

How Islamic Values and Political Trust Shape Perceptions of Social Development: Evidence from Urban Zanzibar

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Abstrak

Studi mengenai tata kelola Islami secara ekstensif telah menyoroti integrasi nilai keagamaan ke dalam administrasi kontemporer. Namun, eksplanasi teoretis mengenai bagaimana nilai-nilai tersebut berinteraksi dengan kepercayaan politik dalam mengonstruksi persepsi pembangunan sosial di tingkat lokal masih mengalami kelangkaan literatur. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana nilai Islam, kepercayaan politik, dan kualitas tata kelola membentuk persepsi pembangunan sosial di kalangan aktor politik perkotaan di Zanzibar. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-eksploratif, data dihimpun melalui wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur terhadap 22 aktor politik dari faksi CCM, ACT-Wazalendo, dan CHADEMA, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik reflektif yang menghasilkan tiga tema. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa persepsi pembangunan sosial tidak bersifat tunggal, melainkan multidimensional dan dibentuk oleh kualitas tata kelola, kepercayaan politik, dan internalisasi nilai-nilai aksiologis Islam—mencakup *amanah*, *adl*, *shura*, dan *maslahah*. Secara analitis, studi ini berkontribusi dengan merekonseptualisasi fungsi nilai-nilai keagamaan tersebut: alih-alih beroperasi semata sebagai doktrin normatif yang statis, partisipan tampak memperlakukannya sebagai instrumen evaluatif aktif dan basis legitimasi dalam menilai kinerja birokrasi pada masyarakat Muslim urban kontemporer. Sebagai studi eksploratif pada satu lokasi, penelitian ini memetakan bagaimana penilaian tersebut dikonstruksi, bukan menetapkan bobot relatifnya.

Kata Kunci: *Tata Kelola Islami, Kepercayaan Politik, Pembangunan Sosial, Urban Zanzibar, Aktor Politik.*

Abstract

Studies on Islamic governance extensively highlight the integration of religious values into contemporary administrations. However, theoretical explanations regarding how these values interact with political trust in constructing social development perceptions at the local level remain limited. This study examines how Islamic values, political trust, and governance quality shape social development perceptions among urban political actors in Zanzibar. Employing an exploratory qualitative design, data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 22 political actors from CCM, ACT-Wazalendo, and CHADEMA, and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, from which three themes were developed. The findings indicate that social development perceptions are not monolithic but multi-dimensional, shaped by governance quality, political trust, and the internalization of axiological Islamic

values—specifically *amanah* (trustworthiness), *‘adl* (justice), *shura* (consultation), and *maslahah* (public interest). Analytically, this study contributes by reconceptualising the function of these religious values; rather than operating merely as static normative doctrines, participants appeared to treat them as active evaluative instruments and grounds of legitimacy used to assess bureaucratic performance within a contemporary urban Muslim society. As an exploratory single-site study, it maps how these evaluations are constructed rather than establishing their relative weight.

Keywords: Islamic Governance, Political Trust, Social Development, Urban Zanzibar, Political Actors.

Introduction

The idea of social development, although commonly used as a key approach for enhancing well-being, is frequently debated and naturally ambiguous. Its complexity stems from the fact that its meaning in academic literature differs from its practical use in spatial and social settings. For scholars, social development has been linked to the strengthening of human abilities, enabling individuals to make choices, express their emotions, and live the lives they desire (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011; see also Singh & Agarwal, 2024). It is also viewed as social change aimed at improving welfare and supporting societies in adapting to its effects. Social change has been described in terms of James Midgley’s concept, rooted in economic development and the enhancement of living standards (Midgley, 2024).

Some scholars, such as Amartya Sen and Walter Rodney, emphasise economic growth, freedom, human welfare, and participation as key determinants of perceptions of social development (Rodney, 1972; Sen, 1999; Chasela, 2023; Lanoszka, 2025). In contrast, scholars from developing countries tend to emphasise poverty reduction, employment, access to basic needs, and food security, while those from developed countries emphasise social protection, quality of life, and innovation (Rustamova et al., 2025). Policymakers also associate social development with improvements in living standards, including health, education, housing, employment opportunities, and water supply (Lakioti et al., 2025). Despite these differences, both scholars and policymakers aim at improving social well-being and quality of life.

Theoretical frameworks such as modernisation theory explain social development as a linear process driven by education, urbanisation, and technological progress. However, this view has been criticised for its limited explanatory power and neglect of social justice dimensions (Lister et al., 2024). Political leaders often adopt modernisation-oriented approaches by equating development with economic transformation, infrastructure expansion, and foreign investment (Mumun & Abdulyakeen, 2025). In contrast, Amartya Sen’s capability approach emphasises freedom, participation, and human capabilities as central to development (Kjosavik, 2021). This

suggests that perceptions of social development are shaped not only by economic indicators but also by social and political freedoms.

