

Islamic Values and Civic Responsibility: A Study of Their Implementation in Pakistani Society

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Abstract

This article explores the intricate relationship between Islamic values and civic responsibility within the socio-political and cultural landscape of Pakistan. Drawing upon primary Islamic sources and contemporary socio-legal frameworks, the study investigates how foundational Islamic principles—such as justice (*‘adl*), consultation (*shūrā*), public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), and accountability (*ḥisābah*)—inform and shape civic duties in a modern nation-state context. Through qualitative analysis of constitutional provisions, educational curricula, civil society initiatives, and everyday practices, the research demonstrates both the potential and the challenges inherent in harmonizing religious ethics with democratic citizenship. The findings suggest that while Islamic values provide a robust moral foundation for civic engagement, their effective implementation is often hindered by structural inefficiencies, gaps in civic education, and socio-economic disparities. The article concludes with policy-oriented recommendations aimed at fostering a more cohesive and ethically grounded civic culture in Pakistan.

Keywords: Islamic Values, Civic Responsibility, Pakistan, Citizenship, *Shūrā*, Public Welfare, Constitutionalism

Introduction

Pakistan, since its inception in 1947, has navigated a complex trajectory of nation-building that intertwines Islamic identity with modern statehood. The foundational vision articulated by Muhammad Ali Jinnah emphasized a state where religious freedom and civic equality would coexist, yet the subsequent constitutional and legal evolution has increasingly anchored national identity in Islamic principles. Article 2 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973) declares Islam as the state religion, while Article 31 mandates the state to enable Muslims to order their lives in accordance with the teachings of Islam.¹

This constitutional embedding of Islamic ethos creates a unique framework wherein civic responsibilities are not merely legal obligations but also moral and spiritual duties derived from Islamic ethics.

Civic responsibility—the commitment of individuals to contribute positively to the public good through lawful, ethical, and participatory conduct—is central to the functioning of any democratic society. In Pakistan, this concept is deeply interwoven with Islamic values that emphasize communal solidarity, justice, and accountability. The Qur'an and Sunnah repeatedly enjoin believers to “enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong” (Qur'an 3:104), to uphold justice even against themselves (Qur'an 4:135), and to consult one another in matters of public concern (Qur'an 42:38). These injunctions form the bedrock of an Islamic civic ethic that transcends mere compliance with state laws and calls for active moral engagement in society.

Despite this rich ethical tradition, the practical implementation of civic responsibility in Pakistan remains uneven. High levels of tax evasion, environmental degradation, corruption, and political apathy suggest a disjuncture between normative ideals and lived realities. This article seeks to examine this gap by analyzing how Islamic values are interpreted, institutionalized, and practiced in

contemporary Pakistani society. It argues that while Islamic teachings provide a compelling framework for civic virtue, their effective translation into social practice requires deliberate policy interventions, educational reforms, and cultural reinforcement.

The study is structured into five sections. Following this introduction, the second section delineates the core Islamic values relevant to civic life. The third section examines their constitutional and legal articulation in Pakistan. The fourth section analyzes empirical manifestations of these values in education, civil society, and everyday conduct. The fifth section identifies key challenges and proposes recommendations. The conclusion synthesizes the findings and underscores the potential of an Islamically informed civic culture to strengthen democratic resilience in Pakistan.

Islamic Foundations of Civic Responsibility

Islamic ethics offer a comprehensive vision of social responsibility rooted in the concepts of *tawhīd* (the oneness of God), *khilāfah* (vicegerency), and *amānah* (trusteeship). According to Islamic theology, human beings are appointed as *khalīfah* (vicegerents) on earth (Qur'an 2:30), entrusted with the stewardship of God's creation. This role entails not only personal piety but also active engagement in establishing justice, protecting the vulnerable, and maintaining social harmony. The notion of *amānah* further reinforces this duty: every individual is accountable before God for how they fulfill their responsibilities toward society, the environment, and future generations.

