



The Medina Charter: Values and Principles Underpinning the Concept of Civil Society

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Abstract

Civil society is a significant concept for fostering a social order grounded in justice, civility, and participation. From an Islamic perspective, however, civil society extends beyond notions of social freedom and autonomy to encompass moral responsibility, social justice, the rule of law, and respect for diversity. This article aims to examine the concept of civil society from an Islamic perspective by analyzing its normative foundations and the social values embedded within it. The study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review and descriptive analysis. The findings indicate that the Islamic conception of civil society is grounded in the integration of freedom, morality, justice, social responsibility, and inclusive communal life. The concept of *ummah* and the social practices of the Medinan community, particularly as articulated in the Medina Charter, demonstrate how these values were institutionalized within a religiously and socially diverse society. Accordingly, the Islamic conception of civil society remains relevant as a normative foundation for fostering a harmonious, just, inclusive, and civilized social order.

Keywords: *Medina Charter; Values; Principles; Civil Society*

Abstrak: Masyarakat madani (*civil society*) merupakan gagasan penting dalam membangun kehidupan sosial yang adil, beradab, dan partisipatif. Dalam perspektif Islam, konsep tersebut tidak hanya berkaitan dengan kebebasan dan kemandirian masyarakat, tetapi juga dengan tanggung jawab moral, keadilan sosial, supremasi hukum, dan penghormatan terhadap keberagaman. Artikel ini bertujuan menganalisis konsep masyarakat madani dalam perspektif Islam melalui kajian terhadap landasan normatif dan nilai-nilai sosial yang terkandung di dalamnya. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kepustakaan dan analisis deskriptif. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa konsep masyarakat madani dalam Islam berlandaskan keterpaduan antara kebebasan, moralitas, keadilan, tanggung jawab sosial, dan kehidupan masyarakat yang inklusif. Konsep *ummah* serta praktik kehidupan masyarakat Madinah melalui Piagam Madinah menunjukkan penerapan nilai tersebut dalam kehidupan masyarakat yang beragam. Dengan demikian, masyarakat madani perspektif Islam tetap relevan sebagai landasan membangun kehidupan sosial yang harmonis, adil, inklusif, dan berkeadaban.

Kata Kunci: *Piagam Madinah; Nilai; Prinsip; Masyarakat Madani*

INTRODUCTION

The development of the idea of civil society demonstrates that an ideal society is shaped not only by political and legal structures but also by the values and norms that regulate communal life (Asrida et al., 2021). In modern political thought, civil society is generally understood as a social sphere in which individuals and groups can exercise autonomy, develop an awareness of their rights and obligations, and participate in public affairs while exercising oversight over political power. This development suggests that the quality of a society is determined not solely by the existence of formal institutions but also by citizens' capacity to establish responsible social relations. At this juncture, the concept of civil society enters into dialogue with Islamic thought, which likewise emphasizes the formation of a social order characterized by social regulation, responsibility, justice, and a commitment to the common good (Astuti, 2018).

The conceptualization of civil society, however, cannot be adequately confined to the notions of freedom, autonomy, and social participation that have developed within modern discourse (Barton et al., 2021). The Islamic perspective introduces a broader dimension by connecting social life with moral and spiritual values. The Qur'an provides normative foundations for social life through principles of justice, equality, consultation, respect for human dignity, and social responsibility (Jaiyeoba et al., 2024). Accordingly, civil society from an Islamic perspective is not merely understood as a legally regulated social order but also as a form of communal life shaped by the moral qualities of those who constitute and sustain it.

This dimension becomes more apparent when the Islamic conception of society is examined through the concept of *ummah* (Faqih, 2021). The term *ummah* does not simply denote a collection of individuals inhabiting the same social space; rather, it refers to a community bound by shared values, purposes, beliefs, and responsibilities. Within this framework, communal life is constructed through an awareness that human relationships cannot be separated from moral values and social responsibility. The principles of justice (*al-'adl*), equality, consultation, and respect for diversity therefore constitute essential elements in organizing communal life. The concept of *ummah* consequently provides a conceptual foundation for understanding civil society as a community that integrates social, moral, and spiritual dimensions (Ul Islam, 2026).

