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Explaining the Status of Political Opponents in the Islamic Government Through the Recognition of Their Rights

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the status, rights, and legal-religious foundations surrounding political and ideological opposition in an Islamic government, drawing on jurisprudential principles, historical precedents, and constitutional interpretations. It argues that Islamic governance does not inherently reject dissent but instead evaluates it through a multilayered framework that distinguishes peaceful critique from destabilizing rebellion and internal belief from harmful public action. By analyzing classical jurisprudence, including distinctions between belief and conduct, as well as modern legal approaches to due process, national security, and media regulation, the study demonstrates that political and ideological opponents occupy a recognized and protected space within Islamic political thought. Historical models—particularly the governance of Imam Ali—serve as foundational examples illustrating tolerance toward critique, the primacy of justice, and the ethical obligation to preserve human dignity even in the presence of disagreement. The article further outlines the rights afforded to opponents, including freedom of expression, participation, belief, conscience, and access to fair legal procedures, while also highlighting the boundaries imposed to prevent harm, sedition, or foreign exploitation. Through this integrated examination, the study shows that Islamic political jurisprudence provides a balanced and coherent system that safeguards legitimate dissent while upholding communal welfare and ethical governance. The findings contribute to contemporary discussions on Islamic political theory, offering a nuanced understanding of how opposition is conceptualized within a governance structure rooted in divine sovereignty and moral accountability.

Keywords: *Islamic government; political opposition; ideological opposition; freedom of belief; Islamic jurisprudence; Imam Ali; due process; national security; public order; rights and governance*

Introduction

The conceptualization of political and ideological opposition within an Islamic governmental system has always represented one of the most intricate and sensitive discussions in the field of Islamic political jurisprudence. In a system where legitimacy is derived not only from popular endorsement but also from divine authority, the very notion of dissent occupies a complex position that demands careful legal and theological examination. The Islamic government is structured upon principles of justice, rational governance, and moral responsibility, which makes the treatment of opposition neither a matter of arbitrary political expediency nor a purely security-driven calculation. Rather, the boundaries of acceptable opposition must be understood against the backdrop of Qur'anic teachings, classical juristic interpretations, constitutional commitments, and the lived historical experiences of Islamic



governance. This complexity becomes evident when examining how scholars have approached themes such as freedom of belief, political participation, national security, and the ethical responsibilities of rulers. Many of these discussions emphasize that the Islamic tradition does not dismiss political plurality or intellectual divergence outright, as demonstrated in classical works like *Al-Mizan* by Tabataba'i that highlight the Qur'anic endorsement of diversity in human convictions (1). At the same time, the tradition introduces clear constraints on actions that jeopardize public security or that undermine the fundamental values upon which the Islamic polity rests, forming a balanced but demanding framework that any modern Islamic government must navigate.

This dynamic tension between rights and responsibility is deeply embedded in the legal and constitutional fabric of contemporary Islamic governance. For instance, the Iranian constitutional system recognizes extensive civil liberties while simultaneously establishing doctrinal boundaries that preserve essential Islamic principles. This duality reflects the broader juristic understanding in works such as *Foundations of Constitutional Law in Islam*, where discussions about sovereignty emphasize that ultimate authority belongs to God even as citizens maintain rights to critique, advise, and supervise political leadership (2). The complexity of opposition becomes more apparent once one considers the jurisprudential distinction between peaceful dissent and destabilizing rebellion. While scholars such as Misbah Yazdi argue that political systems grounded in Islamic principles are obligated to preserve public order and moral foundations, they also emphasize that such preservation must never come at the cost of extinguishing legitimate political participation or silencing constructive criticism (3). The complementarity of security and freedom is therefore not incidental but intrinsic to the Islamic model, where rulers are duty-bound to protect the community while simultaneously ensuring that justice and accountability remain intact.

Historical precedents reinforce this sensitivity. The governance of Imam Ali, for example, is frequently cited in classical and modern scholarship as an exemplar of balancing firmness with openness. Imam Ali's treatment of political opponents demonstrated a commitment to safeguarding social order without categorically criminalizing dissent, and this careful equilibrium is discussed in detail by scholars like Alikhani, who highlights how Imam Ali tolerated even harsh criticism so long as it did not escalate into armed hostility (4). Similar themes appear in Saeedi's analysis, which underscores that the Imam's ethos was rooted in justice and human dignity rather than coercive suppression (5). These historical models illustrate that the foundational figures of Islamic governance engaged with opposition in a manner that acknowledged political difference while firmly confronting violent rebellion. Such precedents are crucial for contemporary interpretation, as they reveal that Islamic political thought has long held space for dissent within ethical and legal parameters. They also demonstrate that the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate opposition is not a modern invention but a deeply entrenched principle that helps maintain both the stability and the moral credibility of an Islamic state.

