ISLAMIC ETHICAL TEACHING ON JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT
*Justice (ʿ*Adl*) is a central principle in Islamic ethics, law, and social life, representing both a divine attribute and a moral obligation for human conduct. This study examines Islamic teachings on justice as expressed in the Qur'an, Hadith, and scholarly interpretations, emphasizing its role in personal morality, governance, and social harmony. Islamic justice integrates fairness, equity (*qist*), balance (*mīzān*), accountability, and compassion (*rahmah*), guiding individuals and communities toward ethical behavior and human dignity. Classical scholars, including Al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah, and contemporary thinkers like Kamali and Qaradawi, highlight its relevance in addressing modern challenges such as inequality, corruption, and oppression. The study concludes that justice in Islam is both a spiritual and social imperative, essential for moral integrity, communal cohesion, and ethical governance.*

Keywords: Islamic ethics, justice, ʿAdl, equity, accountability, compassion,

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Justice (ʿAdl) occupies a central place in Islamic ethics and law. It represents a divine attribute of Allah and serves as the moral foundation for human behavior, governance, and social relations. The Qur'an commands believers to uphold justice, even when it conflicts with personal interests or family loyalties:

> "*O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin" (Q4:135).*

This command shows that justice in Islam transcends individual bias and demands fairness, sincerity, and truthfulness in all circumstances.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) exemplified justice throughout his leadership, family life, and social interactions. His governance was guided by the principle that justice sustains social harmony and divine approval. Islamic ethical teaching therefore presents justice as extending beyond formal legal rulings to include compassion, service, and the preservation of human dignity (Saeed & Hussein, 2025).

Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Al-Farabi emphasized justice as a foundation of ethical conduct and good governance. Contemporary maqāṣid scholarship

likewise connects justice with the protection of essential human interests and the public good (Kamali, 2025). Recent scholarship further shows that Islamic justice can be understood as a framework for balancing rights, responsibilities, and social welfare rather than as a purely procedural concept (Firas & Ismail, 2024; Sopianto, 2025). The pursuit of justice in Islam is therefore presented as both a moral virtue and a divine duty essential to human flourishing and social progress.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this presentation is to examine Islamic ethical teachings on justice as expressed in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and classical and modern interpretations. It aims to clarify how justice operates as a moral, spiritual, and social ideal shaping both individual character and collective institutions. The study also explores how Islamic justice can inform responses to modern social problems such as inequality, corruption, and oppression through a framework grounded in divine accountability and moral integrity (Saeed & Hussein, 2025).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it connects classical Islamic ethics with modern discussions on social justice and human dignity. In a world marked by economic disparity, corruption, and systemic injustice, the Islamic conception of justice offers an ethical framework rooted in divine accountability, fairness, and social responsibility. Recent scholarship indicates that the concept remains relevant to contemporary debates on economic justice, governance, and social equity (Solehudin et al., 2024; Firas & Ismail, 2024). By revisiting these ethical teachings, the study highlights pathways toward fairness, social responsibility, and communal harmony.

Scope of the Study

This presentation focuses on the ethical and theological dimensions of justice (*ʿAdl*) in Islam. It analyzes relevant Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions, and scholarly interpretations while including insights from recent academic research. Although it does not cover every aspect of Islamic jurisprudence, it highlights how the moral principle of justice influences personal behavior, community relations, and governance. The study also considers contemporary applications of Islamic justice in addressing global issues such as corruption, inequality, and human rights.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach. It draws from primary sources such as the Qur'an and Hadith, and secondary materials from scholarly books and peer-reviewed journal articles. Sources were selected on the basis of direct relevance to Islamic conceptions of justice, ethical interpretation, maqāṣid al-sharīʿah, governance, social equity, and contemporary applications of Islamic ethics. Priority was given to established classical scholarship and recent peer-reviewed research published in 2024–2025. The analysis involved three stages: first, close reading of the selected texts; second, coding recurring ideas into thematic categories; and third, comparative interpretation of classical and contemporary perspectives. The principal themes were ʿadl, qist, mīzān, accountability, human dignity, governance, and social welfare. Analytical rigor was strengthened by comparing claims across primary religious texts, classical scholarship, and recent academic studies rather than relying on a single interpretive source.

Analytically, the study uses a three-level framework: normative foundations (Qur'anic and Prophetic commands), conceptual interpretation (the meanings and relationships of ʿadl, qist, and mīzān), and contemporary application (governance, social equity, economic justice, and accountability). This framework makes it possible to distinguish what the primary texts prescribe from how classical and contemporary scholars interpret those prescriptions and from how the principles may be applied to modern social problems.