Existing discussions of civil society from an Islamic perspective have tended to focus on the relationship between Islamic teachings and the principles of civil society (Kazhimi et al., 2024; Ria et al., 2025). Such an approach is important for demonstrating the compatibility of values such as justice, participation, social responsibility, and respect for diversity with principles developed within civil society discourse (Tobroni, 2020; Wang, 2024). Nevertheless, this discussion requires further development so that the Islamic conception of civil society does not remain limited to identifying

similarities between Islamic thought and modern conceptions of civil society. The more fundamental question concerns how these values constitute a framework of communal life that reconciles freedom with responsibility, individual rights with the common interest, and social order with moral cultivation. This constitutes the central analytical space addressed in the present article.

On this basis, this article approaches civil society from an Islamic perspective as a concept concerned not only with social structures but also with the moral quality of human beings as agents of communal life. Such a perspective shifts the discussion of civil society beyond institutional arrangements toward the values that sustain social relations. Justice is understood not merely as a legal principle, freedom not merely as an individual right, and participation not merely as involvement in the public sphere; rather, these dimensions are situated within a broader framework of moral responsibility and the common good.

Accordingly, this article aims to analyze the concept of civil society from an Islamic perspective by examining its normative foundations, the concept of *ummah*, its underlying social values, and the social practices of the Medinan community as one of its historical manifestations. The discussion focuses on how Islam integrates freedom, justice, moral responsibility, the rule of law, and respect for diversity within communal life. In doing so, the study seeks to demonstrate that the Islamic conception of civil society is not merely a concept that shares similarities with modern notions of civil society but constitutes a framework of social life that simultaneously connects social and spiritual dimensions. The relevance of this framework becomes increasingly significant amid contemporary social transformations and the growing challenges to solidarity, justice, and the values that sustain communal life.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on understanding and interpreting the concept of civil society from an Islamic perspective, particularly its normative foundations, social values, and relationship to modern conceptions of civil society. Rather than collecting empirical data through field observation, the study draws on library research to examine and interpret relevant written sources in relation to the research problem. This approach enables the concept of civil society to be examined conceptually and in depth through a systematic engagement with available scholarly sources.

The data sources consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources comprise the Qur'an and Hadith, which are examined to identify normative foundations for a social order characterized by justice,

morality, responsibility, and respect for diversity. Secondary sources include scholarly books, journal articles, and works by Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers addressing civil society, the Islamic conception of society, the concept of *ummah*, social life in Islam, and the Medinan community. Sources were selected purposively based on their credibility, relevance to the research focus, and contribution to explaining the relationship between the concept of civil society and Islamic values.

Data were collected through documentation by systematically locating, identifying, reading, and recording information from relevant literature. The collected material focused on several key dimensions: the concept of civil society in modern social thought; the Islamic conception of society and *ummah*; justice and equality; freedom accompanied by responsibility; the rule of law; consultation (*shura*); and respect for diversity. Materials concerning the social life of the Medinan community and the Medina Charter were also examined to determine how these principles were articulated and embodied in social practice during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad.

The data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical approach. The collected material was first organized thematically according to the central concerns of the study and then described to establish an analytical understanding of civil society from an Islamic perspective. The subsequent analysis compared and connected modern conceptions of civil society with values articulated in Islamic teachings. Rather than focusing exclusively on conceptual similarities, the analysis also examined the distinctive characteristics of civil society in Islam, particularly its integration of moral and spiritual dimensions into social life. This analytical process was used to illuminate the relationships between freedom and responsibility, individual rights and the common good, and social order and moral cultivation.

The findings were subsequently interpreted to develop a more comprehensive understanding of civil society from an Islamic perspective. The interpretation examined the relationship among Islamic normative foundations, the concept of *ummah*, social values, and the historical experience of the Medinan community. Through these analytical stages, the study seeks to demonstrate that civil society from an Islamic perspective involves not only social autonomy and participation but also justice, moral responsibility, the rule of law, and respect for diversity. The analysis therefore moves beyond a descriptive presentation of the concept to consider its relevance to the formation of a harmonious, inclusive, and civilized social order.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Civil Society in the Development of the Concept of Civil Society

The concept of civil society did not emerge as a fully formed idea but

developed alongside changing understandings of the relationship among individuals, society, and the state. In modern discourse, civil society is generally understood as a sphere of social life that retains a degree of autonomy from state domination, in which citizens possess legal awareness, establish social organizations, and participate actively in public life (Jufri, 2020). This understanding indicates that civil society refers not merely to the existence of groups of individuals but also to the formation of social networks sustained by shared values, norms, and mechanisms of participation that enable communal life to function in an orderly and civilized manner (Putri & Dahliana, 2023). Thus, an autonomous and actively engaged citizenry constitutes a fundamental element in developing a social order that does not depend entirely on state power.

