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Explaining the Status of Doctrinal Opponents in the Islamic Government in Light of Their Recognized Rights

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the legal-religious status, rights, and regulatory mechanisms governing doctrinal opponents within an Islamic governmental framework. Drawing directly on classical jurisprudence, constitutional principles, and historical precedent, the study distinguishes between internal belief, peaceful doctrinal dissent, intellectual heterodoxy, religious minority identity, and doctrinal subversion that evolves into tangible harm. By analyzing how Islamic law differentiates between belief and behavior, the article demonstrates that internal conviction remains inviolable, while intervention is warranted only when doctrinal activities manifest in incitement, deception, violence, or organized destabilization. The typology developed in this study identifies several categories of doctrinal opponents and clarifies the rights owed to each, including safety, dignity, property rights, due process, and freedom of private belief and worship. Historical models, particularly from the governance of Imam Ali and Imam Hasan, provide practical demonstrations of tolerance toward peaceful dissenters and proportionate intervention against violent doctrinal actors. Building on these foundations, the article proposes a rights-based model for doctrinal opposition in contemporary Islamic governance. This model balances the protection of conscience and civil liberties with the state's duty to safeguard social order and national stability. It emphasizes procedural justice, proportionality, ethical governance, and accountability as essential components of a legitimate legal response to doctrinal dissent. The study concludes that Islamic governance contains a deeply rooted and principled framework for managing doctrinal plurality—one that can meet modern challenges while remaining faithful to its jurisprudential and ethical heritage.

Keywords: *doctrinal opposition; Islamic governance; rights-based model; Imam Ali; Imam Hasan; Islamic jurisprudence; political dissent; religious minorities; national security; doctrinal pluralism*

Introduction

The question of how an Islamic political system manages doctrinal opponents has remained one of the most sensitive and intellectually demanding issues within Islamic governance. While political dissent has long been discussed in various strands of Islamic political thought, doctrinal opposition touches the very foundations of belief, legitimacy, and the preservation of religious identity. The Islamic tradition has historically emphasized both the sanctity of individual conscience and the safeguarding of communal faith, creating a dual imperative that must be carefully balanced. This complexity is visible in classical jurisprudence, where scholars such as Ibn Manzur developed precise linguistic and conceptual distinctions surrounding terms related to belief, apostasy, and doctrinal



deviation, highlighting early juristic awareness of how sensitive departures from orthodox teaching could be interpreted within society (1). As jurists elaborated frameworks for governance, figures such as al-Amili and al-Juba'i contributed to shaping the boundaries between acceptable heterodoxy, intellectual exploration, and forms of doctrinal deviation that could disrupt social order or religious stability (2, 3). This early discursive architecture underscores that doctrinal disagreement was never a marginal concern; rather, it formed a core axis of Islamic political-legal reasoning.

The sensitivity of the topic becomes even clearer when examining the tension between freedom of belief and the preservation of the Islamic order. Islamic sources articulate foundational principles that prohibit coercion in matters of faith, a stance reinforced in Qur'anic texts that emphasize human agency in belief and disbelief, thereby framing faith as an inherently voluntary disposition (4). This theological grounding influenced classical jurisprudence, which maintained the principle that the inner domain of belief should not be subject to force, even while jurists such as al-Hilli and al-Bahuti argued that the public manifestations of doctrinal deviation must be regulated to protect societal stability (5, 6). These scholars did not perceive regulation as a contradiction of freedom; rather, they viewed it as a necessary safeguard to ensure that the public domain remained cohesive, preventing actions that could endanger communal security. Later reformulations by modern thinkers such as Mesbah Yazdi emphasized a similar balance, arguing that freedom of belief within Islamic governance operates within a structured moral system that seeks to protect both individual dignity and the integrity of the Islamic community (7). This delicate coexistence of individual autonomy and collective preservation is therefore deeply embedded in Islamic legal consciousness.

This balancing act is reflected as well in the constitutional framework of modern Islamic governance, particularly within the context of the Islamic Republic of Iran, where freedom of belief, religious pluralism, and doctrinal boundaries are acknowledged alongside commitments to preserving Islamic identity. Constitutional provisions recognize the religious autonomy of other monotheistic communities and prohibit coercive investigations into private belief, echoing juristic principles articulated over centuries (8). At the same time, the constitution delineates protective limits against threats to the Islamic order, integrating insights drawn from classical jurisprudence into contemporary governance. This interplay illustrates how doctrinal freedom is simultaneously upheld and bounded, forming a nuanced landscape within which dissenting beliefs must be understood and regulated.

Understanding doctrinal opposition requires distinguishing between several layers of belief-related divergence. One of the core distinctions stressed by classical and modern scholars is between internal doctrinal disagreement and existential doctrinal threats. Intellectual heterodoxy—defined as interpretive diversity within the Islamic tradition—was historically tolerated and even encouraged, as long as it did not evolve into organized subversion or violent confrontation. Jurists such as al-Karaki, who articulated detailed categories of religious authority and governance, underscored that not all deviations from dominant doctrine constitute rebellion or heresy (9). Such distinctions were essential for maintaining intellectual vibrancy within Islamic scholarship. Similarly, religious minorities such as Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians were historically granted protected status under the dhimmi framework, which al-Mamqani articulated using jurisprudential principles that safeguarded their civil rights while regulating their public religious expressions (10). These protections were grounded in the Qur'anic commitment to fair treatment and peaceful coexistence and were later reflected in modern constitutional law.

By contrast, existential doctrinal threats emerge only when doctrinal deviation is linked to activities that undermine social order, manipulate the public sphere, or incite violence. Modern security theory, including discussions by scholars such as Buzan and Mandel, clarifies that any political system—Islamic or otherwise—must

differentiate between peaceful dissent and actions that endanger national stability (11, 12). Their insights align with Islamic jurisprudence, which identifies categories such as *baghy* (armed rebellion), *ifsad fi al-ard* (corruption causing societal harm), and *hirabah* (armed aggression) as distinct from peaceful doctrinal dissent. Classical jurists drew these distinctions clearly: al-Bahuti and al-Amili considered doctrinal beliefs non-punitive unless connected to organized hostility, manipulation, violent conduct, or destabilization of the public sphere (2, 6). This interpretive tradition remains essential for understanding how doctrinal opponents should be classified within contemporary Islamic governance.

The question of legitimacy further deepens the complexity surrounding doctrinal opposition. Islamic governance rests on a dual foundation: divine legitimacy sourced from religious law and popular legitimacy derived from the consent and participation of the governed. Thinkers such as Na'ini argued that political authority in Islam cannot be sustained without responsiveness to the moral and social needs of the community, connecting legitimacy to accountability and inclusive governance (13). Divine legitimacy ensures adherence to revelation and jurisprudence, while popular legitimacy ensures the system remains grounded in social consent. This duality shapes how dissent is conceptualized. Peaceful doctrinal disagreement may serve as a corrective mechanism, and scholars such as Jawadi Amoli emphasize that constructive criticism rooted in moral reasoning plays a vital role in renewing Islamic governance and ensuring just leadership (14). Conversely, doctrinal activities that aim to delegitimize the system through manipulation, incitement, or foreign subversion fall outside the realm of protected dissent, particularly when linked to geopolitical threats that scholars such as Brzezinski have identified as destabilizing forces for states (15).

Although political opposition in Islamic systems has been the subject of considerable study, the more intricate area of doctrinal opposition remains understudied. Most existing literature focuses on political dissent, constitutional rights, or security threats, leaving a significant research gap concerning the systematic classification of doctrinal opponents and the rights they possess. Contemporary legal analyses, such as those by Fathi and Khaghani Esfahani, demonstrate the importance of procedural justice, civil protections, and compensation for state overreach in criminal matters, yet such frameworks have rarely been applied to doctrinal dissent (16, 17). Likewise, works on political security by scholars such as Behzadi and Roshandel underscore the importance of stable governance and societal cohesion, but they typically do not address how doctrinal diversity interacts with these concerns (18, 19). This gap is particularly striking given the centrality of doctrinal integrity within Islamic political thought and the need to articulate clear criteria distinguishing acceptable doctrinal plurality from harmful doctrinal subversion.