Central to Islamic civic ethics is the principle of *'adl* (justice). The Qur'an commands: "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin" (Qur'an 4:135). Justice in Islam is not limited to legal fairness but encompasses economic equity, social inclusion, and procedural transparency. It obligates citizens to oppose oppression

and to support institutions that uphold fairness. This principle directly informs civic duties such as paying taxes honestly, respecting the rule of law, and participating in judicial processes as truthful witnesses.

Another foundational concept is *shūrā* (consultation). The Qur'an states: "And those who have responded to their Lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves" (Qur'an 42:38). While classical jurists debated the scope of *shūrā*, contemporary Islamic scholars widely interpret it as a mandate for participatory governance. In a modern context, *shūrā* legitimizes democratic practices such as voting, public deliberation, and civic advocacy. It transforms passive subjects into active citizens who co-create the social order through reasoned dialogue and collective decision-making.

The Islamic emphasis on *maṣlaḥah* (public interest or welfare) further grounds civic responsibility. Classical jurists like Al-Ghazālī and Al-Shāṭibī argued that the overarching objective (*maqāṣid*) of Islamic law is the preservation of religion, life, intellect, progeny, and property—collectively known as the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*.²

Any action that promotes these objectives is deemed virtuous, while that which undermines them is discouraged. Thus, civic acts such as volunteering, environmental conservation, and community service are not merely optional but integral to fulfilling one's religious duty.

Finally, the doctrine of *ḥisbah*—the duty to "enjoin good and forbid evil"—serves as a mechanism for social accountability. Historically, the *muḥtasib* (public inspector) ensured market fairness, public morality, and administrative integrity.³

In contemporary society, this function is diffused among citizens, who are morally obligated to speak out against corruption, injustice, and negligence. While the state bears primary responsibility for governance, Islam assigns every believer a role in maintaining societal integrity.

These values—justice, consultation, public welfare, and accountability—constitute an Islamic civic ethic that aligns closely with modern notions of active citizenship. Their implementation, however, depends on how they are interpreted, institutionalized, and internalized within a given socio-political context. As Fazlur Rahman has argued, the dynamic reinterpretation (*ijtihad*) of Islamic principles in light of contemporary challenges is essential for their relevance in modern civic life.⁴

Constitutional and Legal Framework in Pakistan

Pakistan's constitutional architecture reflects a deliberate effort to integrate Islamic principles with modern governance. The Objectives Resolution of 1949, incorporated as the Preamble to the 1973 Constitution, declares that "sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to Almighty Allah alone," and that the state shall exercise its authority "within the limits prescribed by Him."⁵

This theological premise underpins the entire legal system, positioning Islamic values as the moral compass of statecraft.

Article 2A of the Constitution incorporates the Objectives Resolution into the substantive law, giving it justiciable status. Article 31 obligates the state to "endeavour to enable the Muslims of Pakistan to order their lives in the individual and collective spheres in accordance with the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam."⁶

Furthermore, Article 227 stipulates that all existing laws shall be brought into conformity with the Injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and that no law shall be enacted repugnant to these injunctions.⁷

These provisions create a dual framework: on one hand, they affirm the supremacy of Islamic ethics; on the other, they operate within a constitutional democracy that guarantees fundamental rights, including equality (Article 25), freedom of speech (Article 19), and the right to information (Article 19-A). This duality presents both

opportunities and tensions. For instance, the principle of ‘*adl* (justice) finds expression in Article 4, which guarantees the right to be dealt with in accordance with law, and Article 10-A, which enshrines the right to a fair trial. Similarly, *shūrā* is institutionalized through representative democracy, regular elections, and local government systems.

The 18th Amendment (2010) devolved significant powers to provinces and revitalized local governments, creating avenues for participatory governance that echo the spirit of *shūrā*.⁸

Local councils, union councils, and district assemblies provide platforms for citizens to deliberate on community needs, allocate resources, and hold officials accountable. However, the effectiveness of these institutions is often compromised by political interference, lack of capacity, and weak civic engagement.