Review of Literature

Recent scholarship continues to engage deeply with the concept of justice in Islam, exploring its role in individual morality, social relations, law, governance, and economic life. Kamali (2025) treats maqāṣid al-sharīʿah as a framework through which justice, human dignity, good governance, and social welfare can be examined in contemporary contexts. Sopianto (2025), through a literature review of Qur'anic exegesis and Hadith, emphasizes that justice involves both equality and the protection of rights, while Saeed and Hussein (2025) connect justice with tolerance, coexistence, and social harmony. Firas and Ismail (2024) further demonstrate that Islamic and Western philosophical approaches to justice can be compared without assuming that they are identical. In the economic sphere, Solehudin et al. (2024) show how maqāṣid-based reasoning can frame justice in terms of ethical and social utility. Collectively, these studies strengthen the present paper by showing that Islamic justice is multidimensional; however, they also indicate that the meaning and application of justice depend on the interpretive framework used. This makes critical engagement with ʿadl, qist, and mīzān necessary rather than treating the concepts as interchangeable.

The concept of Justice in Islam

Definition of Justice (ʿAdl)

Justice, known in Arabic as ʿAdl, is one of the most profound and comprehensive concepts in Islamic ethics and law. Linguistically, ʿAdl means balance, equality, and uprightness. It denotes placing everything in its proper place and giving each being its due right. The Qur'an emphasizes that justice is a divine attribute, as Allah is often described as Al-ʿAdl (The Just). The Qur'an commands believers:

> *"Indeed, Allah commands justice, good conduct, and giving to relatives, and forbids immorality and oppression" (Q16:90).*

According to Kamali, justice in Islam encompasses both the moral and legal dimensions of human conduct, ensuring that every action aligns with divine principles of fairness and moderation (Kamali, 2025).

Justice is not merely the absence of injustice but an active process of ensuring that rights, responsibilities, and social relationships are ordered fairly. Recent scholarship cautions against reducing Islamic justice to simple numerical equality. Sopianto (2025) distinguishes the Qur'anic language of al-ʿadl and al-qist from a purely uniform conception of equality, emphasizing rights and fair treatment. Thus, justice may require equal treatment in some circumstances and proportionate treatment in others, depending on the rights and responsibilities involved. It is therefore both a spiritual duty and a social necessity.

The subject matter of justice in Islam extends beyond the judicial system to all areas of human life. It applies to personal morality, family relations, economic dealings, and political governance. The Qur'an and the Hadith provide guidance on ensuring fairness in every sphere—

between rulers and subjects, employers and workers, and individuals within communities. Saeed and Hussein note that "justice is the foundation upon which Islamic civilization is built, as it preserves human dignity, equality, and social peace" (Saeed & Hussein, 2025).

The scope of justice (ʿadl) in Islam also includes qist (equity) and mīzān (balance). These terms are closely related but should not be treated as exact synonyms. ʿAdl generally conveys the broader idea of justice, right ordering, and giving each party its due; qist emphasizes equitable and impartial dealing, especially where rights are distributed or adjudicated; and mīzān conveys the idea of balance and measure. Sopianto (2025) notes the importance of distinguishing the Qur'anic uses of al-ʿadl and al-qist, while contemporary maqāṣid scholarship connects justice with broader questions of human welfare and social order (Kamali, 2025). The analytical value of these distinctions is that they show Islamic justice as both a moral principle and a practical method of ordering social relations.

Objectives of Justice

The primary objective of justice in Islam is to establish harmony among human rights, divine guidance, and social welfare. It is closely related to the maqāṣid al-sharīʿah, or higher objectives of Islamic law, which include protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property (Kamali, 2025). These objectives provide an analytical framework for considering whether social and legal arrangements protect essential human interests and prevent harm. Contemporary maqāṣid scholarship also stresses that justice should be examined in relation to human dignity, good governance, and public welfare rather than as an isolated legal principle (Kamali, 2025; Ludfi & Rais, 2024).

The ethical objective of justice also concerns the formation of moral character. Rather than relying only on external enforcement, Islamic ethics seeks to cultivate individuals who understand justice as an obligation before Allah and as a responsibility toward other people. This interpretation connects justice with accountability, moral education, and social responsibility, thereby moving the discussion from formal rules to the ethical dispositions required for those rules to produce just outcomes.

Classification of Justice

Islamic discussions of justice can be grouped into several interrelated dimensions, including divine justice, social justice, legal justice, and moral justice. These classifications are useful analytically, but they should not be treated as completely separate categories because the Qur'anic and Prophetic framework connects personal conduct with social and institutional responsibility. Divine justice concerns Allah's perfection and freedom from wrongdoing; social justice concerns equitable relations and protection from oppression; legal justice concerns impartial adjudication; and moral justice concerns truthful, responsible, and trustworthy conduct. The distinction is therefore one of emphasis rather than rigid separation.