Comparative studies demonstrate that perceptions of social development vary between developed and developing countries. In developed nations, perceptions are shaped by institutional accountability, innovation, and efficiency (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008), while quality of life remains a key indicator of development (Lakomý & Alvarez-Galvez, 2022). European survey evidence indicates that citizens in EU countries associate social development with life satisfaction, social protection, and institutional quality (Shiroka-Pula et al., 2023). In developing nations, political leaders prioritise basic services such as education, healthcare, and transport, whereas citizens often navigate broader structural constraints in everyday life, as ethnographic work in urban Egypt illustrates (Hoodfar, 1997). Previous research also points to social distance between political elites and the urban residents they represent, including in where they live (Folke et al., 2024), which may condition how each group interprets development.

In Muslim-majority contexts, however, social development possesses a distinct conceptual framework that is neither reducible to the service-delivery focus of developing-country discourse nor to the life-satisfaction metrics dominant in Western paradigms. Drawing on the aims of Islamic jurisprudence (maqasid al-shariah), which focus on the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth, classical Islamic scholars conceived of development as the organised realisation of collective welfare (maslahah) and comprehensive human flourishing (falah), understood as encompassing both material sufficiency and moral integrity. Al-Ghazali (ca. 1109/2015) systematised maslahah within legal theory, Al-Mawardi (1058/1996) grounded political office in the duty to secure it, and Ibn Khaldun (1377/2005) linked justice to the durability of social order. This tradition considers social solidarity (takaful) and distributive justice ('adl) not as supplementary concerns but as fundamental components of genuine development. This means that a state may provide infrastructure but still be judged as underdeveloped in Islamic terms if it fails to sustain ethical governance and communal cohesion (Ullah et al., 2025).

Contemporary scholarship reinforces this perspective, suggesting that in societies where Islamic values are institutionally embedded, citizens assess governance outcomes through a moral-evaluative lens that secular performance metrics tend to overlook (Drechsler et al., 2024). Therefore, social development in the Islamic context is not merely a specific output of the state but an ongoing relational condition of the continuous alignment between governance practices,

ethical obligations, and community trust. Zanzibar offers a unique multicultural context shaped by African, Arab, Indian, and Persian influences. This diversity, combined with intermarriage and social integration, introduces complexity into the balancing of perceptions of social development among urban groups. The heterogeneity of needs makes it difficult for political actors to identify unified development priorities, often impacting policy formulation and implementation, a complexity also noted in sectoral studies of development in Zanzibar (Thomsen, 2022). Hence, understanding how urban political actors construct perceptions of social development within such a complex socio-cultural environment is essential.

Political leaders often adopt modernisation-oriented views of social development, emphasising centralised policy and economic transformation. They generally focus on economic growth, technological advancement, industrialisation, urbanisation, improved education and institutional reforms as key drivers of development. In this context, social development is viewed as occurring when societies experience improvements in living standards, employment opportunities, healthcare, and access to modern public services (Jackson, 2020). This approach creates a participation gap between governments and local communities, leading to mismatches between policy design and societal needs. Urban residents expect political leaders to respond to urgent social demands rather than rely solely on political manifestos (Nassor et al., 2026). However, political leaders often prioritise modernisation indicators such as infrastructure and economic growth, thereby neglecting social justice and inclusion.

Modernisation theory highlights the role of political elites in shaping development priorities and influencing public perceptions of social development (Thelma, 2024). In Europe, perceptions of social development are shaped by economic development and political ideologies, including Europeanization (Anderson & Anderson, 2023; Schindler, 2024; Jano, 2024). In developing countries, governments often adopt imported development models but face challenges in institutional capacity and governance effectiveness (Lavers & Hickey, 2021). Many governments fail to fully meet social and economic needs, leading to alternative social responses within society (Klitgaard, 2023; Post & Rosenblum, 2021).

Recent studies reveal that political trust, governance quality, and ethical values are crucial factors shaping citizens' perceptions of societal progress and development outcomes. Contemporary governance literature advises that organisational behaviour linked to effective accountability, transparency, inclusiveness, and responsiveness influences public confidence in governance and fosters perceptions of social development (OECD, 2024; World Bank, 1992). Likewise, political trust affects people's cooperation, enhancing institutional legitimacy and

development efforts. Simultaneously, ethical governance encourages responsible leadership and increases public trust in government institutions (Jonck, 2024; Faye & Nweke, 2024). In Muslim-majority societies, principles of Islamic governance, such as justice, accountability, trustworthiness, and consultation, are increasingly recognised as essential foundations for sustainable development and sound governance (Ahmed, 2025; Ruhullah & Ushama, 2024).

Despite these contributions, substantial gaps remain in the previous studies. Most existing literature examines political trust, governance quality, and ethical values as distinct constructs, thereby limiting understanding of how these factors interact to shape perceptions of social development. In addition, much empirical evidence originates from secular and Western contexts, and although a body of work on religiously informed governance is emerging, its consequences for trust and perceptions of development remain unevenly theorised (Marshall, 2021). Studies focusing specifically on urban political actors, such as civil servants, policymakers, political leaders, and community representatives, are also limited, despite their key roles in demonstrating development outcomes and governance processes. Consequently, the combined influence of political trust, governance quality, and Islamic ethical values remains underexplored, especially in multicultural urban settings.