The purpose of this study is to address that gap by examining how the Islamic government identifies, categorizes, and regulates doctrinal opponents in light of the rights recognized for them in Islamic jurisprudence and constitutional law. The study draws on the classical juristic tradition, modern constitutional principles, and contemporary security theory to develop a coherent model for understanding doctrinal dissent within a modern Islamic state. This article aims to clarify the legal-religious status and rights of doctrinal opponents in the Islamic government.

Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

The conceptual and theoretical foundations of doctrinal opposition in an Islamic governmental framework require an examination of the historical, jurisprudential, linguistic, and political dimensions that have shaped how dissenting beliefs are understood within Islamic law and governance. The starting point for this foundation lies in the linguistic construction of belief-related terms within classical Arabic scholarship. Lexicographers such as Ibn Manzur defined

core concepts related to belief, disbelief, deviation, and doctrinal divergence with great precision, noting that these terms carry nuanced meanings that distinguish internal conviction from outward expression and public disruption (1). His lexical analyses demonstrate that doctrinal categories in Islamic thought are not merely theological but are deeply intertwined with social order, legal responsibility, and political stability. Such a linguistic foundation became essential for subsequent jurists who sought to evaluate doctrinal dissent within legal frameworks, ensuring that terminological clarity guided legal reasoning rather than vague or politically motivated interpretations.

Building on these linguistic distinctions, classical jurisprudence developed systematic categorizations of doctrinal divergence. Scholars such as al-Amili, in his foundational legal texts, defined the boundaries of legitimate disagreement by noting that not every deviation from communal doctrine constituted heresy or rebellion; instead, the severity of doctrinal difference must be assessed according to its implications for communal harmony and the preservation of Islamic law (2). Similarly, al-Juba'i expanded the analysis of doctrinal error by distinguishing errors of interpretation from deliberate acts of doctrinal subversion, emphasizing that intellectual exploration within Islamic scholarship was both necessary and historically normal (3). These jurists recognized that Islamic theology and jurisprudence have never been monolithic but instead formed a dynamic field where interpretive plurality existed within defined limits. Their work underscores that doctrinal opposition cannot be understood solely as a binary between orthodoxy and deviance; rather, it exists along a spectrum that requires careful legal and theological evaluation.

A second conceptual component lies in the recognition that Islamic governance must balance freedom of belief with the preservation of religious and social order. The Qur'anic prohibition of coercion in matters of faith establishes a foundational principle affirming individual autonomy in belief, a principle repeatedly emphasized in Islamic jurisprudential literature (4). Classical jurists such as al-Hilli interpreted this prohibition as a recognition that belief itself cannot be imposed by the state and that internal conviction remains beyond political authority (5). At the same time, al-Bahuti argued that while internal belief is free from compulsion, external actions linked to doctrinal propagation—particularly when involving manipulative or destabilizing intent—fall under the regulatory authority of the Islamic state (6). This dual principle became central to Islamic jurisprudence: inner belief is inviolable, but public actions with doctrinal implications are subject to legal scrutiny. Contemporary scholars such as Mesbah Yazdi echoed this position by arguing that Islamic governance protects inner belief while ensuring that doctrinal expressions in the public sphere do not undermine the moral framework or communal identity of the Islamic polity (7). This consistent stance across centuries demonstrates that Islamic governance is built on a calibrated interaction between individual autonomy and collective preservation.

A further layer of theoretical grounding emerges in the treatment of religious minorities. Islamic jurisprudence, particularly within the writings of al-Mamqani, articulates the dhimma framework as a structured form of legal protection for non-Muslim communities living within an Islamic state (10). This framework grants religious minorities civil protection, property rights, and freedom of internal religious practice while establishing boundaries to prevent public religious confrontation or actions that could disrupt social cohesion. Al-Karaki's writings emphasize that the recognition of religious minorities is not merely a political accommodation but a jurisprudential obligation grounded in the ethical directives of Islamic revelation (9). This historical commitment to protected pluralism demonstrates that Islamic governance, contrary to stereotypes, provides an established system for managing doctrinal diversity, provided that such diversity does not evolve into organized hostility or efforts to weaken the Islamic order.

The conceptual distinction between doctrinal disagreement and existential doctrinal threats is essential for understanding doctrinal opponents within an Islamic state. Not all forms of doctrinal difference pose a threat. Classical texts identify a clear difference between intellectual heterodoxy—interpretive disagreements that arise naturally in scholarly or communal contexts—and doctrinal movements that intentionally seek to destabilize the Islamic polity. Scholars such as Naraqī noted that interpretive plurality is part of the developmental trajectory of Islamic thought and that suppressing such plurality could impair the intellectual vitality of the community (20). Meanwhile, jurists such as al-Khoei provided detailed frameworks for recognizing when doctrinal positions cross into active hostility, noting that only when belief is coupled with organized action aimed at harming the community does it become legally actionable (21). These distinctions help establish a jurisprudential continuum along which doctrinal opponents must be analyzed, reflecting both the tolerance and vigilance required in Islamic governance.

Modern security theory provides another theoretical pillar for conceptualizing doctrinal dissent. Analysts like Buzan argue that the stability of any political system depends on distinguishing between legitimate dissent and actions that undermine national cohesion (11). His framework identifies societal security—protection of collective identity—as a central dimension of national security. In this sense, doctrinal threats that aim to reshape or weaken Islamic identity must be evaluated not merely in theological terms but within broader security considerations. Mandel similarly emphasizes that national security includes the protection of cultural and ideological foundations, meaning that doctrinal movements which challenge foundational beliefs can constitute security threats when tied to social manipulation, foreign interference, or incitement (12). These insights align closely with Islamic jurisprudential principles, which historically classified doctrinal threats according to their political and social implications rather than their purely theological content.

The political-theoretical foundations of Islamic governance further shape how doctrinal opponents are conceptualized. Na'ini argued that legitimate governance in Islam requires adherence to divine law combined with accountability to the public, forming a dual structure of legitimacy that binds rulers to both religious principles and communal expectations (13). This dual legitimacy creates a framework in which dissent—both political and doctrinal—must be recognized as an inherent part of governance. At the same time, it means that doctrinal opponents who seek to delegitimize the government without cause or through destabilizing means threaten not only political authority but also the moral order of the community. Jawadi Amoli emphasizes that dissent grounded in moral critique and sincere reasoning contributes to the ethical refinement of governance, whereas dissent divorced from moral principles or used as a tool for subversion lacks legitimacy within the Islamic political tradition (14). These views highlight the need for nuanced evaluation of doctrinal opponents based on intent, method, and impact rather than mere doctrinal content.

Historical political experiences within Islamic civilization also reinforce the conceptual foundations regarding doctrinal dissent. Works such as those by Ali Khani demonstrate how Imam Ali distinguished between peaceful doctrinal dissidents and groups that engaged in violent rebellion or intentional disruption (22). Imam Ali's governance illustrates that doctrinal disagreement, even when expressed publicly, did not itself constitute grounds for punitive action; rather, intervention occurred only when doctrinal dissent merged with violent or conspiratorial activity. This precedent has guided subsequent Islamic jurisprudence, reinforcing the distinction between belief-based dissent and actionable doctrinal threat.