Historically, the development of the concept of civil society can be traced to classical thought, which regarded society as an essential component of political life and the pursuit of the common good. In Aristotle's political thought, for example, society was conceptualized through the *polis*, a political community that served not merely as a setting for collective existence but as an arrangement oriented toward the attainment of the good life. This conception subsequently evolved as modern thinkers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau placed greater emphasis on the relationship among individuals, society, and political authority. The idea of the social contract became an important foundation for explaining how an orderly social life could be established through collective agreement (Tumin & Che Soh, 2020). This development gradually positioned society as a sphere possessing interests and rights of its own, while also functioning as a potential constraint on state power.

With the emergence of contemporary social and political thought, the meaning of civil society expanded beyond the political relationship between society and the state. Civil society came to be understood as a social force capable of scrutinizing political power, articulating public interests, strengthening democratic governance, and fostering citizen participation across different spheres of social life. Within this framework, citizens are not regarded merely as recipients of state policies but as active agents capable of expressing aspirations, holding power accountable, and assuming social responsibilities. Civil society therefore requires a balance between rights and obligations, freedom and responsibility, and individual interests and the common good (Nugmanovna, 2022). This balance is particularly important because freedom without responsibility can generate competing interests, social conflict, and the erosion of social order.

From an Islamic perspective, this development intersects with the idea of civil society but does not remain confined to its social and political dimensions. The term civil society in Islamic discourse is frequently associated with *Madinah*, a term connected to the notions of city, social order,

and civilization. Accordingly, civil society is understood not only as a community characterized by freedom and public participation (Hegre et al., 2020) but also as a social order grounded in moral and spiritual values. The Qur'an provides normative foundations for a form of communal life oriented toward the common good, social responsibility, and concern for collective well-being. This perspective suggests that the quality of a society is determined not solely by the presence of social institutions or an orderly political system but also by the moral quality of the individuals and groups who constitute and sustain social life.

This difference in emphasis suggests that civil society from an Islamic perspective can be understood as an extension and reinterpretation of the broader civil society tradition. Whereas modern conceptions of civil society place strong emphasis on social autonomy, freedom, participation, and oversight of political power, the Islamic perspective introduces morality as a normative dimension that guides social activity. Freedom is not treated as an autonomous right detached from social obligations but as a capacity accompanied by responsibility toward others. Likewise, civic participation is not directed solely toward advancing group interests but is expected to serve justice, public welfare, and the common good. In this sense, the Islamic conception of civil society brings together the structural dimension of social organization and the ethical dimension that shapes the conduct of its members (Carmona, 2022).

On this basis, civil society should not be understood merely as a concept adopted from Western intellectual traditions. The Islamic discourse on civil society instead reveals a space of intellectual dialogue between the modern idea of civil society and values embedded in Islamic teachings. Muslim intellectuals have consequently developed the view that an ideal society is not simply one characterized by freedom and participation but also by civility, justice, and an orientation toward divinely grounded values. The success of civil society, therefore, cannot be assessed solely in terms of the extent of freedom and participation available to citizens; it must also be evaluated according to the degree to which such freedoms produce a social order that is just, moral, responsible, and respectful of human dignity.

Thus, the development of the concept of civil society provides an important framework for understanding society as an autonomous and participatory social force, while the Islamic perspective broadens this framework by incorporating moral, spiritual, and social-responsibility dimensions. The integration of these dimensions constitutes a defining feature of civil society in Islam. An ideal society is not merely one capable of governing itself and participating in the public sphere but one that makes justice, goodness, responsibility, and respect for others foundational principles of communal life. This conceptual framework provides a basis for examining the concept of *ummah* as one of the principal foundations for

understanding the construction of civil society in Islam

The Concept of *Ummah* as a Foundation of Civil Society in Islam

The Islamic conception of society rests on foundations that differ from approaches based solely on social relations, shared interests, or civic bonds. One of the principal concepts employed in the Qur'an to describe communal life is *ummah*. The term does not merely refer to a group of people inhabiting a particular social environment; rather, it denotes a community united by shared values, purposes, beliefs, and responsibilities. *Ummah* can therefore be regarded as a conceptual foundation for understanding civil society from an Islamic perspective, since the quality of a society is assessed not only by the orderliness of its social relations but also by the moral orientation underlying its communal life (Mustaniruddin et al., 2021).