The gap is actually evident in Zanzibar, a predominantly multicultural and Muslim society formed by ongoing governance reforms and rapid urbanisation. Recent studies, such as Nassor et al. (2026) and Ahmed (2025), have focused on decentralisation, political participation, and socio-economic development, while overlooking the organised roles of Islamic ethical values, governance quality and political trust in shaping perceptions of social development. To address this gap, this study proposes the Governance-Trust-Ethics Framework, which comprises these dimensions into a single explanatory model. By exploring the relationship among urban political actors in Zanzibar, the study contributes a novel theoretical perspective to empirical evidence from an underrepresented context and governance scholarship, thereby advancing understanding of social development and ethical governance in Muslim-majority societies.

Based on the identified research gap, this study examines how political trust influences perceptions of social development among urban political actors in Zanzibar, how governance quality shapes these perceptions, and how Islamic ethical values, such as amanah and justice, contribute to their construction. These questions aim to capture the interactions among institutional trust, governance performance, and ethical values in shaping perceptions of development in a multicultural urban political context.

In line with these questions, the study aims to analyse the influence of political trust on perceptions of social development among urban political actors in Zanzibar, to examine the role of governance quality in shaping such perceptions, and to explore the contribution of Islamic ethical values, particularly amanah and justice, in the formation of social development perceptions. Overall, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how political trust, governance quality, and ethical governance values interact in constructing perceptions of social development.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework: The Governance–Trust–Ethics (GTE) Model

This study develops the Governance–Trust–Ethics (GTE) Model by integrating modernisation theory, the capability approach, and Islamic governance ethics to explain why political actors in Zanzibar interpret the social development perception differently. Modernisation theory (Lipset, 1959) proposes that socioeconomic advancement strengthens the legitimacy of, and popular support for, political institutions. Building on this foundation, Inglehart and Welzel (2005) argue that socioeconomic development is accompanied by cultural shifts toward self-expression and participatory values, which in turn shape citizens' expectations of institutional responsiveness. However, neither perspective clarifies why trust might remain low despite observable social development successes.

The capability approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000, 2011) addresses this limitation by arguing that social development should be judged not only by economic outputs but also by whether people's substantive freedoms and opportunities have genuinely expanded. Nussbaum (2000, 2011) further specifies this claim by proposing a list of central human capabilities—including bodily health, access to basic services, and practical reason—that provide concrete benchmarks against which citizens implicitly evaluate governance performance. Development statistics, therefore, gain legitimacy only when citizens perceive improvements in their real capabilities and well-being.

Islamic governance ethics adds a further evaluative dimension, particularly relevant in Zanzibar's predominantly Muslim context. Political actors assess governance through the principles of amanah (trusteeship and accountability), 'adl (justice and fairness), and maslahah (public welfare). Development outcomes are considered legitimate only when governance is perceived as ethical, just, and in the service of the common good.

The GTE model therefore proposes that governance conditions produce measurable development outcomes, but these outcomes generate political trust only after passing through two interconnected filters: (1) the capability filter, which asks whether substantive freedoms

have improved, and (2) the Islamic ethics filter, which asks whether governance has satisfied the principles of *amanah*, *'adl*, and *maslahah*. The model proposes that where either filter is judged to have failed, identical development achievements may be read as illegitimate or untrustworthy. Consequently, the perception gap among political actors in Zanzibar is fundamentally a legitimacy gap, shaped by differing judgments about capabilities, ethics, and trust rather than by disagreement over the facts of development themselves