Contemporary Iranian legal scholarship also contributes to the conceptual framework. Ansari Lari's work on limitations of freedom of expression in the context of religious sensitivity shows how modern law incorporates

classical distinctions between protected belief and harmful public expression (8). Fathi's analysis of procedural protections in criminal justice illustrates that doctrinal dissenters, like all citizens, are entitled to due process and protection from arbitrary punishment, reflecting the Islamic legal principle that justice must be upheld regardless of belief (16). Khaghani Esfahani's work on compensation mechanisms demonstrates that even when state action is directed at dissenters, accountability for misuse of authority remains a fundamental legal requirement (17). These contemporary analyses help bridge classical jurisprudential doctrine with modern constitutional expectations, revealing continuity rather than rupture in the foundational principles governing doctrinal dissent.

Security and governance theorists such as Behzadi and Roshandel provide a political context for understanding why doctrinal opposition can become a sensitive issue when linked to larger stability concerns. Behzadi's analysis of political security emphasizes that ideological cohesion supports nationalist and communal stability, suggesting that doctrinal movements seeking to undermine Islamic identity may affect political resilience (18). Roshandel's work further demonstrates that in systems where religion forms the basis of constitutional legitimacy, threats to doctrinal integrity may translate into threats to state legitimacy itself (19). This insight helps explain why Islamic governance places such emphasis on distinguishing harmless doctrinal disagreement from potentially destabilizing doctrinal subversion.

These conceptual and theoretical foundations reveal that doctrinal opposition in Islamic governance cannot be understood through a simplistic framework. It is grounded in a sophisticated interplay between linguistic precision, theological principles, jurisprudential classification, political legitimacy, security analysis, and historical precedent. Only by integrating these elements can a coherent and nuanced understanding of doctrinal opposition emerge within an Islamic governmental system.

Typology of Doctrinal Opponents in the Islamic Government

The typology of doctrinal opponents in an Islamic government emerges from a long-standing jurisprudential and political tradition that distinguishes between various categories of belief-based dissent according to their intentions, methods, and potential impact on societal order. Islamic jurisprudence has historically avoided reducing doctrinal dissent to a monolithic phenomenon, instead insisting on careful categorization to prevent injustice and preserve intellectual vitality. This typological differentiation begins with the recognition that peaceful doctrinal opponents—those who hold differing beliefs but do not engage in harmful or disruptive actions—constitute a category fundamentally distinct from groups whose doctrinal positions evolve into organized hostility or subversion. The Qur'anic principle that belief cannot be coerced forms the foundational guarantee for peaceful doctrinal opponents, affirming that internal conviction lies beyond the reach of legal punishment and must be protected within any Islamic political framework (4). This bedrock principle shapes the first major category of doctrinal opponents: individuals or communities whose doctrinal positions differ from prevailing Islamic norms yet remain within the boundary of non-hostility.

Peaceful doctrinal opponents may include Muslim individuals with minority interpretations, non-Muslim religious communities living under Islamic governance, or individuals whose private convictions diverge from orthodoxy but who do not publicly propagate opposition to the Islamic order. Classical scholars such as al-Karaki observed that interpretive diversity is a natural outcome of the intellectual and spiritual breadth of Islamic jurisprudence, and that such diversity, when not linked to organized disruption, remains within the realm of permissible disagreement (9). Jurists including al-Mamqani similarly noted that the existence of doctrinal variety among Muslims did not constitute

grounds for punitive classification, provided that such beliefs did not challenge the legitimacy of Islamic law or the stability of the community (10). This juristic restraint reflects an understanding that Islamic governance requires space for interpretive plurality and that imposing homogeneity upon internal belief would undermine both religious authenticity and social cohesion.

The next major category includes doctrinal opponents whose dissent manifests through heterodox or deviant interpretations that challenge the core tenets of Islamic belief yet do not immediately translate into political or violent activity. These groups may articulate theological positions considered erroneous by mainstream jurists but remain nonconfrontational in their conduct. Classical jurists such as al-Amili differentiated between mere theological error and willful propagation of doctrines intended to confuse, mislead, or manipulate the faithful (2). This distinction was crucial because the Islamic intellectual tradition has historically permitted debate, disagreement, and even sharp critique as part of scholarly engagement. Al-Juba'i emphasized that intellectual heterodoxy contributes to the evolution of Islamic thought when pursued sincerely and within ethical limits (3). However, he cautioned that heterodox movements can transition into destabilizing entities when they intentionally manipulate religious symbols, engage in psychological or emotional coercion, or aim to erode the moral foundation of society. These insights highlight that heterodox doctrinal positions occupy an intermediate category—permissible as long as they do not cross the threshold into harmful manipulation.

A third significant category among doctrinal opponents encompasses recognized religious minorities living within an Islamic state. Islamic jurisprudence developed a comprehensive legal framework, known as the dhimma system, which grants non-Muslim communities protection, autonomy in personal religious affairs, and civil rights under the guardianship of the Islamic authority. Scholars such as al-Mamqani articulated this structure as a reflection of Islamic ethical obligations toward peaceful non-Muslims (10). The dhimma system distinguishes doctrinal difference from political opposition, recognizing that religious diversity does not inherently threaten the Islamic order. Al-Karaki further emphasized that the protection of religious minorities is rooted in the Qur'anic injunction to deal justly with those who do not engage in hostility against the Muslim community (9). These juristic positions demonstrate that religious minorities are categorized not as opponents but as protected communities whose doctrinal difference is acknowledged and legally safeguarded.

However, within this typology, certain forms of doctrinal opposition are categorized as existential threats due to their potential to destabilize society. One of the most studied forms in classical jurisprudence is apostasy. Apostasy, or the explicit renunciation of Islam, is treated with a nuanced approach by classical scholars, with figures such as al-Hilli distinguishing between internal doubt, public denial of Islamic essentials, and active attempts to use apostasy as a tool for manipulating or weakening the Muslim community (5). Scholars such as al-Khoei emphasized that apostasy which remains internal and unpublicized falls outside the realm of legal prosecution, while public apostasy accompanied by incitement or alliance with hostile forces may constitute an actionable threat (21). This distinction underscores that apostasy becomes a category of doctrinal opposition primarily when it intersects with political or social disruption rather than when it remains a matter of personal belief.

Another major category of doctrinal opponents includes deviant or extremist sects whose doctrinal positions directly challenge the legitimacy of Islamic governance. Historical precedents demonstrate that when such sects moved beyond theoretical dissent, they posed significant challenges. Studies by Ali Khani illustrate that during the governance of Imam Ali, groups such as the Kharijites held doctrinal positions considered extreme, yet Imam Ali tolerated their existence until they initiated acts of violence and communal disruption (22). This historical model

reinforces that doctrinal deviance alone was insufficient to justify punitive action; rather, punishment was reserved for when doctrinal deviance transformed into violent praxis or active rebellion. This precedent directly influences contemporary Islamic political thought, demonstrating how peaceful doctrinal opposition is treated differently from doctrinally driven rebellion.

Within this typology, a crucial category includes doctrinal movements that merge belief with organized hostility or political subversion. These groups may include those who exploit doctrinal language to mobilize rebellion, undermine political legitimacy, or collaborate with foreign actors to weaken the Islamic state. Modern security theory aligns with this classical distinction. Analysts such as Buzan note that threats to societal security often originate from ideological movements that seek to redefine or undermine communal identity (11). Mandel similarly emphasizes that ideological subversion represents a form of non-military aggression that can destabilize national cohesion (12). When doctrinal dissent becomes a tool for political subversion, it transitions from a theological matter to a security concern. Islamic jurisprudence historically identified such movements as engaging in *baghy* or *ifsad fi al-ard* when they combined doctrinal rhetoric with actions aimed at harming the community. Al-Bahuti's analysis illustrates that the state's intervention becomes necessary when doctrinal movements seek to damage moral or social integrity through deception, incitement, or manipulation (6).

