society they inhabit by drawing inspiration from faith, education, and technology. In short, Generation M is a diverse group that fosters a creative identity construction and aims to lead a faithful life by drawing nourishment from religious sources.

Generation M, with a tendency to explore alternatives in various areas such as food, clothing, and entertainment, aims to popularize halal brands and create a Muslim lifestyle. Muslim consumers are not only satisfied with halal food; they also strive to access products that have undergone quality production and distribution processes, emphasizing health, halal, cleanliness, transparency, and integrity. According to the author, many individuals become acquainted with Generation M through the ethical consumer movement.

The relationship that this generation has formed with technology differs from previous generations. According to the author, Generation M relies less on traditional institutions compared to their elders and instead builds a new sense of



**Generation M, with a tendency to explore alternatives in various areas such as food, clothing, and entertainment, aims to popularize halal brands and create a Muslim lifestyle.**

identity as individuals through social media, experiencing a collective belonging to the ummah. The internet provides a space where young people, especially young women, can express themselves more freely and feel a strong sense of affiliation. It also offers the opportunity for curiosity, easier questioning, a sense of belonging, and the ability to make judgments. However, young individuals express concerns about the circulation of misinformation. They explore various interpretations and options online before making decisions, indicating the proliferation of diverse religious interpretations and identities in the virtual world.

In addition to digital platforms and technological advancements, they also show a tendency to create and explore alternatives in the realms of culture and entertainment. They seek to transform music into a means of life and entertainment by adapting cultural and Islamic values. Through their songs, they strive to address current issues. They aim to create and develop new spaces, such as humour, cartoons, novels, comics, films, animations, magazines, and blogs, where they can freely express their identities. Their main motivation is to produce alternative content by incorporating Islamic values and concepts into language. It is possible to say that they aspire to reach a different world and wider audiences through the culture they create and the identities they construct.

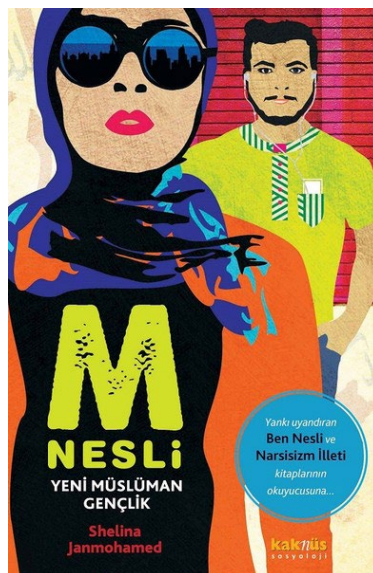
The book comprises five main sections with several subsections. The opening chapter, titled “Selam” (Greetings), provides an overview of the general characteristics, religious perceptions, and identity constructions of Generation M. The author enhances the narrative with illustrative examples that depict the generation’s relationship with technology, modernity, and tradition.

The section titled “Global Muslim Lifestyle” delves into challenges and alternative recommendations concerning the accessibility of halal products in diverse domains such as food, finance, the internet, and entertainment. Emphasis is placed on the significance of attaining halal and healthy production processes and goods.

Under the heading “Culture: New Muslim Cool,” the book concentrates on alternative music genres and instances, considering their Islamic connections and perceiving music as a source of inspiration. It explores various issues encompassing contemporary challenges and music, including the compatibility of music with Islamic content. The section named “The Twenty-First Century Ummah” tackles the subject of the global Muslim consumer, examining topics like celebrations, veiling, and modesty through concrete examples. The concluding segment, “The Faithful Future,” directs its attention towards consumption and production chains.

The author highlights the concept of the Muslim consumer as a significant topic in discussions about Generation M. The book’s examples illustrate the rise of a new economic power and a growing consumption capacity. Within this context, the evolving and changing Muslim

consumer base is portrayed to readers, emphasizing the development of global Muslim brands and the influence of production, consumption, marketing, and advertising. In the book, it is possible to come across various narratives from different countries around the world, offering a wide range of examples from diverse geographical locations, providing insights into Muslim experiences. It is a work that contributes to keeping up with the contemporary world of Muslim youth.