Origin and Development

The concept of justice in Islam originates from divine revelation. From the earliest Meccan revelations, the Qur'an emphasized moral accountability and fairness as central to faith. The Prophet Muhammad's life and leadership established justice as a core principle of governance and personal conduct. Over time, Muslim scholars elaborated on the idea of justice in theology, philosophy, and law. Al-Farabi linked justice to the ideal state, where leaders govern according to wisdom and virtue. Ibn Taymiyyah viewed justice as the basis of legitimate political

authority, asserting that "a government may endure with unbelief, but not with injustice" (quoted in Ismail).

In modern times, scholars such as Kamali have reinterpreted Islamic justice in light of contemporary social challenges. Kamali (2025) links maqāṣid reasoning with justice, human dignity, good governance, and social welfare. Other recent scholarship similarly considers how Islamic ethical and legal principles can respond to contemporary questions of governance, economic justice, and social equity (Ludfi & Rais, 2024; Solehudin et al., 2024). This development does not necessarily mean abandoning classical foundations; rather, it demonstrates an ongoing effort to interpret enduring principles in changing social circumstances. Hefni et al. (2025) likewise show how contemporary maqāṣid-oriented reasoning can engage changing social conditions while remaining connected to Islamic legal foundations.

Islamic Ethical viewpoint of Justice

Islamic ethics derive primarily from the Qur'an, Sunnah, *Ijma'* (consensus), and *Qiyas* (analogy). These sources consistently emphasize justice as both a divine command and an ethical duty. Justice in Islam is not limited to legal contexts but encompasses personal morality, social relations, and governance. It represents a moral principle that aligns human behavior with divine will, ensuring fairness, balance, and equity.

The Qur'an

The Qur'an repeatedly commands believers to uphold justice, even when it conflicts with personal or familial interests. It states,

> *"O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even if it be against yourselves, your parents, or your kin" (4:135).*

This verse illustrates that justice must transcend personal bias, tribal loyalty, or social pressure. Kamali emphasizes that Qur'anic justice is universal and absolute, encompassing moral, social, and legal dimensions (Kamali, 2025).

The Sunnah

The Sunnah, or the practices and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), reinforces the Qur'anic emphasis on justice. The Prophetic model presents justice as a responsibility of leaders and individuals and condemns oppression and favoritism. In this sense, the Sunnah complements the Qur'anic command by demonstrating how justice can operate in governance and interpersonal relations. Contemporary scholarship likewise emphasizes the relationship between justice, tolerance, and social well-being (Saeed & Hussein, 2025).

Ethical Interpretation

From an ethical perspective, justice in Islam is both preventive and corrective. It prevents wrongdoing and restores balance when rights are violated. Injustice (zulm) is regarded as one of the gravest sins, while upholding justice is considered an act of worship and moral fulfillment. Sopianto notes that justice functions as a guiding principle in all human interactions, ensuring that social and moral equilibrium is maintained (Sopianto, 2025). Ethical justice thus integrates individual morality with communal responsibility.

Classical and Contemporary Insights

Classical Islamic scholars provided foundational insights into justice. Al-Ghazali viewed justice in relation to the moral ordering of the self and society, while Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized justice as a condition of legitimate political authority. Contemporary scholarship adds new dimensions to these discussions. Kamali (2025) connects justice with *maqāṣid*, human dignity, good governance, and social welfare, while Firas and Ismail (2024) demonstrate that Islamic approaches to justice can be critically compared with Western philosophical approaches. These perspectives are not identical, but their comparison helps show both the distinctive theological basis of Islamic justice and its engagement with wider ethical questions.

Islamic Ethical Principles of Justice

Justice as a Moral Value

In Islam, justice (*ʿAdl*) is not merely a legal requirement but a fundamental moral value that shapes personal conduct and social interaction. It is considered both a divine command and an ethical responsibility for all individuals. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes that justice is integral to righteousness:

> *"Indeed, Allah orders you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice" (Q4:58).*

This verse underscores that justice is inseparable from ethical behavior and spiritual accountability (Kamali, 2025).

Justice as a moral value encourages individuals to act fairly, uphold truth, and resist personal or societal pressures that may lead to oppression. The ethical significance of justice therefore lies not only in the existence of rules but also in the moral character of those who apply and obey them. Recent research on Islamic ethics and governance similarly emphasizes the connection between justice, responsibility, and the common good (Ludfi & Rais, 2024; Saeed & Hussein, 2025).