A related category involves doctrinal opponents whose deviation is linked to foreign influence or external threats. Brzezinski's analysis of geopolitical pressure and ideological penetration explains how external actors may use doctrinal narratives to destabilize a state from within (15). Roshandel's writings on national security highlight that in states where religious identity underpins constitutional legitimacy, foreign-backed doctrinal subversion becomes not only a political threat but a threat to the very identity of the nation (19). This theoretical insight aligns with classical Islamic reasoning, which treated doctrinal movements allied with hostile powers as a distinct and dangerous category.

In addition to these categories, contemporary legal scholarship identifies doctrinal opponents who engage in public propagation of harmful or destabilizing beliefs that manipulate vulnerable individuals or disrupt moral order. Fathi's work on criminal procedure emphasizes that such individuals must still be afforded due process, reinforcing that doctrinal threat does not suspend legal protections (16). Khaghani Esfahani similarly argues that mechanisms for preventing governmental overreach, including compensation for wrongful prosecution, must apply even in cases involving doctrinal dissent, ensuring that the state's response remains accountable and proportionate (17). These contemporary reflections demonstrate that doctrinal threat is not a justification for suspending rights; rather, it requires careful procedural balance.

Finally, the typology of doctrinal opponents includes individuals and groups whose doctrinal positions intersect unintentionally with political tensions but who lack intent to destabilize governance. Behzadi's work on political security underlines that not all ideological expressions with political implications constitute security threats, cautioning against expansive or exaggerated interpretations of doctrinal risk (18). This understanding is crucial for avoiding overextension of governmental authority and for ensuring that peaceful doctrinal opponents are not misclassified as security threats.

Taken together, this typology reveals a deeply nuanced jurisprudential and political approach to doctrinal opponents in Islamic governance. The distinctions among peaceful doctrinal dissenters, heterodox thinkers, protected religious minorities, apostates, deviant sects, politically subversive movements, and foreign-backed ideological agents demonstrate the complexity of doctrinal management in an Islamic state. These categories

highlight that Islamic governance does not treat doctrinal difference uniformly; instead, it applies a layered and principled approach rooted in classical jurisprudence, security considerations, ethical obligations, and historical precedent.

Rights of Doctrinal Opponents in the Islamic Government

The rights of doctrinal opponents in an Islamic government emerge from a long juridical and ethical tradition that seeks to harmonize the sanctity of individual conscience with the preservation of communal order. Islamic law does not treat doctrinal dissent as a monolithic phenomenon; instead, it distinguishes among categories of belief, intention, and behavior to ensure that protections are afforded where appropriate and restrictions are applied only where necessary. The foundational principle that belief cannot be coerced, derived from the Qur'anic injunction against compulsion in matters of faith, establishes the general legal immunity of internal conviction within Islamic governance (4). This principle is reflected in classical jurisprudence, where jurists such as al-Hilli repeatedly emphasized that inner belief falls outside the scope of state authority, thus establishing a fundamental right for doctrinal opponents whose dissent remains private or peaceful (5). Islamic political authority, therefore, is not concerned with policing hearts but with regulating public acts that may have tangible social consequences.

This foundational protection extends to the dignity and personal security of doctrinal opponents. Classical jurists consistently held that individuals who hold dissenting or heterodox beliefs are entitled to protection of life and property as long as they do not engage in actions that constitute hostility or rebellion. Al-Bahuti articulated this principle clearly in his legal writings, noting that doctrinal difference, even when significant, does not invalidate the right to safety or civil protection unless accompanied by aggression or the intent to harm communal order (6). Similarly, al-Amili stressed that the mere holding of erroneous beliefs does not justify punitive action because Islamic law requires demonstrable harm before the state may intervene (2). These perspectives establish the first major right of doctrinal opponents: the right to life, safety, and personal integrity, which remains fully intact except in rare cases where doctrinal activities evolve into violent insurrection or organized subversion.

Another major right affirmed by classical and contemporary jurisprudence is the protection of property and economic activity. Islamic governance historically placed great emphasis on safeguarding the material rights of individuals regardless of their doctrinal stance, provided that they honored social obligations and refrained from acts of hostility. Jurists such as al-Karaki emphasized that the Islamic ruler has no authority to confiscate the property of doctrinal dissenters unless such property is being used directly to finance rebellion or criminal activity (9). In the same vein, al-Mamqani wrote that even communities recognized as doctrinally deviant retain their property rights under the dhimma structure as long as they comply with their legal responsibilities and do not violate public order (10). This long-standing protection reflects the broader ethical commitment within Islamic governance to economic justice and fairness, ensuring that doctrinal dissent does not become a pretext for discrimination or material deprivation.

The right to due process constitutes another fundamental protection for doctrinal opponents. Contemporary legal scholars such as Fathi have argued that Islamic criminal procedure is rooted in rigorous evidentiary standards that prevent the state from imposing punitive measures based solely on suspicion or doctrinal deviation (16). Procedural rights include the presumption of innocence, the requirement of clear evidence, and the prohibition of coercive interrogation—principles that protect individuals whose beliefs may be disliked or misunderstood but who have not engaged in provable harmful behavior. Al-Khoei, in his extensive juristic writings, underscored that accusations of

apostasy or deviant belief must be substantiated through clear, intentional, and public declarations, warning against ambiguous or politically motivated charges (21). These procedural safeguards ensure that doctrinal opponents cannot be targeted arbitrarily and that the Islamic government must follow strict legal norms when addressing belief-based cases.

Beyond procedural rights, doctrinal opponents possess the right to freedom of private religious practice. Islamic jurisprudence has always recognized the sanctity of private belief and religious ritual, extending even to non-Muslim communities living within an Islamic state. Naraqi explained that while public expressions of non-Islamic belief may be regulated for reasons of social harmony, private worship and internal religious adherence remain protected (20). This principle is reinforced by the writings of al-Mamqani, who noted that religious minorities enjoy autonomy in matters of personal law, ritual practice, and internal community governance under the protections of the dhimma agreement (10). These rights form a crucial part of the Islamic legal framework, demonstrating that doctrinal difference is neither suppressed nor criminalized when practiced privately and peacefully.

The right to moral and intellectual respect also emerges from Islamic teachings regarding the treatment of dissenters. Jawadi Amoli argued that Islamic governance is obligated to maintain the dignity of all individuals, including those who disagree doctrinally, unless they violate ethical or legal norms through aggressive or manipulative conduct (14). His interpretation situates respectful engagement with doctrinal opponents as part of the broader Islamic ethic of justice and benevolence. Similarly, Na'ini underscored that legitimacy in Islamic governance depends on ethical treatment of the governed, including the fair treatment of dissenters who may challenge governmental or doctrinal positions (13). These perspectives indicate that doctrinal opponents must not be subjected to humiliation, defamation, or coercive pressure, reinforcing their right to dignified treatment within the Islamic polity.

A particularly significant set of rights applies to recognized religious minorities. Under classical Islamic law, religious minorities such as Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians are granted comprehensive legal protections through the dhimma framework. These protections include the right to maintain places of worship, observe religious festivals, administer internal religious law, and operate communal institutions. Al-Karaki emphasized that the Islamic government is obligated to protect these rights as part of its moral duty and legal mandate, provided that minority communities refrain from public provocation or acts that threaten public order (9). Al-Mamqani's writings further clarify that religious minorities must not be coerced into adopting Islamic doctrine, and that their religious identity is to be respected in both public administration and judicial matters (10). These rights illustrate the pluralistic dimension of Islamic governance, challenging modern assumptions that doctrinal difference necessarily invites suppression.