# Muslims amidst a Transforming Multipolar World

A Seminar from Wadah Khanfar

Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of just and equitable governance of the world. This framework not only encompasses harmony among humans but also encompasses the well-being of all living beings. This religious ethic can provide a strong foundation for Muslims to engage with environmental issues. Muslim societies and beyond can utilize this ethical framework to promote greater environmental consciousness and motivate steadfast actions. Muslim scholars and theologians can articulate an Islamic environmental ethics based on Quranic teachings and Hadiths, emphasizing the moral and spiritual dimensions of environmental stewardship.

Moreover, countries with a majority Muslim population that are significantly affected by climate change can play an active role in international climate negotiations by advocating for climate justice and equitable climate policies. These countries can also lead in renewable energy technologies, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable agricultural practices, offering concrete models for environmental sustainability.

To effectively contribute to these global discussions, it is vital for Muslim societies to invest in education, scientific research, and technology. They also need to foster a culture of critical thinking and intellectual openness that allows for the free exchange of ideas and constructive engagement with global intellectual trends. Furthermore, drawing upon their rich intellectual and spiritual traditions, Muslim societies can offer unique insights and solutions to these global challenges.

## The Period of Transformation

The world today is going through one of the most sophisticated, complicated, and deep transformations that generations have witnessed. This is not a transformation in the world order like the power or the wealth is moving from the west to the east, or the post-Cold War world order and the American decline, etc. It is much deeper than that, hence a multi-layer transformation in this particular time and age can be seen. Therefore, we can divide this change into three categories:

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Editor's note: Elif Sağır compiled the seminar titled "Muslims amidst a Transforming Multipolar World," which was conducted by Wadah Khanfar at ILKE Foundation on June 1, 2023.

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*A seminar titled “Muslims amidst a Transforming Multipolar World” was conducted*

## Change in the Concept of “Civilisation”

This is the end of a civilizational cycle. In my opinion, this cycle has reached a moment where it cannot reproduce itself. Although the western narrative itself is not simple and it has great ways of exercising criticism and correcting itself, the great values that the western civilization introduced to humanity were or are declining. Because with time, these values were embedded in power and utilized by power, and reshaped to suit interest of the minority, not the whole world. So in my opinion, right now, the values that are the seeds of the western civilization are not capable of reintroducing themselves as universal values that could create what is supposed to be peace, justice, equality, democracy.

Because initially, we embraced this Western paradigm, which became dominant internationally, because it had a huge value behind it. However, the elegance and the attractiveness of that civilization is no more capable of overcoming the shortcomings that its products are actually generating.

## Change in the Economics

Also, there is definitely a major shift in economy. The current crisis of America’s attitude that reinforces “only I can continue printing money to sustain my superiority” is not going to continue or the dollar’s role as the currency of international reserve is not going to continue forever. That is true when America was going up, there was a hiccup and it will be assumed that the process is going up, but America is going down. Any hiccup cannot be covered up easily. And also economically, when America was going up, China did not exist. The Soviet Union did not compete at that time. But today, there are alternatives. People are much more aware of the fact that one reserve currency is basically a manipulation of the economic system that will eventually lead to a lot of us.

## Change in the Concept of “Power” Itself

Hegemonic nature of the system is systematically affecting everyone in the world. So, the victims of that system eventually are going to be fed up. At the beginning, we might be scared or be tempted

by some beautiful things that the system gives us. But we cannot continue doing this forever. Especially if we sense that the hegemonic power is now weaker, then we will have the courage to introduce our own way of thinking. And in my opinion, the world is now sick and fed up with the way that the Western-centric approach to politics has been done during the last few decades, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, everyone is trying to breathe again. This is why a region like ours, which was dominated most likely by the American framework of interest, is now trying to figure out new ways. This is also why Türkiye is talking to Saudi Arabia or Qatar is reconciling with Egypt, etc. There is a new feeling that we can break away from the American approach to the region.