From a legal perspective, defining the scope of legitimate opposition requires an understanding of the categories established by classical jurisprudence. Terms such as *baghy* (armed rebellion), *moharebeh* (armed hostility), and *ifsad fi al-ard* (corruption on earth) form the backbone of Islamic criminal classifications for acts that threaten social security. The works of jurists like Allamah Hilli in *Qawa'id al-Ahkam* lay out the doctrinal bases for differentiating between mere ideological disagreement and violent insurrection (6). The same distinction is found in the writings of classical authorities like Shahid al-Awwal and Shahid al-Thani, whose discussions on criminal responsibility clarify that spiritual deviation or verbal criticism does not fall under categories of violent crime unless accompanied by specific acts that endanger the public (7, 8). These scholarly contributions show that Islamic jurisprudence is not primarily concerned with suppressing beliefs but with preventing harm, and that ideological dissent remains lawful

unless transformed into actions that endanger the community. The significance of these distinctions becomes even clearer when considering modern analyses, such as Rasekh and Bayat Kemenghi's work on freedom of expression in Iran, which situates contemporary media rights within a framework that respects Islamic values while promoting transparency and public accountability (9).

Security concerns nonetheless shape the contours of acceptable opposition, particularly in an age marked by global geopolitical instability. Scholars in the field of security studies have long recognized the multi-dimensional nature of national security, emphasizing that social, cultural, and political stability are vital components of a functioning state. The work of Abdollah Khani on social and national security illustrates how the breakdown of social cohesion can generate vulnerabilities that hostile elements exploit, making the management of dissent not only a political requirement but a security necessity (10). Similarly, Mandel's foundational discussions on national security articulate how states must balance internal liberties with protective measures that shield essential national interests (11). These theoretical perspectives align with Islamic jurisprudence, where the protection of life, property, and collective welfare is considered a central function of governance. Contemporary political systems must therefore interpret opposition not merely as a legal category but also through the lens of societal stability, ensuring that the rights of individuals do not inadvertently facilitate conditions that threaten the broader community.

The intersection of historical, legal, and security perspectives is also evident in the writings of Mamqani, who argues that Islamic governance relies on a structured system of authority where leadership is entrusted with safeguarding both spiritual and temporal order (12). This authority, however, is not absolute; rather, it is limited by mandates of justice and accountability. Imam Khomeini's theoretical contributions echo this duality, as he maintains that the Islamic ruler possesses delegated authority for managing public affairs but is simultaneously bound to uphold divine law and ensure that citizens' rights are not violated (13). Such a framework demands nuanced distinctions between types of dissent, acknowledging political disagreement while preventing chaos and sedition. The writings of modern jurists like Fathi further highlight the procedural safeguards necessary to prevent abuses of state power, demonstrating how the rights of the accused—whether political opponents or ordinary citizens—must be protected through proper legal channels (14). These legal protections underscore that political opposition cannot be conflated with criminal conduct without established evidence and due process.

Within this intricate landscape, the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate opposition emerges as fundamental to maintaining both justice and stability. Legitimate opposition encompasses peaceful criticism, ideological disagreement, scholarly debate, and political participation, all of which are supported within Islamic governance when conducted within the legal framework. Illegitimate opposition, by contrast, refers to actions that cross the threshold from dissent into active harm, such as armed rebellion, violent agitation, foreign collusion, or intentional destabilization. The scholarship of Behrooz Lak and Kafili illustrates how Islamic governments must distinguish carefully between these categories, promoting constructive engagement while deterring actions that undermine collective welfare (15). This distinction ensures that the government remains open to reform and critique while maintaining the authority necessary to prevent disorder. It also preserves the legitimacy of political institutions, as a system that criminalizes all forms of dissent inevitably erodes its moral foundations and alienates its citizenry.