Islamic jurisprudence also recognizes the right of doctrinal opponents to fair political treatment. While political participation may vary according to the structure of the state, Islamic governance requires equitable enforcement of law regardless of belief. Contemporary legal scholars such as Ansari Lari argue that the regulation of religious speech must be consistent with broader principles of justice and non-discrimination, noting that laws governing expression should not be used as tools to silence doctrinal dissent that does not pose a genuine threat to communal stability (8). Behzadi's analysis of political security similarly warns against conflating peaceful doctrinal dissent with political rebellion, suggesting that overreaction by the state can harm political legitimacy and weaken social trust (18). These modern perspectives demonstrate continuity with classical jurisprudence in protecting dissent that remains peaceful and sincere.

The rights of doctrinal opponents also extend to protection from wrongful governmental action. Khaghani Esfahani's work on compensation mechanisms establishes that doctrinal opponents who are wrongly accused or harmed through judicial or administrative error are entitled to compensation under Islamic law (17). This requirement reflects the Islamic jurisprudential commitment to correcting violations and ensuring the integrity of the justice system. The principle aligns closely with al-Hilli's insistence that Islamic governance must uphold justice even for those whose beliefs sharply diverge from mainstream doctrine (5). By requiring compensation and accountability, Islamic law protects doctrinal opponents from systemic abuse and institutional overreach.

While doctrinal opponents enjoy these rights, Islamic governance simultaneously imposes certain limitations when doctrinal activities intersect with threats to communal stability or national security. Roshandel's work on Iranian national security notes that states rooted in religious identity have a particular interest in maintaining doctrinal coherence to preserve political legitimacy (19). Buzan similarly identifies societal identity as a core component of national security, meaning that doctrinal movements that seek to subvert foundational beliefs may pose more significant risks than mere political dissent (11). Islamic jurisprudence mirrors these insights by recognizing that the state may intervene when doctrinal activities involve incitement, manipulation, or collaboration with external hostile forces. For example, al-Bahuti held that harmful public propagation of deviant doctrine—particularly when aimed at misleading the community—falls within the legitimate scope of state regulation (6). However, even in such cases, intervention must be proportionate, grounded in evidence, and limited to preventing tangible harm.

Another limitation concerns the prohibition of public desecration or insult of Islamic symbols, which classical jurists viewed as actions capable of inciting social unrest or undermining public morality. Al-Amili and al-Juba'i both wrote that public acts of doctrinal provocation, when intentionally designed to create conflict, could be restricted for the protection of communal harmony (2, 3). Yet they also emphasized that such restrictions must not be extended to peaceful expression or private belief. These distinctions reflect the jurisprudential concern for balancing freedom and order through carefully calibrated legal norms.

Foreign-backed doctrinal subversion represents another context in which Islamic governance imposes limitations. Brzezinski's work indicates that external actors may use doctrinal fragmentation as a strategic tool to undermine political systems (15). In such cases, the state may impose restrictions to prevent manipulation or infiltration, but these measures must still respect procedural rights and avoid criminalizing belief itself. Mandel's analysis reinforces that countering ideological subversion requires targeted responses rather than broad repression (12). Islamic jurisprudence likewise differentiates between internal doctrinal dissent and foreign-backed doctrinal movements, restricting the latter through legal mechanisms while continuing to protect individual conscience.

Despite these limitations, the overarching framework of Islamic governance demonstrates that doctrinal opponents hold extensive rights grounded in both classical jurisprudence and modern legal principles. The right to life, property, procedural justice, private religious practice, dignity, and compensation forms the foundation of their legal status. At the same time, the Islamic state maintains the authority to regulate doctrinal activities that evolve into organized harm or external subversion. The resulting balance reveals an intricate and ethically grounded system for managing doctrinal diversity within an Islamic governmental context.

Mechanisms of Regulation and Engagement with Doctrinal Opponents

The mechanisms through which an Islamic government regulates and engages with doctrinal opponents arise from a deep jurisprudential heritage that balances the preservation of social order with the ethical duty to uphold justice, dignity, and freedom of belief. These mechanisms have evolved in response to historical experiences, theological principles, and contemporary security considerations. They aim to distinguish between peaceful doctrinal dissent and doctrinal threats that endanger societal stability. The first and most foundational mechanism is dialogical engagement, rooted in the classical Islamic principle of admonition (*nasiha*) and rational persuasion. Scholars such as Jawadi Amoli emphasize that Islamic governance must prioritize intellectual engagement and moral reasoning when addressing doctrinal dissent, maintaining that constructive dialogue aligns with the ethical foundations of Islamic political thought (14). He argues that the state should invite doctrinal opponents to articulate their concerns and interpretations, fostering an environment where disagreement can be clarified, corrected, or accommodated without coercion. This emphasis on dialogue reflects the Qur'anic command to "invite with wisdom and good counsel," showing that persuasion, rather than suppression, is the primary mechanism for addressing doctrinal divergence (4).

Classical jurists reinforced this approach by defining advice and moral correction as duties of the Islamic state. Al-Hilli maintained that rulers must engage dissenters patiently, distinguishing between misguided beliefs that require clarification and malicious doctrines that require legal intervention (5). Similarly, al-Amili described the obligation of the state to respond to doctrinal concerns through education and explanation, ensuring that individuals are judged only after opportunities for clarification have been provided (2). These jurists recognized that doctrinal deviation often arises from misunderstanding rather than malice, and therefore initial engagement should focus on correcting conceptual errors rather than imposing punitive measures.

A second mechanism of regulation involves judicial oversight, which ensures that doctrinal disputes are evaluated through clear evidentiary standards rather than arbitrary suspicion or political motivation. The judiciary serves as the primary safeguard against abuse of power, ensuring that doctrinal opponents are not punished without due legal process. Fathi's analysis of Iranian criminal procedure highlights the importance of safeguarding procedural justice, emphasizing that accusations of doctrinal deviation must meet rigorous standards of proof, including the requirement of public, intentional expression in cases involving apostasy or doctrinal subversion (16). This requirement prevents the state from prosecuting individuals based on private belief or unverified allegations.

Al-Khoei's jurisprudential writings further underscore that doctrinal accusations must be handled meticulously, noting that ambiguity, misinterpretation, or coerced confessions cannot form the basis of legal rulings (21). He emphasizes that doctrinal cases require heightened scrutiny because of the risk of mislabeling sincere believers as dissidents. This judicial caution reflects a long-standing Islamic commitment to protecting individuals from wrongful punishment, particularly in belief-related matters that demand great sensitivity. The judiciary also functions as a mechanism through which doctrinal opponents can seek redress and defend themselves against unjust accusations, reinforcing their civil and religious protections.

A third mechanism involves the institutional regulation of public religious expression. Islamic jurisprudence distinguishes between private belief, which is inviolable, and public doctrinal activities, which may be subject to reasonable regulation to preserve societal harmony. Al-Bahuti articulated this distinction clearly, arguing that while internal belief remains beyond governmental interference, public propagation of doctrines that mislead the

population or undermine moral order may warrant regulation (6). His distinction does not aim to suppress doctrinal plurality but to prevent harmful manipulation or incitement. Classical jurists such as al-Juba'i similarly held that when doctrinal expression manipulates vulnerable populations or fosters hostility toward the Islamic order, the state may intervene to prevent social destabilization (3). These insights inform modern regulatory mechanisms, such as laws governing religious publications, public preaching, and media content, which aim to protect the public sphere without infringing on private belief.

The constitutional framework of modern Islamic governance incorporates this jurisprudential heritage by establishing legal boundaries for public religious expression. Ansari Lari's work on the press law demonstrates that freedom of expression, including religious expression, is recognized in Iranian law but remains subject to limitations designed to protect Islamic values and prevent social disorder (8). These limitations are not designed to silence doctrinal dissent but to regulate the medium through which it is communicated, ensuring that harmful incitement or misinformation does not endanger societal stability. This mechanism highlights a central principle of Islamic governance: regulation should be targeted, proportionate, and based on demonstrable harm rather than doctrinal difference alone.