The fact that we start feeling that the system is slowly declining, we are also liberating ourselves from the perceptions, the interests and the chains that the American system has been imposing on us. We need to realize that we are going through gigantic kind of transformation from a civilization level to an economic level, into a geopolitical level, and even to a social level, and most importantly, to a conceptual level. We could not imagine the world outside the Western philosophical, intellectual, and sociological kind of parameters. All of us, in a way or another, are either engaged in embracing the system or trying to respond to the system. We could not introduce our own and practice our own originality, come up with our own narratives from within, rather than from without. Also, we couldn't imagine the world functioning in a world order that is not based in the Western center, or an economy that could introduce prosperity outside capitalism, or a governing system that could introduce some dignity to the humanity or a good life outside the Western system. But right now, we are much more capable of doing so, simply because we couldn't, and I can now see more books, research, conferences are taking place around the world, trying to search for alternatives in economics, politics, democracy and in many other forms. I would say that we are invited to think about alternatives to create beyond the nation state, not post, because it might continue to exist, but to think about something "beyond" the nation state, and in an integration mode.

## Ummah

While thinking beyond the nation state and alternatives to the current system, we should recall the concept of "Ummah" in relation to the golden age of Islam. Because the nation state has been turned into an idol, and it has become so sacred that we eradicated any kind of legacy that inherited over 1,300 years of consensus. In this Ummah, there is something beyond the boundaries of a particular polity, for example, al-Bukhari was born in Bukhara. Was he an Uzbek, or Turcic? Was he an Arab, or was he a Persian, does it matter? Does it matter for anyone at that time whether al-Bukhari was from this nationality or Imam Muslim, who is Persian born in Nisabur from that nationality? So, when we speak about the golden age of Islam, we forget that this great age of Islam was established in a different space, in a different sphere of movement. So, without al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ibn Arabi, Al-Shadhili, Abu Hanifa, how could any individual entity develop what we are today? How could we, as Muslims, be who we are today? The sphere that the concept of Ummah introduced to us is genius. I argue that it does not exist anywhere in any other nation in history. Our concept of Ummah is not politically made, Ummah was a separate entity revolving around a separate order, not in the same political order. Because we are empowered as individuals by belonging to an Ummah, which goes way above the state. While in the current system, the state makes the Ummah. The state defines who we are, what kind of card we carry, what kind of nationality, and how we could belong to the state or not, and even what we eat, what we drink, how to make all kinds of transactions. In our concept, however the human was given the utmost of freedom beyond any other political order. This is why we created something called an Ummah, and I claim that the Ummah is a not a creation of the political system, or a creation of an evolution within the Ummah. Instead, it is one of the most important, nuclear pillars of the fact that we are Muslims, it is established by Quran, then emphasized by the Prophet -May the blessings of Allah be upon him- in Medina.

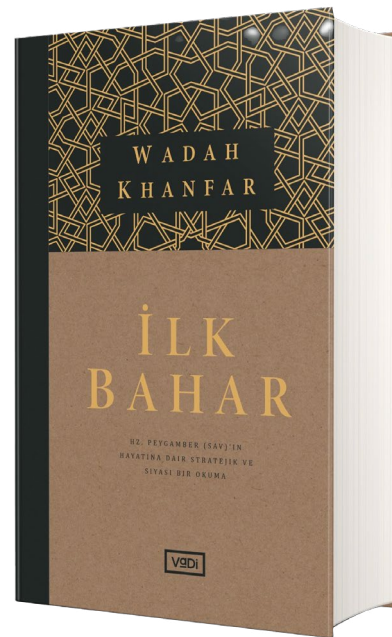
So, is it a ridiculous idea to think one day that Türkiye and Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, the Gulf and Iraq and Syria, for example, could establish a form of something similar to the European Union