The historical and contemporary debates surrounding ideological disagreement further illuminate how Islamic systems navigate the boundaries of acceptable belief. Tabataba'i's exegetical works emphasize that human diversity—including diversity of belief—is a divinely ordained reality, and that coercion in matters of faith contradicts both Qur'anic teachings and the prophetic model (1). Naraqi's writings similarly explore the ethical dimensions of

governance, arguing that rulers must distinguish between harmful rebellion and personal belief, ensuring that ideological plurality is not suppressed unjustly (16). These views resonate with contemporary jurisprudential arguments that define apostasy, heterodoxy, and religious divergence through nuanced criteria rather than through blunt punitive measures. In modern society, such distinctions are essential for maintaining social harmony, enabling states to avoid unnecessary conflict without compromising ethical principles.

The contemporary global context adds further urgency to these discussions. Brzezinski's reflections on geopolitical power shifts indicate that modern states operate in an environment where ideological conflicts and political dissent can rapidly intersect with international tensions (17). This reality requires Islamic governments to develop frameworks that address political and ideological opposition not only through theological and legal reasoning but also through strategic awareness. The legal apparatus must therefore respond to dissent with precision, distinguishing between peaceful objection, ideological exploration, and acts that threaten national security. Scholars like Khoei, in analyzing foundational legal maxims, stress that governmental authority must be exercised with accuracy and restraint, ensuring that coercive powers are used only when justified by clear jurisprudential evidence (18).

Given these complex dynamics, the present article aims to examine the status of political and ideological opponents in the Islamic government through a comprehensive analysis of rights, constraints, and historical precedents. The goal is to clarify how Islamic jurisprudence, constitutional law, and security considerations jointly shape the framework through which opposition is classified, tolerated, or restricted. By analyzing classical sources, constitutional interpretations, and contemporary legal scholarship, the study seeks to provide a coherent understanding of how legitimate dissent is accommodated while harmful rebellion is appropriately regulated. The central thesis of the article is that an Islamic government, when operating within its authentic legal and ethical principles, upholds a structured but meaningful space for political and ideological opposition, defining its limits based on the overarching imperatives of justice, public welfare, and security rather than arbitrary political control.

Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Background

The conceptual foundations and theoretical background surrounding political and ideological opposition in an Islamic governmental framework rest upon a constellation of interrelated legal, theological, and political constructs. These constructs form the intellectual architecture that shapes how dissent is defined, interpreted, and regulated in a system grounded in divine sovereignty. An essential starting point is the understanding of freedom of belief and diversity of religious conviction, which plays a pivotal role in determining the boundaries of acceptable ideological plurality. In classical Islamic exegesis, the recognition of human intellectual diversity is emphasised repeatedly, most notably in the interpretive works of scholars such as Tabataba'i, who underscores that the Qur'anic worldview does not aim to abolish ideological divergence but to guide it within a framework of moral accountability (1). This foundational premise influences the broader legal tradition by establishing that ideological difference is a natural, and at times even constructive, aspect of human society. Naraqi's ethical writings build upon this by asserting that spiritual and intellectual distinctions should not be conflated with political hostility, thus requiring a nuanced differentiation between personal belief and subversive action (16). These perspectives form the philosophical basis upon which later jurists construct detailed categories of permissible and impermissible dissent.

The legal dimension of this foundation emerges most clearly in the corpus of Islamic jurisprudence, where scholars have systematically articulated the principles of political authority and the parameters of legitimate

governance. In classical works such as *Qawa'id al-Ahkam*, Allamah Hilli presents governance as a trust bound by obligations of justice, public welfare, and adherence to divine law (6). The jurist's responsibility to uphold these obligations reflects an understanding that governance is not an autonomous political force but a moral and legal institution rooted in accountability. This perspective is echoed in the writings of Mamqani, who describes the Islamic political structure as one where authority is legitimised by both divine mandate and the ruler's commitment to ethical stewardship (12). Such analyses clarify that the concept of sovereignty in Islamic governance—often encapsulated in the term *wilayah*—is far removed from absolute or authoritarian rule; instead, it situates political authority within a carefully regulated environment of responsibility and oversight. Imam Khomeini similarly asserts that while the Islamic ruler possesses authority to manage the affairs of the community, this authority remains circumscribed by the necessity to preserve justice, protect public welfare, and avoid infringement upon legitimate rights (13). These foundational texts collectively demonstrate that Islamic political authority exists within an intricate framework of constraints that shape how both political action and opposition must be understood.