The judiciary has also played a pivotal role in interpreting Islamic values in civic contexts. In *Benazir Bhutto v. Federation of Pakistan* (1988), the Supreme Court held that the Objectives Resolution is a “grundnorm” that informs the interpretation of all constitutional provisions.⁹

More recently, in environmental jurisprudence, courts have invoked the Islamic concept of *khalīfah* to affirm citizens’ rights to a clean environment. In *Shehla Zia v. WAPDA* (1994), the Supreme Court recognized the right to a healthy environment as part of the fundamental right to life, drawing upon Islamic stewardship principles.¹⁰

Despite these progressive interpretations, gaps remain between constitutional ideals and administrative practice. Corruption, bureaucratic inertia, and weak enforcement mechanisms often undermine the realization of civic rights. Moreover, the selective application of Islamic principles—emphasizing ritual compliance over social justice—has led to a fragmented civic culture where moral duties are privatized rather than collectively enacted. As Javaid Rehman observes, the challenge lies in

ensuring that Islamic legal principles are applied consistently and inclusively within a pluralistic constitutional order.¹¹

Manifestations in Education, Civil Society, and Everyday Life

The transmission of Islamic civic values occurs through multiple channels: formal education, religious discourse, civil society organizations, and familial socialization. In Pakistan, the national curriculum has long sought to instill Islamic ethics alongside civic education. Textbooks for Islamiyat and Pakistan Studies emphasize themes such as honesty, patriotism, social service, and respect for law, often citing Qur’anic verses and Prophetic traditions.¹²

For example, students are taught that paying taxes is a religious duty because it supports public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), and that voting is an expression of *shūrā*.

However, critics argue that the curriculum often prioritizes doctrinal conformity over critical thinking and ethical reasoning.¹³

The emphasis on ritual observance sometimes overshadows the socio-political dimensions of Islamic ethics. Moreover, disparities in educational access—particularly in rural and marginalized communities—limit the reach of formal civic education. Private and elite institutions may offer more robust civic training, but public schools, which serve the majority, frequently lack resources and trained teachers.

Religious institutions, including mosques and madrasas, also play a significant role in shaping civic consciousness. Friday sermons (*khuṭbahs*) often address contemporary social issues, urging congregants to fulfill their civic duties. Campaigns against corruption, drug abuse, and environmental pollution are frequently framed in Islamic terms.¹⁴

For instance, the “Clean and Green Pakistan” initiative launched by the government in 2018 was widely supported by religious leaders who cited the Prophet’s saying: “Removing harmful things from the road is an act of charity (*ṣadaqah*).”¹⁵

Civil society organizations have been instrumental in bridging Islamic ethics and civic action. Groups like the Edhi Foundation, Al-Khidmat Foundation, and Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital operate on principles of *ihsān* (excellence in service) and *ta'āwun* (mutual cooperation).¹⁶

Their work in disaster relief, healthcare, and poverty alleviation exemplifies the Islamic ideal of social solidarity. Notably, these organizations often mobilize volunteers through religious appeals, demonstrating the motivational power of faith-based civic engagement.

At the grassroots level, everyday practices reflect a blend of Islamic norms and civic behavior. Community *majālis* (gatherings) often serve as informal forums for resolving disputes, echoing the Prophetic model of mediation. Neighborhood watch committees, though informal, function as modern expressions of *ḥisbah*, promoting security and accountability. During elections, religious scholars frequently issue *fatāwā* encouraging voter participation as a religious obligation, framing democracy as a contemporary form of *shūrā*.¹⁷

Yet, these positive manifestations coexist with widespread civic disengagement. Voter turnout remains low in many constituencies, tax compliance is poor, and public property is often vandalized. This paradox suggests that while Islamic values are widely affirmed in principle, their internalization as binding civic norms is incomplete. Social trust, collective efficacy, and institutional legitimacy—all crucial for civic culture—are often eroded by experiences of state failure and elite capture. As Iqbal Ahmed notes, the disconnect between ethical ideals and social practice stems from a lack of institutional reinforcement and civic pedagogy.¹⁸

Challenges and Recommendations

Several structural and cultural challenges impede the full realization of Islamic civic values in Pakistan. First, there is a persistent gap between religious rhetoric and institutional practice. Political leaders often invoke Islamic slogans without

enacting policies that reflect justice, transparency, or public welfare. This instrumentalization of religion breeds cynicism and disengagement among citizens. Second, civic education remains underdeveloped. While Islamic studies are compulsory, they rarely engage with the socio-political dimensions of faith. Students learn about prayer and fasting but seldom about Islamic theories of governance, economic justice, or environmental ethics. Integrating *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* into social studies curricula could foster a more holistic understanding of civic duty.