This understanding indicates that *ummah* possesses both social and normative dimensions. The bonds constituting an *ummah* are not confined to material interests or interpersonal relations but are directed toward the realization of a good life grounded in shared values. Within this framework, each member of society is understood as part of a social whole and bears responsibility for sustaining communal life. Individual interests are therefore not positioned in opposition to collective interests but are situated within a mutually complementary relationship. Individual freedom remains protected, but its exercise must take into account the rights of others and the common good. This perspective distinguishes the Islamic conception of civil society from approaches to social life that place primary emphasis on individual freedom.

The Qur'an further characterizes the *ummah* through the concept of *wasath*, as stated in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 143. The concept describes Muslims as an *ummatan wasathan*, a community characterized by moderation, balance, and the avoidance of excess in responding to the various conditions of life (Islam, 2026). This principle of balance carries important social implications. A society grounded in *wasathiyah* is expected to maintain equilibrium between individual and collective interests, rights and obligations, and freedom and responsibility. *Wasathiyah*, therefore, concerns not only religious orientation but also functions as an ethical principle for cultivating a just and harmonious social order.

Within the context of civil society, the concept of *ummah* also embodies the principle of social responsibility. Communal life cannot be sustained when individuals are oriented exclusively toward their own interests. Islamic society is consequently encouraged to cultivate concern for surrounding social conditions, preserve interpersonal relationships, and promote the common good. Such responsibility transforms social relations from passive coexistence into active engagement, requiring members of society to participate in addressing problems arising within their

communities. At this point, *ummah* shares an important affinity with the characteristics of civil society, which positions citizens as active agents in public life. The Islamic perspective, however, provides a moral orientation intended to ensure that such engagement remains directed toward goodness and collective welfare.

Furthermore, the concept of *ummah* encompasses the principles of equality and respect for diversity. Social unity need not be achieved by eliminating differences but through the capacity to manage diversity within a just social order. This principle is particularly significant because social life invariably involves differences in background, interests, culture, and religious belief. From the perspective of Islamic civil society, such diversity should not constitute grounds for discrimination or conflict; rather, it should provide a basis for cultivating social relations grounded in respect, responsibility, and justice. These principles found a historical expression in the life of the Medinan community, which accommodated groups with diverse social, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

The concept of *ummah* thus demonstrates that civil society in Islam rests on a deeper foundation than the mere existence of social organizations or a public sphere free from state domination. Its foundation lies in the formation of a community characterized by an awareness of shared values, collective purposes, and moral responsibility. Such a society requires not only rules to regulate the conduct of its members but also an internal moral consciousness through which those rules are upheld on the basis of justice and concern for others. In this sense, *ummah* provides an ethical dimension to the concept of civil society by connecting social life with the cultivation of responsible human beings.

From this perspective, *ummah* can be understood as the social foundation through which the values of Islamic civil society can be realized in practice. The concept brings together communal identity and social responsibility, freedom and obligation, and individual interests and the common good. Islamic civil society, therefore, cannot be constructed solely through robust social structures and institutions; it also requires members who possess the moral awareness necessary to exercise their rights and fulfill their obligations. This framework demonstrates that justice, freedom, and moral responsibility are not discrete elements but interconnected dimensions of a unified value system that constitutes the character of civil society from an Islamic perspective

Principles Underlying the Formation of Islamic Civil Society

Civil society from an Islamic perspective is founded on the integration of justice, freedom, and moral responsibility as mutually interdependent principles. A civilized social order cannot be defined merely by the existence of individual freedom or civic participation in the public sphere; it also

requires a moral orientation that guides the exercise of freedom so that it does not result in actions detrimental to the interests of others. Freedom in Islamic civil society is therefore situated within a framework of responsibility, while justice serves as the principle that maintains a balance between individual rights and the common good. This perspective demonstrates that civil society concerns not only the forms of social relations but also the moral qualities that sustain those relations.

Justice (*al-'adl*) occupies a central position because it provides the foundation for establishing social relations based on equality and human dignity. The Qur'an places strong emphasis on the obligation to uphold justice, including when individuals encounter others whose interests, backgrounds, or social affiliations differ from their own. Justice, therefore, cannot be reduced to the formal distribution of rights; it also entails treating each person fairly in accordance with their rights and obligations. This principle is particularly significant in diverse societies because, in the absence of justice, differences can develop into discrimination, domination, or intergroup conflict. Within Islamic civil society, justice thus functions as a normative foundation that allows freedom, participation, and diversity to flourish without compromising the rights of others.