Equity and Fairness

Equity (qist) is a critical dimension of Islamic justice, emphasizing impartiality and equal treatment. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) instructed that rulers and judges should remain unbiased: "*Do not oppress or be unjust, and do not favor one over another*" (Sunan al-Kubra 11:362). Equity ensures that all individuals, regardless of social status, wealth, or familial connections, are treated with fairness.

Sopianto (2025) highlights that equity in Islam extends beyond formal legal systems to social, economic, and interpersonal interactions, while Kamali (2025) situates justice within the broader objectives of protecting human interests and social welfare. By distinguishing *qist* from the broader concept of *ʿadl*, the discussion avoids treating equity and justice as exact synonyms. Islamic ethical teachings therefore foster trust, cooperation, and social cohesion while requiring attention to the particular rights and responsibilities of those involved.

Accountability and Responsibility

Islamic justice emphasizes accountability to both Allah and fellow human beings. Every action, whether in governance, trade, or personal conduct, carries moral and spiritual consequences. The Qur'an connects righteous conduct with the assurance that people will not be wronged as Allah comments,

> *"If any do deeds of righteousness, be they male or female and both have faith. They will enter Heaven. And not the least injustice will be done to them" (Q4:124).*

Accountability in this context encourages ethical vigilance and integrity, ensuring that individuals uphold justice in all spheres. Contemporary discussions of Islamic governance similarly associate justice with responsible exercise of authority, protection of rights, and prevention of abuse of power (Ludfi & Rais, 2024).

Accountability is therefore not merely an individual religious concern but also an institutional principle. Leaders and public institutions are expected to exercise authority transparently and responsibly, while members of society retain responsibilities toward one another. This broader understanding helps connect Islamic ethical teaching with contemporary concerns about corruption, governance, and social welfare without reducing justice to punishment alone.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen the understanding and application of Islamic ethical principles of justice in contemporary society. First, scholars, educators, and religious leaders should intensify efforts to promote accurate and contextual interpretations of Qur'anic and Prophetic teachings on justice. Many modern challenges—such as corruption, social inequality, gender-related injustice, and abuse of power—stem from a gap between Islamic ethical ideals and real-life practice. By integrating classical scholarship with contemporary realities, institutions can ensure that justice (*ʿAdl*), equity (*qist*), and moral balance (*mīzān*) remain central to Muslim conduct and governance.

Second, Islamic educational institutions should incorporate justice-centered curricula that foster moral consciousness, civic responsibility, and ethical sensitivity from an early age. Embedding teachings from the *Qur'an*, *Sunnah*, and classical scholars within educational programs will help cultivate individuals who internalize justice as a spiritual and social obligation, not merely a legal requirement. This aligns with scholars such as Chasanah et al., who emphasize the role of education in nurturing ethical awareness.

Third, Muslim communities and policymakers should prioritize transparent, accountable, and compassionate governance grounded in Islamic principles. Leaders at all levels must be trained in ethical decision-making that avoids bias, upholds equity, and demonstrates mercy, reflecting the Prophetic model. Institutional reforms should focus on combating corruption, protecting human rights, and ensuring that justice is accessible to all, regardless of social, economic, or political status.

Finally, further interdisciplinary research is recommended to explore how Islamic justice can be practically applied to modern issues such as economic disparity, gender equity, restorative justice, and conflict resolution. Collaboration among Islamic scholars, legal experts, sociologists, and policymakers would support the development of systems that harmonize divine principles with contemporary societal needs. By anchoring social structures in justice, compassion, and accountability, Muslim societies can advance moral integrity, social harmony, and sustainable development in accordance with Islamic ethical teachings.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that justice (*ʿadl*) in Islam is a comprehensive ethical principle encompassing legal, moral, social, and spiritual dimensions. It is not limited to judicial or governance contexts but permeates personal conduct, family relationships, economic dealings,

and community interactions. The Qur'an and Sunnah establish justice as both a divine command and a moral obligation, requiring fairness, equity, and accountability to transcend personal interest and social bias as the Qur'an 4:135 explained. Classical scholarship provides the conceptual foundations, while contemporary scholarship demonstrates the continuing relevance of justice to questions of governance, economic fairness, human dignity, and social welfare (Firas & Ismail, 2024; Kamali, 2025; Saeed & Hussein, 2025).

The analysis also shows that *ʿadl*, *qist*, and *mīzān* are related but analytically distinct concepts. Their relationship allows Islamic justice to be understood not simply as equality, but as a broader ethical requirement to give rights their due, maintain balance, prevent oppression, and protect human welfare. The study therefore concludes that Islamic justice is both rooted in revelation and capable of meaningful engagement with changing social realities. Its continuing relevance depends on careful interpretation, ethical accountability, and responsible institutional application.

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