Another mechanism involves ethical oversight and moral guidance, which Islamic governance historically employed through scholars, religious councils, and community institutions. Na'ini argued that the ethical dimension of governance requires that rulers uphold justice and fair treatment toward all individuals, including doctrinal opponents (13). His writings emphasize that moral governance demands transparency, humility, and accountability, preventing the abuse of authority in doctrinal matters. This ethical oversight acts as a mechanism for ensuring that doctrinal regulation does not devolve into persecution or authoritarianism. It places responsibility on leaders to uphold integrity and avoid misusing doctrinal differences as tools of political suppression.

Historical precedent also informs contemporary mechanisms of engagement. Ali Khani's analysis of Imam Ali's governance offers a clear example of how doctrinal and political dissent were handled with nuance and fairness (22). Imam Ali allowed dissenters, including extremist sects such as the Kharijites, to express their views freely as long as they refrained from violence. He tolerated doctrinal differences and avoided punishment based solely on belief. Intervention occurred only when dissent transitioned into violent rebellion. This historical model informs contemporary Islamic governance by illustrating that peaceful doctrinal opposition must be met with tolerance, while violent doctrinal subversion must be addressed through legal means. The precedent establishes that the earliest Islamic governance distinguished between belief and behavior, offering a model for regulating doctrinal opposition while safeguarding justice.

A further mechanism of regulation concerns national security considerations, particularly when doctrinal movements threaten societal cohesion or political stability. Buzan's theory of societal security identifies collective identity as a crucial component of national stability, suggesting that ideological threats can destabilize societies more profoundly than conventional military threats (11). Mandel similarly highlights that ideological manipulation and subversion represent forms of aggression that modern states must be equipped to counter without undermining civil liberties (12). These insights have influenced contemporary Islamic governance, where doctrinal movements linked to foreign interference, destabilizing propaganda, or organized subversion may be classified as security threats. Roshandel's work demonstrates how religious identity in Iran forms part of national security, meaning that doctrinal threats may also be political threats (19). In such cases, engagement must be guided by principles of proportionality, evidence-based assessment, and respect for procedural rights.

Islamic jurisprudence historically addressed similar concerns through classifications such as *baghy* (armed rebellion) and *ifsad fi al-ard* (corruption and societal harm). Al-Bahuti and al-Hilli both maintained that the state has an obligation to confront doctrinal movements that use belief as a façade to promote violence, deception, or social disintegration (5, 6). Yet they equally emphasized that intervention must be limited to those actions directly linked to harm, ensuring that doctrinal beliefs themselves remain protected. This classical reasoning informs modern legal mechanisms that restrict violent or subversive doctrinal activity while preserving freedom of belief for peaceful dissenters.

Compensatory mechanisms serve as an additional safeguard for doctrinal opponents. Islamic governance recognizes that wrongful accusations, misclassification, or excessive regulation can produce harm requiring restitution. Khaghani Esfahani's analysis of compensation law makes clear that individuals who suffer unjust harm due to wrongful governmental action—including doctrinal opponents targeted improperly—are entitled to monetary or legal compensation under Islamic principles (17). This mechanism reinforces accountability and ensures that the state retains legitimacy by correcting its mistakes. The principle aligns with the ethical foundations articulated by al-Karaki and al-Mamqani, both of whom insisted that justice must be upheld even in cases involving doctrinal deviation (9, 10).

Oversight by religious scholars and institutions also plays a role in regulating doctrinal dissent. These institutions historically served as mediators, interpreters, and bridges between the state and doctrinal opponents. Mesbah Yazdi argued that religious institutions must guide the state in distinguishing legitimate doctrinal diversity from harmful deviation, ensuring that doctrinal regulation is based on scholarly expertise rather than political convenience (7). Such involvement ensures that doctrinal matters are handled with theological accuracy and moral responsibility. It also prevents the politicization of doctrinal categories by grounding decisions in established religious scholarship.

Another mechanism concerns the regulation of public spaces where doctrinal content circulates. This includes oversight of publications, sermons, educational materials, and media broadcasts. Ansari Lari's analysis of legal restrictions on public speech indicates that these measures aim to prevent public disorder, protect religious sanctities, and ensure responsible discourse (8). These regulatory mechanisms derive from classical jurisprudence, where scholars like al-Juba'i and al-Amili warned against allowing public spaces to become arenas for manipulation or ideological corruption (2, 3). Modern regulation in these areas aims to ensure that public discourse remains respectful, truthful, and aligned with broader social ethics while safeguarding the right of peaceful dissenters to express their views within responsible parameters.

Finally, Islamic governance employs mechanisms that separate doctrinal assessment from political rivalry. Behzadi emphasized that political stability depends on avoiding excessive politicization of religious discourse, warning that governments may lose legitimacy if doctrinal categories are used to suppress political competitors (18). Brzezinski's work similarly cautions that conflating ideological disagreement with political threat can create instability and hinder effective governance (15). These insights reinforce the need for systemic safeguards to differentiate doctrinal assessment from political expediency.

Taken together, these mechanisms of regulation and engagement reveal an intricate and ethically grounded framework for responding to doctrinal opposition within an Islamic governmental system. Judicial oversight, dialogical engagement, procedural protections, ethical governance, historical precedent, national security considerations, and compensatory safeguards contribute to a cohesive approach that preserves freedom of belief while protecting the integrity of the Islamic polity.

Historical Precedent: Imam Ali and Imam Hasan's Treatment of Doctrinal Opponents

The historical precedents set by Imam Ali and Imam Hasan provide some of the most significant and instructive models for understanding the treatment of doctrinal opponents in an Islamic government. Their approaches reveal an intricate balance between commitment to Islamic doctrinal integrity and the ethical imperative to protect rights, dignity, and social order. These precedents form an essential part of the Islamic political tradition and have influenced later juristic reasoning, constitutional development, and contemporary legal interpretations. Imam Ali, in particular, is widely recognized for his nuanced differentiation between peaceful doctrinal dissent and violent doctrinal subversion, a distinction that is repeatedly emphasized in historical and scholarly analyses. Ali Khani's detailed study of Imam Ali's political conduct demonstrates that Imam Ali did not punish individuals solely for holding dissenting views but instead tolerated doctrinal difference as long as it did not transition into actions that threatened public safety or social cohesion (22). This approach aligns with the overarching Islamic principle that internal belief cannot be coerced and that the moral legitimacy of governance depends on justice rather than doctrinal homogeneity.

A central episode in Imam Ali's governance concerns his engagement with the Kharijites, a group whose doctrinal positions and political behavior presented complex challenges. Initially, the Kharijites expressed doctrinal disagreement regarding the arbitration during the Battle of Siffin. Their early dissent was primarily ideological, expressed in slogans and critiques but not accompanied by violent rebellion. Imam Ali chose not to punish them, even though their slogans questioned his leadership. Ali Khani notes that Imam Ali explicitly stated that as long as the Kharijites refrained from violence, they would retain full rights as members of the community (22). This decision demonstrated a principled commitment to freedom of belief and expression, grounded in the Islamic juridical understanding that doctrinal dissent alone does not justify punitive action. Imam Ali's restraint reflects a jurisprudential consistency with the Qur'anic command against compulsion in faith (4) and with the views of jurists such as al-Hilli and al-Amili, who asserted centuries later that doctrinal deviation absent harmful conduct should not be criminalized (2, 5).

However, Imam Ali's treatment of the Kharijites changed when their doctrinal dissent escalated into violent rebellion. Once they began committing acts of aggression, including roadside killings and inciting armed conflict, their status shifted from peaceful doctrinal dissenters to armed rebels (*bughat*). This jurisprudential category—formulated in detail by classical scholars such as al-Bahuti, who defined armed rebellion as a punishable threat to social order (6)—was applied by Imam Ali only after the Kharijites had engaged in concrete acts of harm. His reaction thus distinguished between belief and behavior, maintaining that the state's response must be proportionate and based on demonstrable harm rather than mere doctrinal deviance. The precedent demonstrates that the Islamic state has authority to intervene when doctrinal movements threaten communal peace, but it also reinforces that punitive action must never be based on belief alone.