Freedom of expression, political rights, and civil liberties constitute another essential layer of the conceptual background, providing the mechanisms by which dissent is articulated within society. Jurists and legal scholars have long argued that without avenues for critique and participation, governance loses its legitimacy and its capacity for self-correction. In the comparative constitutional studies of Sobhani Tabrizi, political freedoms in Islamic governance are presented as essential instruments for ensuring accountability and preventing tyranny, even while operating within an Islamic normative structure (19). These freedoms include the right to express criticism, the right to advise the ruler, and the right to engage in public debate, all of which are central to sustaining a morally sound political community. Rasekh and Bayat Kemenghi emphasize that in the realm of media and expression, even modern constraints imposed for public welfare must be balanced with the constitutional guarantees of openness and transparency (9). Their analysis highlights that laws governing expression cannot be applied in a way that suppresses legitimate critique or masks governmental shortcomings. Similarly, Fathi's detailed examination of procedural rights in the criminal justice system underscores that legal institutions must safeguard the rights of individuals—including political opponents—to ensure that accusations of subversion or rebellion are not misused for political ends (14). These contributions illuminate the reality that political dissent cannot be divorced from broader principles of civil liberties and procedural justice, both of which are enshrined in Islamic governance as mandatory elements of a just society.

National security considerations play an equally central role in shaping the theoretical understanding of political and ideological opposition. In the modern context, national security is not limited to military defence but encompasses social stability, cultural coherence, and economic resilience. Scholars like Abdollah Khani argue that social security—rooted in strong community bonds, equitable access to public resources, and the absence of corruption—is the bedrock upon which national security rests (10). Without such foundations, societies become vulnerable to internal fragmentation and external manipulation, both of which magnify the potential risks posed by destabilizing forms of opposition. Mandel's influential work on the meaning of national security reinforces this multi-dimensional understanding, emphasizing that a state's ability to protect itself depends on its capacity to maintain internal harmony while managing external threats (11). Brzezinski's broader geopolitical analyses similarly illustrate that ideological conflict, political dissatisfaction, and social unrest can become entry points for foreign interference when national cohesion is weak (17). In light of these perspectives, Islamic political theory integrates security considerations into the evaluation of dissent by acknowledging that not all opposition carries the same potential for

harm. Peaceful dissent may contribute positively to institutional refinement, whereas organized sedition, violent rebellion, or foreign-backed ideological campaigns may jeopardize the stability of the entire polity. These security-based distinctions are crucial for understanding why Islamic law treats certain actions—such as *baghy* or *moharebeh*—as crimes, while protecting the right to critique or disagree peacefully.

Historical precedents further enrich the conceptual understanding of opposition by offering concrete examples of how early Islamic governance navigated tensions between dissent and security. The leadership of Imam Ali is frequently invoked in contemporary scholarship because it provides a nuanced model of engagement with political opposition. Saeedi's examination of Imam Ali's approach highlights that he maintained a firm distinction between verbal criticism and armed rebellion, showing restraint towards the former while confronting the latter only when it threatened social order (5). Alikhani's historical analysis of the same period elaborates on how Imam Ali fostered an environment where political dispute could be expressed openly, believing that suppression of dissent would erode the moral foundations of the state (4). These early precedents are essential to the theoretical background because they demonstrate the depth of Islamic political tolerance when confronted with non-violent dissent. They also illustrate that legitimacy in Islamic governance is tied not only to legality but to ethical integrity, a concept that continues to influence contemporary legal interpretations.

The classical juristic categorization of opposition into legitimate and illegitimate forms serves as another critical component of the conceptual foundation. Works by jurists such as Shahid al-Awwal and Shahid al-Thani provide some of the earliest systematic distinctions between types of dissent, categorizing actions based on their intent, methods, and consequences (7, 8). Their writings explain that verbal opposition, intellectual disagreement, and peaceful activism are not only permissible but often necessary for ensuring governmental accountability. Conversely, they clarify that violent uprisings, coercive intimidation, or actions that threaten communal welfare fall under the domain of prohibited rebellion. Khoei's analysis of legal maxims deepens this juristic framework by illustrating how principles of harm prevention and public welfare govern legal interpretation, making it impermissible for rulers to classify all forms of dissent as rebellion simply for political convenience (18). These jurisprudential distinctions establish a doctrinal foundation that prevents the conflation of ideological diversity with criminal activity.