The Governance–Trust–Ethics (GTE) Model

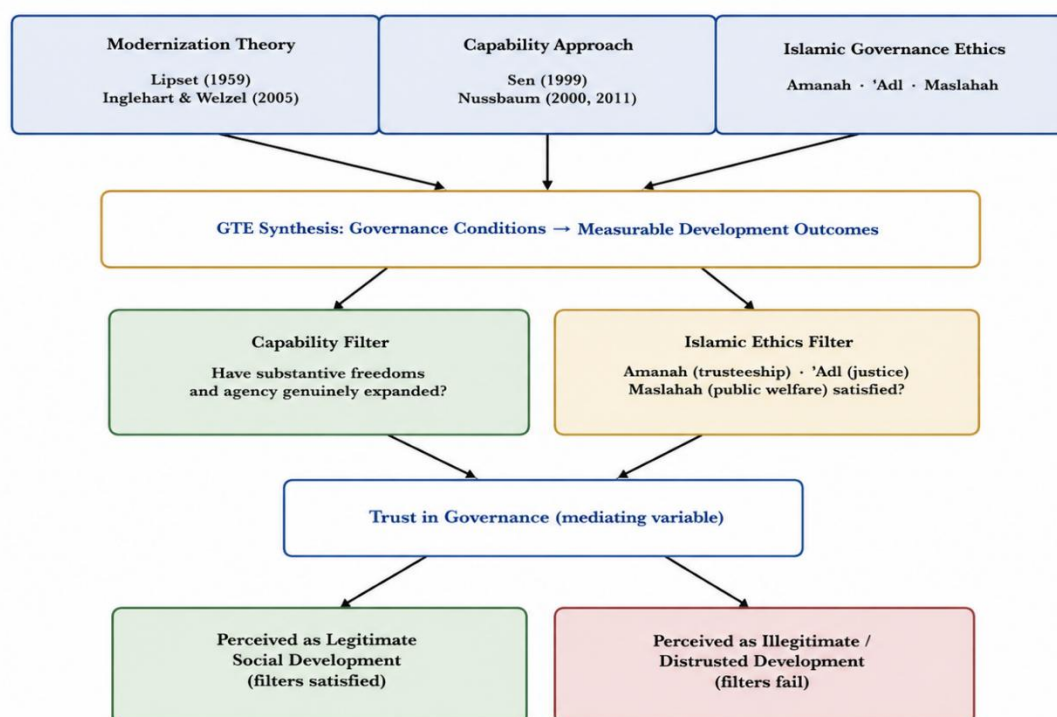


Figure 1. The Governance–Trust–Ethics (GTE) Model: modernisation theory, the capability approach, and Islamic governance ethics as joint inputs to political trust and perceived social development.

Research Method

1. Research Design

This study employed an exploratory qualitative research design to examine the factors shaping perceptions of social development among urban political actors in Zanzibar. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, subjective interpretations, and contextual understanding of social development within a dynamic socio-political environment. The study was conducted in

Zanzibar Municipality, where political actors actively engage in local governance and political decision-making.

2. Research Participants and Sampling

The research participants consisted of 22 local political party officials representing three major political parties in Zanzibar: Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), Alliance for Change and Transparency (ACT-Wazalendo), and Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA). Participants were selected using purposive sampling, followed by snowball sampling to identify additional informants with relevant political experience.

Selection criteria included (1) active involvement in local political activities, (2) representation of different political parties, (3) variation in political experience, and (4) gender representation. Sample size was guided by the principle of information power (Malterud et al., 2016): given the narrow aim, the specificity of the sample, and the theoretically informed interview guide, a comparatively small sample was judged adequate. Consistent with Braun and Clarke (2021), no claim of thematic saturation is made, since reflexive thematic analysis treats themes as analytic constructions rather than as a finite set to be exhausted; data collection ended when the research team judged that the material was sufficiently rich to address the research questions.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants. Gender and length of political experience were recorded to guide variation in sampling rather than to serve as analytic categories; the findings reported below are not disaggregated along these dimensions.

Political Parties	Number of Participants	Gender		Political Experience		
		Male	Female	Below 1-5 years	6-10 years	11 and above years
CCM	10	6	4	2	2	6
ACT-Wazalendo	8	5	3	4	1	3
CHADEMA	4	3	1	1		3
Total Participants	22	14	8	7	3	12

The recruitment process began through official contacts within political organizations and was subsequently expanded using participants' recommendations. All participants were approached individually, informed about the objectives of the study, and invited to participate voluntarily. Ethical principles were observed throughout the study by obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and allowing participants to withdraw from

the research at any stage without consequence. Given the small number of participants within each party (particularly CHADEMA, $n = 4$), illustrative quotations in the Findings are attributed generically (e.g., "one participant," "a CHADEMA leader") rather than to individual participant codes, in order to minimise the risk of participants being identifiable within Zanzibar's relatively small political community. In this study, the term urban political actors refers specifically to local political party officials in Zanzibar Municipality who were directly involved in local governance, political party activities, and policy implementation.

3. Research Procedure

The research was conducted through eight analytical stages.

Table 2. Research Procedure

No	Research Procedure	Description
1	Research Problem Identification	Identifying the research problem concerning factors influencing urban political actors' perceptions of social development in Zanzibar.
2	Literature Review	Reviewing literature on social development, political perception, governance, and qualitative political studies to establish the conceptual framework.
3	Participant Selection	Selecting participants through purposive and snowball sampling based on political affiliation, experience, and gender representation.
4	Data Collection	Conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with the selected participants.
5	Data Organization	Transcribing interviews, organizing transcripts, and preparing data for analysis.
6	Initial Coding	Identifying meaningful statements and assigning initial codes to relevant data segments.
7	Thematic Analysis	Grouping codes into categories and developing overarching themes explaining perceptions of social development.
8	Interpretation and Reporting	Interpreting the findings within the context of Zanzibar's socio-political environment and presenting the final analytical themes.

4. Data Collection

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview guide focused on participants' perceptions of social development, governance, political participation, economic conditions, and public service delivery. The present article reports the three themes that were most salient across the coded dataset; material falling outside these themes is not analysed here. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at locations agreed upon by the participants and were audio-recorded with their consent. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and organized systematically before analysis. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and participants' right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Reflexively, the researcher is a Zanzibar-based academic in public administration and a member of the same Muslim-majority community as the participants; this position eased access and interpretation of religious idiom, but it also carried a risk of treating Islamic ethical vocabulary as self-evident, which was addressed through repeated re-reading of transcripts against alternative, non-religious readings of the same accounts.

5. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase framework. The analytical process consisted of:

1. familiarizing with the interview transcripts through repeated reading;
2. generating initial codes from meaningful data segments;
3. searching for patterns among the codes to develop preliminary themes;
4. reviewing and refining themes based on consistency across the dataset;
5. defining and naming the final themes; and
6. producing the final analytical narrative illustrated by selected participant quotations.

Extracts presented in the findings were chosen for the clarity with which they articulate a pattern rather than for representativeness or frequency of occurrence, and the number of extracts reported for a theme should not be read as an indication of how widely that pattern recurred.

Microsoft Excel was used to organize interview transcripts, coding, and thematic categorization. The final themes represented the principal factors shaping urban political actors' perceptions of social development in Zanzibar. Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2021) approach to thematic analysis, descriptions of how widely a pattern recurred (e.g., "consistently," "frequently") reflect

qualitative judgments about the salience of a pattern across the coded dataset rather than quantified frequency counts.

Research Finding

Islamic Values and Governance Quality

The findings reveal that Islamic values functioned as a central evaluative framework through which urban political actors in Zanzibar assess governance quality and social development. Participants across parties referred to principles such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *'adl* (justice), *shura* (consultation), and *maslahah* (public welfare) as moral standards for evaluating leadership legitimacy, accountability, and public responsibility.

Participants assessed political leaders not only based on service delivery performance but also on ethical conduct and moral responsibility. In several cases, leaders were critically evaluated even when improvements in public services were acknowledged, indicating that administrative achievements alone were insufficient to establish perceptions of legitimate governance. One participant stated: "People cannot achieve genuine development with unethical leadership because honesty and justice are the basis of public trust."

These findings suggest that social development is perceived not merely through administrative effectiveness but also through adherence to Islamic ethical principles. Political actors therefore regarded governance as legitimate when public institutions operated fairly, transparently, and responsibly.

Governance Performance and Perceptions of Social Development

The findings show that perceptions of social development among urban political actors in Zanzibar were closely tied, in participants' accounts, to governance performance, particularly the provision of public utility services and employment opportunities. Participants perceived social development in practical terms, where access to essential services such as water, electricity, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities represented key indicators of government effectiveness. As one participant stated, "As a political leader, I frequently assess development in terms of the government's capacity to fulfil citizens' daily needs."

However, participants did not evaluate governance performance solely through administrative outcomes. Effective service delivery was closely connected to ethical leadership and moral responsibility, particularly the principles of justice (*'adl*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and public welfare (*maslahah*). Participants across political parties linked improved public services with government responsibility toward citizens. An ACT-Wazalendo participant

emphasized that quality public services demonstrate government responsibility to serve the people, while a CHADEMA leader highlighted the importance of diverse, reliable, and accessible services within transparent and accountable frameworks. Similarly, a CCM participant associated improvements in utility services with government efforts to enhance citizens' welfare and living standards.

These findings indicate that public service provision in Zanzibar is understood simultaneously as an administrative obligation and a moral commitment within an Islamic governance framework.

Political Trust and Manifesto Implementation

The findings further reveal that political trust was central to how participants framed perceptions of social development among urban political actors in Zanzibar. Participants indicated that the fulfilment of political commitments strengthens trust, while gaps between electoral promises and policy implementation weaken perceptions of government credibility and development progress. One participant stated, "Citizens trust the government when political leaders achieve their promises because manifesto implementation demonstrates sincerity and commitment in serving the public."

The findings suggest that political manifestos function not merely as electoral instruments but also as benchmarks through which political actors evaluate leadership responsibility and institutional credibility. Participants frequently assessed development outcomes by comparing political promises with actual policy implementation. Failure to translate commitments into tangible outcomes was perceived not only as a governance deficiency but also as a failure to uphold moral responsibility. One participant reported, "We lose citizen trust if we fail to fulfil our promises, voting trends go down each election."

Overall, participants associated political trust with both institutional performance and ethical evaluations of leadership, particularly the fulfilment of public commitments consistent with the principle of *amanah*.

Discussion

Having outlined the findings above, this section proceeds to interpret them: positioning each theme within existing governance, trust, and Islamic political theory; identifying plausible mechanisms that generate the observed patterns; and assessing where the Zanzibari evidence confirms, qualifies, or challenges the relevant literature. The discussion is organised around the three themes identified in the Findings, followed by an extended interpretive discussion of their

combined implications, a dedicated subsection on the study's theoretical contribution, and a final note on scope and limitations.

Islamic Values and Governance Quality

Islamic Values and Ethical Governance Quality

The role of Islam in forming governance quality constitutes a central moral framework through which political actors in Zanzibar assess social development and state legitimacy. Drechsler et al. (2024) argue that public administration has largely overlooked Islamic conceptions of public value as distinct evaluative systems. These findings highlight significant convergence between modern governance principles (such as accountability and transparency) and Islamic political thought. Classical scholars such as Al-Mawardi (1058/1996), Al-Farabi (ca. 950/1985), and Ibn Khaldun (1377/2005) see *shura*, justice, and public welfare as foundational principles of legitimate governance. An important implication of this finding is that political legitimacy is assessed through both institutional and moral criteria. While modern governance theories primarily focus on institutional effectiveness, Islamic governance adds an additional layer of moral accountability, making these principles substantive moral obligations that fundamentally shape perceptions of social development.