Imam Ali's governance also illustrates the rights afforded to doctrinal opponents prior to the onset of violence. As long as the Kharijites remained peaceful, Imam Ali permitted them to gather, voice their criticisms, and even openly question his decisions. This aligns with the distinctions made by jurists such as al-Juba'i, who argued that intellectual and doctrinal plurality must be tolerated unless it becomes deliberately manipulative or socially destabilizing (3). Imam Ali's tolerance extended to ensuring their civil protections, demonstrating a practice consistent with later juristic writings that stress the protection of life, dignity, and property for peaceful doctrinal

opponents (9, 10). This approach reveals that early Islamic governance upheld the principle of safeguarding dissent even in cases where that dissent directly targeted the ruling authority.

Another instructive episode concerns Imam Ali's response to individuals who expressed theological positions considered incorrect but who did not align themselves with violent groups. Historical accounts show that he frequently engaged such individuals through reasoned debate, exhortation, and explanation rather than coercion. His commitment to dialogue echoes the ethical principles highlighted by scholars like Jawadi Amoli, who argues that moral governance requires rulers to persuade rather than compel, using wisdom and ethical reasoning as primary tools for addressing doctrinal divergence (14). Imam Ali's dialogical approach also aligns with al-Hilli's later jurisprudential position that clarification and education should precede any form of punitive engagement (5). These correspondences demonstrate continuity between early Islamic practice and later theoretical elaboration, reinforcing that the ethical foundations of Islamic governance require engaging doctrinal opponents with respect, fairness, and intellectual openness.

Imam Hasan's governance offers an additional historical model, particularly in terms of prioritizing peace and preventing bloodshed when addressing doctrinal and political dissent. Imam Hasan inherited a community fractured by civil conflict, political intrigue, and doctrinal divisions. His treaty with Muawiyah, often analyzed through both political and doctrinal lenses, reflected a strategic decision to prevent further violence and preserve the unity of the Muslim community. This decision parallels the arguments of jurists and political theorists who maintain that preventing widespread harm is a primary objective of Islamic political authority. Behzadi's analysis of political security underscores that the legitimacy of governance in Islamic contexts is strengthened when leaders prioritize the preservation of community welfare over assertions of political power (18). Imam Hasan's decision thus exemplifies the principle that doctrinal and political disputes must be managed in a way that minimizes collective harm and preserves societal cohesion.

Imam Hasan's approach toward doctrinal opponents was grounded in the same foundational principles upheld by Imam Ali: respect for internal belief, tolerance of peaceful dissent, and restraint in the use of force. His willingness to reconcile and negotiate even with political and doctrinal adversaries reflects a jurisprudential ethos that views peace-building as a legitimate and often necessary instrument of governance. This ethos is echoed in modern political theory, where Roshandel argues that national security must be understood not only in militaristic terms but in relation to social stability, communal identity, and the prevention of internal strife (19). Imam Hasan's pursuit of peace can thus be understood as a form of national security strategy in an early Islamic context, aligning with contemporary insights regarding the preservation of collective identity in times of internal conflict.

Imam Ali and Imam Hasan also upheld the rights of religious minorities and non-Muslim communities within their jurisdictions. Their treatment of such groups mirrored the dhimma framework outlined by classical jurists, who emphasized the protection of life, property, and religious autonomy for peaceful non-Muslims living under Islamic governance. Scholars such as Naraqī and al-Mamqani affirm that this protected status was rooted in Islamic ethical imperatives rather than political expediency (10, 20). Imam Ali's administration demonstrated this commitment through his directives ensuring fair taxation, protection of religious freedoms, and prohibition of discriminatory treatment. These historical practices reinforce the view that doctrinal difference alone—whether among Muslims or non-Muslims—was not considered a threat requiring suppression unless accompanied by harmful actions.

The historical precedents established by Imam Ali and Imam Hasan have had enduring influence on Islamic jurisprudence, shaping doctrinal classifications and informing contemporary interpretations of religious freedom,

political legitimacy, and conditions for lawful intervention. Their approaches resonate with insights from modern scholars who distinguish between ideological dissent, which is often a legitimate expression of conscience, and ideological subversion, which threatens political stability. The frameworks developed by Buzan and Mandel regarding societal security and ideological manipulation echo the distinctions observed in early Islamic governance (11, 12). Likewise, contemporary jurists such as Khaghani Esfahani emphasize that Islamic governance must remain accountable for its treatment of dissenters, ensuring that measures taken against doctrinal opponents adhere to principles of justice and restitution where necessary (17). The historical precedents of Imam Ali and Imam Hasan thus serve not only as moral exemplars but as foundational models for the legal and ethical management of doctrinal opposition in modern Islamic states.

In sum, the historical conduct of Imam Ali and Imam Hasan demonstrates a consistent, principled approach to doctrinal opponents rooted in ethical engagement, legal restraint, and the prioritization of social harmony. Their refusal to punish mere belief, their commitment to dialogue, their protection of rights, and their calibrated responses to violent rebellion collectively reveal an approach to doctrinal dissent that remains deeply relevant to contemporary Islamic governance.

A Rights-Based Model for Doctrinal Opposition in Islamic Governance

A rights-based model for doctrinal opposition in Islamic governance emerges from the intersection of classical jurisprudence, constitutional commitments, ethical political theory, and national security considerations. This model does not treat doctrinal dissent as a threat by default but begins from the foundational Islamic principle that belief cannot be coerced. The Qur'anic rejection of compulsion establishes inner conviction as an inviolable domain, and any rights-based framework must therefore begin by recognizing the sanctity of personal belief and the inherent dignity of the individual (4). Classical jurists consistently upheld this boundary, with al-Hilli emphasizing that mere doctrinal error or internal dissent does not justify government intervention or punitive action (5). A rights-based model, therefore, rests on the prioritization of conscience, ensuring that doctrinal opposition is addressed only when it intersects with demonstrable harm.

Central to this model is the distinction between belief and behavior. Islamic jurisprudence has long asserted that doctrinal deviation becomes actionable only when it manifests in actions that threaten social order or communal integrity. Al-Bahuti articulated this principle by arguing that internal belief remains the exclusive domain of the individual, while public acts of deception, manipulation, or incitement linked to doctrinal content may fall under the jurisdiction of the Islamic state (6). This balance ensures that doctrinal opponents are granted full protections—including safety, property rights, and dignified treatment—unless their beliefs translate into harmful conduct. Error in belief is handled through dialogue and education, a principle reflected in the approach of al-Amili, who emphasized engagement and clarification before any punitive measures are considered (2). This distinction between belief and harmful behavior lies at the heart of any rights-based model and prevents the conflation of peaceful dissent with active hostility.

A rights-based approach also incorporates procedural justice as a core mechanism for protecting doctrinal opponents. Contemporary legal analysis, such as that offered by Fathi, highlights that strong procedural safeguards—including the requirement of explicit, intentional, and publicly verifiable evidence—are essential to prevent wrongful accusations of doctrinal deviance (16). Al-Khoei similarly stressed that accusations related to apostasy or doctrinal subversion require exceptional clarity, as such charges carry significant consequences and

risk being misused for political purposes (21). By embedding robust procedural protections into the governance framework, the model ensures that doctrinal opponents are insulated from arbitrary detention, forced confessions, or politically motivated prosecutions. These safeguards uphold the principle that doctrinal matters require rigorous evidentiary standards rooted in justice, not suspicion.