Third, socio-economic inequality undermines the universality of civic responsibility. When basic needs are unmet, ethical appeals to public service ring hollow. Poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to justice make it difficult for marginalized citizens to prioritize civic duties over survival. Islamic principles of *zakāt* (obligatory almsgiving) and *waqf* (endowment) offer mechanisms for redistribution, but their potential remains underutilized due to weak institutional frameworks. As S. Akbar Zaidi has demonstrated, elite capture of economic resources exacerbates this imbalance, weakening the social contract.¹⁹

Fourth, the legal system often fails to uphold the very values it professes. Delays in justice, police brutality, and elite impunity contradict the Qur'anic injunction to "stand out firmly for justice." Restoring public trust requires judicial reforms, police accountability, and anti-corruption measures that align with Islamic standards of integrity.

Fifth, gender disparities persist in civic participation, despite Islamic teachings that affirm the moral and civic agency of women. As Asma Barlas argues, patriarchal interpretations have often obscured the Qur'an's egalitarian ethos, limiting women's roles in public life.²⁰

Reclaiming inclusive readings of Islamic texts can empower women as full civic actors.

To address these challenges, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Curriculum Reform:** Revise national curricula to emphasize the civic dimensions of Islam, including *shūrā*, *‘adl*, and *maṣlaḥah*. Teacher training programs should equip educators to facilitate critical discussions on ethics and citizenship.
2. **Strengthen Local Governance:** Empower local governments with adequate resources and autonomy to function as genuine spaces of *shūrā*. Civic education campaigns should encourage community participation in local decision-making.
3. **Leverage Religious Platforms:** Partner with mosques and religious scholars to promote civic messages. Sermons, religious festivals, and media programs can be used to frame tax compliance, environmental care, and voting as Islamic duties.
4. **Institutionalize Zakāt and Waqf:** Modernize the administration of *zakāt* and *waqf* to support social welfare, education, and disaster response. Transparent and efficient systems can enhance public trust and resource mobilization.
5. **Judicial and Administrative Reforms:** Align public administration with Islamic ethics of accountability and service. Performance evaluations for civil servants could include criteria based on integrity, responsiveness, and public welfare.
6. **Promote Gender-Inclusive Civic Engagement:** Encourage women’s participation in local councils, civil society, and electoral processes through targeted outreach and religiously grounded advocacy.
7. **Promote Research and Dialogue:** Support academic research on Islamic civic ethics and facilitate inter-institutional dialogues on citizenship. Universities and think tanks can play a key role in developing contextually relevant models of civic engagement.

These measures require political will, cross-sectoral collaboration, and sustained public investment. However, given Pakistan's deep-rooted Islamic ethical tradition, they offer a culturally resonant pathway toward a more responsible and participatory citizenry.

Conclusion

Islamic values provide a profound and enduring foundation for civic responsibility in Pakistan. Principles such as justice, consultation, public welfare, and accountability are not only religious imperatives but also essential components of a functional democracy. The constitutional framework of Pakistan explicitly recognizes this synergy, and numerous social practices reflect its lived reality. Yet, the translation of these values into consistent civic behavior remains incomplete due to institutional weaknesses, educational gaps, socio-economic constraints, and gendered exclusions.

The path forward lies not in rejecting modern civic concepts but in enriching them through an authentically Islamic ethical lens. By reimagining citizenship as a sacred trust (*amānah*), participation as a form of worship (*‘ibādah*), and public service as a collective duty (*farḍ kifāyah*), Pakistan can cultivate a civic culture that is both morally grounded and democratically robust. Such a culture would honor the nation's Islamic identity while fulfilling its constitutional promise of justice, liberty, and fraternity for all citizens.

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