that could start with economic integration, then can move into much more levels of integration? Why no one is talking about this? Why are we only emphasizing our states and the magnificence of our flags and our history? Because I think in a hundred years, the legacy of 1300 years of collectiveness of the Ummah concept has not only been wiped away but also ridiculed, although it is us who had the brand initially. We had it even much better than that. We had a nation, an Ummah that was something unique beyond politics. Nevertheless, now we cannot think about it simply because our intelligentsia think that modernization is westernization and anything beyond it is heresy. This is why we need a new intelligentsia that will introduce a new narrative, which is much more original than a little bit of variation in the western model and futuristic; a new intellectual group of people thinking beyond the necessities of the state. Because in our culture as Muslims, we had the Ulama, the scholars that were way above the level of the politicians because they are the “Umana,” trustees of the people and of Islam. The Alim was the trustee, not the politician. This is why I am encouraging this kind of debate and discussion amongst intellectuals, economists, politicians in this region to see how we can move forward.

## Science

Also, while developing alternatives to the current system, the issues of science and scientific advancements also become important, because the more we move, there will be hiccups. When artificial intelligence is introduced, some people will use it for the destruction of humanity, some military guys will use it to kill people, etc. But slowly, the humanity, the line of progress within the human scientific realm will run parallel to the concept of Iman, the faith. In his book *al-‘Ālamīyah al-Islāmīyah al-Thānīyah*, Muhammad Abū al-Qāsim Ājjāmād argues that Allah used the word “ayah” to describe the verses of Quran and at the same time, to describe the laws of the universe, or the phenomenon of existence. He believes that the more we study Al-Qur’an, in light of studying, or in the barrel of studying scientific approach to the universe and to the self, the more we will unlock the meaning of Quran and the mysteries of the universe. So, the Quran will empower us to be much better scientists because of the purpose that is going to establish in our minds, and our understanding of



*Wadah Khanfar's book First Spring: A Political And Strategic Reading Of The Prophet's Biography has been translated in to Turkish and widely acclaimed.*

***While thinking beyond the nation state and alternatives to the current system, we should recall the concept of “Ummah” in relation to the golden age of Islam.***

science, the universe and the self will empower us to be much better believers as well. Thus, it will end the dichotomy that the Western mind had between science and religion. The more we move forward in science, the better believers we can be if we read that within the realm of the parameters of Quran.

### **Concluding Remarks on the Future of the “Civilisation”**

On the other hand, when we talk about alternatives and moving forward beyond the parameters of Western systems, the question of “Which civilization will replace the Western civilization?” also occurs. The concept of “civilisation” is going to be multi-layered, so we should act upon converting our Islamic values, from Islamic values into human values. Because the humanity itself can and will, eventually, start looking for alternatives, and the values we have are amazing. But we should not keep them within the religious parameters, or the cultural parameters, we need to transcend these values into a global level. Then we should start competing in economics, in politics, in international relations, coming up with theories. This is why I concluded my book with a chapter called, “Islam Resides in the Future,” not in the Past.

Therefore, if you want to know Islam, think about the future, because Muhammad SAW is the last prophet for humanity, and the book is the last book. It means that it is a book for the future. If it will continue to be valid until the Day of Judgment, then it is a book for the future, not a book for the past. And it means that our intellectuals, ulema and scholars should realize it to start building a new discourse for humanity. And in this case, that civilization, Insha’Allah, will not be called necessarily “Islamic civilization,” or a “Christian civilization,” or Chinese, or whatever it is. But it will be the civilization of the wise man, the stable man, and the civilization of the value-centred human, which is empowered by Islam as it is empowered by other values that the humanity could accept.

***The sphere that the concept of Ummah introduced to us is genius. I argue that it does not exist anywhere in any other nation in history. Our concept of Ummah is not politically made, Ummah was a separate entity revolving around a separate order, not in the same political order.***



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