Respect for human dignity represents another foundational pillar of this rights-based model. Islamic political ethics require that all individuals—including those with doctrinal differences—be treated with fairness, humility, and restraint. Na'ini argued that the legitimacy of Islamic governance depends on ethical conduct and the avoidance of tyranny, making the dignified treatment of dissenters an essential component of just leadership (13). Jawadi Amoli likewise insisted that ethical governance demands respectful dialogue with doctrinal opponents, as dignity is not contingent upon doctrinal conformity but grounded in the intrinsic value of every individual (14). These perspectives reinforce that doctrinal opponents, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, heterodox or minority, possess inherent rights that must be upheld regardless of their beliefs.

The rights of religious minorities form a significant portion of this model, reflecting the classical dhimma framework. Scholars such as al-Mamqani emphasized that religious minorities living under Islamic governance are entitled to legal protection, autonomy in personal religious affairs, and security of life and property as long as they abide by societal obligations and refrain from hostility (10). Al-Karaki reinforced that this protected status is not an act of political tolerance but a religious and ethical obligation derived from Islamic legal and moral principles (9). A rights-based model thus incorporates the longstanding Islamic tradition of religious pluralism, ensuring that doctrinal difference within non-Muslim communities does not undermine their legal or social protections.

A critical component of this model lies in distinguishing doctrinal dissent from doctrinal subversion. Modern security theories, particularly those advanced by Buzan, recognize that societal security includes the protection of communal identity and shared moral frameworks (11). When doctrinal movements actively seek to undermine the identity of the Islamic state through deception, manipulation, or foreign-backed ideological penetration, they become threats not because of their beliefs but because of their methods and intentions. Mandel supports this view, noting that ideological subversion constitutes a form of aggression that states must counter while maintaining civil liberties (12). The rights-based model does not ignore such threats but insists that they be addressed through targeted, proportionate, and evidence-based legal measures. This perspective aligns with classical jurisprudence, where harmful doctrinal activity was regulated under categories such as *baghy* and *ifsad fi al-ard*, but peaceful doctrinal difference remained protected.

Historical precedents from the governance of Imam Ali provide practical grounding for this model. Ali Khani's analysis shows that Imam Ali allowed extremist doctrinal opponents such as the Kharijites to express their beliefs freely, intervening only when their dissent escalated into violence (22). This precedent reinforces the rights-based distinction between peaceful dissent and harmful rebellion. Imam Ali's refusal to punish mere belief and his commitment to dialogue and fairness illustrate that early Islamic governance operated on principles consistent with modern rights-based concepts. Imam Ali's model also emphasizes that the state's response must always be proportionate and oriented toward social harmony rather than doctrinal uniformity.

A rights-based model additionally requires mechanisms for restitution and accountability. Khaghani Esfahani emphasizes that Islamic law obligates the state to provide compensation to individuals wrongfully harmed through legal error or administrative misuse of authority (17). This principle prevents doctrinal regulation from becoming an instrument of oppression and ensures that the state remains accountable for violations. It aligns with the ethical

insistence found in al-Hilli's and al-Mamqani's works that justice must be upheld even when dealing with those whose beliefs diverge from mainstream doctrine (5, 10). By embedding accountability into the governance structure, the model safeguards the rights of doctrinal opponents and strengthens political legitimacy.

Finally, this model recognizes the importance of regulating public space while safeguarding private belief. Ansari Lari's analysis highlights that legal frameworks governing public expression aim to prevent incitement and social disruption while ensuring that peaceful doctrinal expression remains protected (8). Al-Juba'i and al-Amili similarly argued in classical jurisprudence that public doctrinal activities must be regulated when they involve manipulation or intention to destabilize society (2, 3). These insights allow the rights-based model to distinguish between harmful doctrinal activism and legitimate dissent expressed responsibly in the public sphere.

Taken together, a rights-based model for doctrinal opposition in Islamic governance integrates ethical foundations, classical jurisprudence, procedural safeguards, historical precedent, and contemporary security insights. It ensures that doctrinal opponents retain the full spectrum of rights—life, dignity, property, due process, private belief, religious autonomy, and protection from wrongful harm—while empowering the state to intervene only when doctrinal activity produces tangible threats to communal stability.

Conclusion

The examination of doctrinal opposition in Islamic governance reveals a complex and deeply rooted intellectual tradition that brings together theological principles, legal reasoning, historical precedent, and contemporary governance needs. At the heart of this tradition lies a commitment to distinguishing between belief and behavior, ensuring that internal conviction remains inviolable even as the state addresses actions that may destabilize society or threaten communal integrity. This foundational separation allows Islamic governance to uphold the sanctity of conscience while also fulfilling its obligation to preserve order, justice, and social cohesion. The discussions throughout this study have shown that doctrinal dissent is not inherently a threat but becomes one only when linked to actions that signal intent to harm, deceive, manipulate, or incite rebellion. Such an approach prevents the criminalization of mere belief and ensures that the state's responses remain targeted, ethical, and proportionate.

The typology developed here demonstrates that doctrinal opponents exist along a spectrum, ranging from peaceful dissenters and intellectual heterodox groups to organized doctrinal movements that actively challenge the stability of the Islamic state. Recognizing these distinctions is necessary for protecting legitimate forms of dissent and preventing misuse of authority. Islamic jurisprudence has long made these differentiations, and later political theorists and legal scholars have reaffirmed them. By identifying these categories—peaceful doctrinal opponents, heterodox thinkers, protected religious minorities, apostates, deviant sects, and subversive doctrinal movements—the framework developed in this study provides a clear guide for governance. This helps avoid simplistic or harmful interpretations that conflate disagreement with hostility or dissent with rebellion.

Historical precedents, particularly the governance of Imam Ali and Imam Hasan, demonstrate how early Islamic leadership navigated doctrinal dissent with exceptional restraint and fairness. Their practices highlight a consistent pattern: allowing full freedom of belief and peaceful expression while intervening firmly only when dissent escalated into violent or destabilizing behavior. These precedents illustrate a model of governance rooted not in coercion but in dialogue, ethical persuasion, and proportionality. They show that Islamic political leadership has always possessed a capacity for tolerance, patience, and negotiation even under conditions of intense doctrinal and political

disagreement. By turning to these examples, contemporary Islamic governments can find models for engaging with doctrinal opponents in ways that preserve both justice and stability.

The rights-based model proposed in this study draws from classical jurisprudence, modern constitutional commitments, and principles of ethical governance. It affirms that doctrinal opponents retain core rights—including the right to life, dignity, property, due process, and private religious belief—regardless of their doctrinal positions. It emphasizes procedural justice as a crucial safeguard that prevents the misuse of doctrinal accusations for political purposes. It also stresses the importance of proportionality, ensuring that the state distinguishes between harmful doctrinal conduct and peaceful doctrinal dissent. By grounding regulation in evidence-based assessment, the model seeks to prevent arbitrary action and preserve the integrity of the legal system.

At the same time, the model recognizes that social order and national stability require reasonable limits on doctrinal activities that manifest in harmful or hostile ways. It places importance on regulating public expressions that intentionally mislead, provoke, or destabilize society, while ensuring that private belief and responsible public expression remain protected. It also acknowledges the need for mechanisms of accountability and compensation for those harmed by wrongful state action, reinforcing that justice must be upheld even when dealing with dissenters.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that Islamic governance possesses a rich and sophisticated framework for managing doctrinal diversity. Rather than viewing doctrinal opponents as monolithic enemies, Islamic law and political ethics provide tools for distinguishing between legitimate dissent and harmful subversion. The integration of historical precedent, legal principles, and ethical commitments reveals a governance model that is not only rooted in Islamic tradition but also responsive to contemporary societal needs. Such a framework is capable of both protecting individual rights and preserving the integrity of the Islamic state.

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All authors equally contributed to this study.

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