Governance Performance, Public Utilities, and Perceptions of Social Development

The observation that social development is mainly assessed through visible governance outcomes—such as access to water, electricity, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities—aligns with both the World Bank's (1992) governance framework and the UNDP's (2024) human development framework. However, from an Islamic governance perspective, public service provision represents not only administrative effectiveness but also the fulfilment of ethical responsibilities embedded within Islamic political thought, reflecting the principle of *maslahah* (public interest). Read through the capability filter of the GTE model, participants' emphasis on these utilities can also be interpreted as an implicit application of the capability approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000, 2011): rather than treating service statistics as ends in themselves, participants evaluated governance performance by whether such services genuinely expanded their substantive freedoms and opportunities.

Political Trust, Manifestos, and Promise Fulfilment This finding aligns with Easton's (1975) framework of political support and research on mandate representation (Stokes, 2001), which argues that democratic legitimacy diminishes when governments depart from the commitments on which they were elected. In Zanzibar, perceptions of urban

politicians' social development are heavily influenced by how effectively governments translate political promises (manifestos) into concrete policy outcomes. From an Islamic political perspective, this mechanism reflects the concept of *amanah* (trustworthiness and responsibility). The promise–performance gap thus acts as a vital mechanism through which governance performance, political trust, and ethical assessments interact. Trust is not simply a passive read-out of institutional performance but is actively constructed through the moral framing of promises as covenant-like obligations.

Governance Performance and Perceptions of Social Development

The observation that social development is mainly assessed through visible governance outcomes aligns with the World Bank's (1992) governance framework, which identifies public sector management, accountability, a legal framework for development, and information and transparency as key aspects of development-focused governance. It also supports Rothstein and Teorell's (2008) claim that governance performance is indicated by the state's ability to deliver public services impartially and effectively. This is consistent with survey evidence that perceptions of governance performance inform views of state legitimacy and social well-being (Cunningham et al., 2020). However, it is crucial to engage with these frameworks critically rather than merely descriptively. Both the World Bank's (1992) governance agenda and Rothstein and Teorell's (2008) impartiality thesis were primarily developed from the institutional experiences of secular Western welfare states, and neither was designed with religiously informed polities in mind.

Drechsler et al. (2024) explicitly critique this at the level of public administration theory, arguing that mainstream public administration and public value scholarship have largely overlooked Islamic notions of public value and administrative ethics, viewing them as peripheral rather than as fundamentally different bases for assessing state conduct. Their argument supports, at the disciplinary level, what the current data empirically suggest: the explanatory power of the World Bank and Rothstein-Teorell frameworks in Zanzibar is therefore only partial.

From an Islamic governance perspective, these findings reflect the principle of *maslahah* (public interest). Al-Ghazali (ca. 1109/2015) systematised *maslahah* as the protection of the essential ends of the law, and Al-Mawardi (1058/1996) correspondingly argues that political authority derives its legitimacy from the capacity to secure justice, welfare, and the public interest. Therefore, public service provision represents not only administrative effectiveness but also the fulfilment of ethical responsibilities embedded within Islamic political thought. Read

through the capability filter of the GTE model, participants' emphasis on access to water, electricity, healthcare, and education can also be interpreted as an implicit application of the capability approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000, 2011): rather than treating service statistics as ends in themselves, participants appeared to evaluate governance performance by whether such services genuinely expanded their substantive freedoms and opportunities, consistent with Nussbaum's (2000, 2011) emphasis on health, education, and practical reason as central human capabilities.

Political Trust and Manifesto Implementation

This finding aligns with Easton's (1975) framework of political support, which holds that specific support for political institutions is shaped by citizens' evaluations of governmental performance and responsiveness. Similarly, Mishler and Rose (2005) demonstrate that institutional performance is a major determinant of political trust. More recent evidence suggests that trust and perceptions of institutional effectiveness reinforce one another in a reciprocal relationship (Xiao et al., 2024). The finding that manifestos function as benchmarks of credibility is further consistent with research on the conditional effects of pledge fulfilment: Bytzek et al. (2024) show, using panel data, that broken election pledges damage citizens' trust in government considerably more than kept pledges increase it, an asymmetry that helps explain why participants in this study described unmet manifesto promises as so corrosive of trust even where improvements in public services were acknowledged.

From an Islamic political perspective, this mechanism reflects the concept of *amanah* (trustworthiness and responsibility). Al-Mawardi (1058/1996) regards leadership as a moral obligation to safeguard public welfare, while Ibn Khaldun (1377/2005) argues that failures in governance weaken social cohesion and undermine political legitimacy. Consequently, political trust reflects both institutional effectiveness and moral responsibility. Beyond restating the finding that trust tracks manifesto fulfilment, it is worth asking why this particular mechanism appears so salient in Zanzibar.