Justice is closely intertwined with human freedom. Islam recognizes human beings as agents endowed with volition, the capacity to choose, and the space to conduct their lives autonomously; however, such freedom is not construed as an absolute and unrestricted right. Its exercise must take into account normative principles, the rights of others, and broader social interests. Freedom within Islamic civil society is therefore not oriented exclusively toward self-interest but is accompanied by an awareness of the social consequences of individual action. This framework transforms freedom into an instrument for cultivating a productive social order rather than a justification for disregarding social order, moral norms, or the interests of the wider community.

The relationship between freedom and moral responsibility becomes particularly significant when the public sphere is open to broad participation. Freedom of expression, the articulation of opinions, assembly, and civic engagement are integral to an active social order. Nevertheless, the exercise of these freedoms requires ethical consideration so that it does not lead to actions that degrade human dignity, promote hostility, or generate social harm. From an Islamic perspective, moral awareness arises from the understanding that human actions have not only social consequences but also implications for accountability before God. This awareness provides an internal form of self-restraint, whereby individuals act not merely in response to external rules or surveillance but out of a commitment to conduct themselves in ways that are morally sound and beneficial to communal life.

Moral responsibility also strengthens the relationship between individual rights and social obligations. Civil society requires individuals who are conscious of their rights while recognizing that communal life entails obligations toward others. Within this framework, individuals are not merely bearers of rights but also agents responsible for maintaining social order, justice, solidarity, and the common good. This principle corresponds with the concept of *ummah* discussed above, as society is constituted not merely through shared social space but also through an awareness of collective responsibility. The quality of civil society therefore depends substantially on individuals' capacity to reconcile personal interests with broader social welfare.

The integration of justice, freedom, and moral responsibility also provides a foundation for respecting diversity. A diverse society requires principles capable of managing differences without imposing uniformity. From an Islamic perspective, human differences constitute a social reality that must be approached through justice, respect, and responsibility. Freedom provides individuals and groups with space to participate in social life according to their respective identities and interests, while justice ensures that the exercise of such freedom does not produce unequal treatment. At the same time, moral responsibility encourages all parties to exercise freedom prudently and preserve harmonious social relations. Through this value framework, diversity is not regarded merely as a potential source of conflict but also as an inherent dimension of social life that can be managed through justice and respect for human dignity.

Thus, civil society from an Islamic perspective encompasses a broader framework than a society characterized solely by autonomy from the state, individual freedom, or participation in the public sphere. These three elements acquire normative direction through the principles of justice and moral responsibility derived from Islamic teachings. Justice provides the basis for equality and the protection of rights; freedom creates space for participation and human self-realization; and moral responsibility ensures that freedom is exercised in ways consistent with human dignity and the common good. Their integration demonstrates that Islamic civil society constitutes a social formation with inseparable ethical and moral dimensions. These principles can be observed in the historical experience of the Medinan community, particularly through the Medina Charter, which illustrates how justice, freedom, responsibility, and respect for diversity were articulated within a pluralistic social order.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that civil society from an Islamic perspective constitutes a framework of social order that integrates individual freedom, social justice (*al-'adl*), the rule of law, and respect for diversity, grounded in

moral values and spiritual consciousness. Unlike modern conceptions of civil society, which tend to emphasize the structural and political autonomy of society from the state, the Islamic perspective is rooted in the principles of *ummah* and *wasathiyah* (balance), whereby civil liberties and legal justice are situated within a broader framework of social responsibility. The historical experience embodied in the Medina Charter demonstrates that principles of inclusion, equal rights, and consultation can provide a foundation for a harmonious, orderly, and civilized pluralistic society.

The implications of this study underscore the need to move the discourse on civil society beyond the formalism of legal and political institutions toward the cultivation of the ethical capacities of social actors. Theoretically, the findings contribute to Islamic intellectual discourse by demonstrating the continued relevance of normative values in addressing contemporary challenges, including moral crisis, inequality, and social fragmentation. Practically, this framework offers a strategic reference for policymakers, religious institutions, and civil society organizations to channel public participation in ways that move beyond claims to freedom and rights toward the strengthening of solidarity, social responsibility, and sustainable national cohesion.

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