One plausible explanation is that electoral manifestos function locally as quasi-contractual public pledges rather than as routine campaign rhetoric: because the participants are party officials rather than ordinary citizens, they may stand closer to the making of such commitments than the electorate does, which could sharpen (rather than merely reflect) their evaluation of trust. This remains a proposition about mechanism; the present data establish that manifesto fulfilment mattered to participants, not why it mattered more to them than it would to

others. This reading is consistent with Mellon et al.'s (2023) finding that not all pledges carry equal weight in citizens' evaluations of governing parties: pledges that are more salient or central to a party's platform have disproportionately large effects on perceived credibility relative to peripheral commitments, which offers one possible account of why manifesto fulfilment functioned as a test of trustworthiness in participants' accounts, although the present data do not distinguish between individual pledges.

This reading both confirms and qualifies Easton's (1975) account of political support and Mishler and Rose's (2005) performance-based account: trust is not simply a passive read-out of institutional performance but is actively constructed through the moral framing of promises as covenant-like obligations, a dimension that purely performance-based models do not anticipate. An unexpected implication follows from this: because manifesto credibility is evaluated through a moral rather than a purely technocratic lens, even objectively modest policy achievements may sustain political trust where they are perceived as sincere efforts to honour public commitments, while objectively adequate performance may fail to generate trust if it is perceived as instrumentally motivated. This suggests that trust-building strategies premised solely on demonstrating institutional competence, as suggested by performance-based accounts such as Xiao et al. (2024), may be insufficient in contexts where the moral credibility of leadership is independently scrutinised.

This finding contributes to political trust scholarship by suggesting that trust in Zanzibar is shaped not only by institutional performance but also by moral evaluations of leadership. This pattern should, however, be read cautiously against the wider trust literature: Devine's (2024) meta-analysis finds that political trust is only a weak-to-moderate predictor of downstream outcomes such as turnout, vote choice, and policy compliance, and is not significantly related to informal participation, suggesting that trust alone rarely translates automatically into behavioural or attitudinal effects. Read against this backdrop, the present findings are better understood as showing that moral evaluations of leadership shape the formation of trust judgments in Zanzibar, rather than as evidence that trust itself exerts a uniformly strong downstream effect once formed. The present findings further indicate that trust is closely linked to ethical expectations regarding the conduct and responsibility of political leaders.

Ethical Governance in an Islamic Political Perspective

These findings highlight significant convergence between modern governance principles and Islamic political thought. The World Bank's (1992) governance framework

underscores accountability, transparency, and responsiveness as essential elements of good governance. This view is supported by Al-Farabi's (trans. 1985) concept of the Virtuous City, which holds that governance is rooted in moral virtue and ethical leadership. Similarly, Ibn Khaldun (1377/2005) stresses justice as a fundamental prerequisite for political stability, social cohesion, and prosperity.

An important implication of this finding is that political legitimacy is assessed through both institutional and moral criteria. While modern governance theories primarily focus on institutional effectiveness, Islamic governance adds an additional layer of moral accountability. Political leaders are expected to be accountable not only to citizens but also to ethical principles that guide public life.

However, this convergence should not be interpreted to mean that religiosity always enhances trust or governance evaluation: Badaoui's (2023) cross-national analysis of the Middle East and North African (MENA) region reveals a complex and not always positive relationship between religiosity and generalised trust, with religious tolerance rather than religiosity itself emerging as the dimension most consistently linked to higher trust. Moreover, this association appears to be region-specific rather than universal. This provides a useful boundary condition for the present argument: it indicates that it is not Islamic identity or religious observance per se that makes ethical governance a significant evaluative criterion in Zanzibar, but rather the substantive moral content (justice, trustworthiness, tolerance) that participants associate with religious obligation.

Although the present data cannot fully determine this distinction, future comparative research should test it directly. Citing the World Bank (1992) and Rothstein and Teorell (2008) alongside Islamic political thought, however, requires more than juxtaposition; it requires acknowledging that these frameworks were not built to travel into religiously plural or religiously dominant polities without modification. The Zanzibari data and the Islamic governance literature treat them as moral obligations owed ultimately to God and the community, which are evaluated rather than merely measured. This distinction matters analytically because it explains an otherwise puzzling pattern in the data: participants continued to judge leaders harshly on ethical grounds even when service-delivery indicators had improved, a pattern that a purely institutional-performance framework would not predict but that a moral-accountability framework would anticipate directly.

Public Utility Services

Urban political actors associated access to water, electricity, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities with collective well-being and societal progress, consistent with the UNDP's (2024) human development framework and the OECD's (2024) evidence that effective service delivery strengthens institutional trust. From an Islamic governance perspective, public service provision can be read against the principles of *'adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), and *falah* (human flourishing) (Al-Mawardi, 1058/1996; Chapra, 2000), framing delivery not merely as administrative effectiveness but as a moral obligation to protect public welfare (*maslahah*). *Rahmah* and *falah* are introduced here as analytic categories drawn from the Islamic governance literature; the principles participants themselves invoked were *amanah*, *'adl*, *shura*, and *maslahah*. Participants' association of utility provision with employment opportunities is nonetheless consistent with development theory's treatment of infrastructure as a prerequisite for competitiveness and employment growth (Todaro & Smith, 2020), suggesting that social and economic development were not treated as separate domains within their evaluative frameworks.

Political Manifestos and Promise Fulfilment

This finding aligns with research on mandate representation and policy switching (Stokes, 2001), which argues that democratic legitimacy diminishes when governments depart from the commitments on which they were elected. In Zanzibar, perceptions of urban politicians' social development are heavily influenced by ethical considerations and how effectively governments translate political promises into concrete policy outcomes. These findings suggest that governance theories developed in predominantly secular settings may not fully capture the normative dimensions shaping political legitimacy in Muslim-majority societies; Islamic ethical values function not merely as cultural background factors but as active evaluative frameworks through which governance outcomes are interpreted. From an Islamic governance perspective, leadership involves both political and ethical duties. As Al-Mawardi (1058/1996) highlighted, authority must be exercised in ways that safeguard public welfare and uphold public trust. Therefore, governance failure is seen not only as institutional inefficiency but also as a violation of moral responsibility. The promise–performance gap thus acts as a vital mechanism through which governance performance, political trust, and ethical assessments interact to influence perceptions of social development in Zanzibar.

The Perception Gap of Social Development Among Political Actors in Urban Zanzibar

One interpretive synthesis that emerges from the three themes above is that the perception divide among political figures in urban Zanzibar may be better understood as a legitimacy divide rather than a development divide. Government-aligned and opposition-aligned actors may perceive broadly similar development results, such as improvements in education, health services, infrastructure, and economic indicators, yet interpret them differently depending on their prior orientation toward political trust and institutional legitimacy. It is plausible that government-aligned actors tend to judge social development mainly through technocratic achievements and service delivery, while opposition-aligned actors and civil society may weigh these outcomes more heavily against a history of electoral disputes, institutional distrust, and perceptions of political marginalisation.

However, the present dataset was not designed to systematically compare government-aligned and opposition-aligned participants on this specific dimension, so this reading is offered as an interpretive proposition warranting dedicated investigation in future research rather than as an empirically established contrast.

This divergence is further reinforced by Zanzibar's Islamic socio-political context, where governance is assessed not only by administrative performance but also by adherence to ethical principles of amanah (trusteeship), shura (consultation), and 'adl (justice). Consequently, social development gains are not automatically regarded as evidence of progress; instead, they are filtered through perceptions of whether governance is morally legitimate, inclusive, and just. The interpretive argument arising from this analysis is that political actors' perceptions of social development in urban Zanzibar appear to be mediated by the degree of trust and legitimacy they assign to the institutions producing development outcomes, rather than following directly from those outcomes themselves. Establishing the relative weight of these two influences would require a research design built for that comparison, which the present study does not provide.

Study Contribution

Taken together, the interaction of governance performance, political trust, and Islamic ethical values described above supports Institutional Theory (North, 1990), which emphasises that both formal institutions and informal norms influence political behaviour and societal outcomes. The main theoretical contribution of this study is therefore an integrated Governance-Trust-Ethics framework that regards moral-religious evaluation not as a cultural addition to

institutional analysis but as an integral part of how institutional performance itself is judged in religiously embedded polities.

The novelty of this framework compared to previous work can be more precisely articulated. Conventional governance models (World Bank, 1992; North, 1990) view institutional performance as the primary explanatory factor, while political trust models (Easton, 1975) establish a link between performance and perception but remain largely agnostic about the normative substance underlying such evaluations. The Governance–Trust–Ethics framework differs from these perspectives by positioning Islamic ethical values as an integral evaluative dimension that shapes how institutional performance is interpreted and legitimacy is constructed. The main contribution of this study is to suggest that, in a Muslim-majority urban setting, moral accountability based on *amanah* and *maslahah* functions as a third explanatory factor that appears to shape how governance performance influences political trust, rather than merely serving as a cultural label attached to findings already explained by conventional governance frameworks. In this sense, Islamic ethical values appear to operate alongside, and at times to condition, perceptions of institutional performance in shaping legitimacy judgments.

Conclusion

This exploratory study of 22 political actors in Zanzibar developed three themes shaping social development perceptions: Islamic values, governance performance, and political trust. These themes map directly onto the proposed Governance-Trust-Ethics (GTE) model: measurable governance outcomes (Theme 2) are actively filtered through Islamic ethics (*'adl*, *amanah*, *shura*, *maslahah*) (Theme 1) and human capabilities to generate political trust (Theme 3). Consequently, participants viewed administrative effectiveness as insufficient for legitimate development unless coupled with the moral credibility of leadership. Conceptually, the GTE framework extends conventional governance theories by positioning Islamic ethical values as a core evaluative mechanism in Muslim-majority societies. Practically, it highlights that governance reforms must pair institutional competence with strict ethical accountability. Given its limitation to a single municipality and political officials, this study provides a solid conceptual baseline for future comparative and quantitative research.

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