In modern times, Islamic political theorists have expanded upon these classical foundations to address contemporary political realities. Misbah Yazdi emphasizes that political authority in Islam is inseparable from the preservation of justice and moral rectitude, meaning that rulers must tolerate non-threatening dissent while combating activities that genuinely endanger societal stability (3). Javadi Amoli's contributions to the discourse on guardianship and governance similarly stress that accountability forms an intrinsic part of Islamic leadership, and that political authority is legitimate only when exercised in accordance with ethical principles and divine law (20). These theoretical works make it clear that Islamic governance is not merely a system of hierarchical control but an intricate structure grounded in justice, consultation, and public welfare. They affirm that opposition is not inherently incompatible with Islamic governance; rather, its legitimacy depends on its adherence to non-violence, ethical conduct, and the common good.

The academic discourse on political opposition within Islamic systems must also consider the role of media, communication, and public participation. Behrooz Lak and Kafili's analysis of governance in the contemporary Islamic Republic demonstrates that political stability is reinforced when governments create structured channels for dissent, enabling citizens to express concerns without fear of reprisal (15). Their findings suggest that the absence of such channels increases the likelihood that dissent will move outside legal boundaries, potentially escalating into

forms that threaten security or social cohesion. Razmarā's examination of public law and fundamental freedoms further indicates that constitutional protections—such as freedom of assembly, political participation, and representation—function as stabilizing mechanisms, reducing the friction between authorities and citizens by institutionalizing the right to opposition (21). These modern perspectives confirm that political participation is not only a democratic virtue but also an Islamic necessity grounded in historical and juristic tradition.

The integration of all these conceptual dimensions reveals that political and ideological opposition in an Islamic governmental system is best understood through a holistic theory that incorporates divine sovereignty, legal accountability, historical precedent, ethical reasoning, and national security considerations. Each component clarifies an essential aspect of how dissent can be accommodated, regulated, or restricted. The theoretical background that emerges from this synthesis illustrates that Islamic governance is neither permissive of anarchic political behavior nor supportive of unchecked authoritarian suppression. Instead, it situates opposition within a framework where legitimate forms of dissent are protected for the sake of justice and communal welfare, while illegitimate forms are restricted to preserve social order and national security.

Modalities of Opposition in an Islamic Government

The modalities of opposition in an Islamic government encompass a wide spectrum of behaviors, attitudes, and actions that range from peaceful ideological disagreement to aggressive forms of rebellion that threaten public order and national security. Understanding these modalities requires examining how Islamic jurisprudence, constitutional principles, and political theory classify the various forms of dissent according to their nature, intent, and consequences. The Islamic legal tradition has long distinguished between opposition that contributes to the intellectual vitality and ethical refinement of the society and opposition that endangers the stability and moral integrity of the political order. In this sense, the modes of opposition are not merely sociopolitical phenomena but also deeply legal categories rooted in classical jurisprudence and historical experience. The different categories of opposition must therefore be analyzed in light of the doctrinal and legal frameworks that guide Islamic governance, frameworks articulated by foundational scholars such as Allamah Hilli in *Qawa'id al-Ahkam* who situates the legitimacy of opposition within broader principles of public welfare and justice (6). His discussions illuminate how jurisprudence aims to protect the community from harmful forms of dissent while simultaneously safeguarding the rights of individuals to express concerns and disagreements.

A key modality of opposition in Islamic governance is peaceful political dissent, a form of opposition that is not only tolerated but often encouraged within the Islamic framework. Historical sources highlight that verbal criticism, intellectual debate, and non-violent resistance were widely accepted within early Islamic governance. The model of Imam Ali's leadership is frequently referenced by modern scholars such as Alikhani, who emphasizes that Imam Ali allowed extensive room for dissenting voices, even when those voices were sharply critical of his rule (4). This permissive stance was grounded in the belief that governance must remain accountable to moral principles, and constructive criticism is a vital means by which rulers are reminded of their obligations. Saeedi's analysis similarly underscores that Imam Ali did not equate opposition with treason unless it crossed the boundary into armed conflict, reflecting an understanding that political disagreement is a natural component of social life (5). These examples illustrate that peaceful opposition is a legitimate modality within Islamic governance and is essential for fostering transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership. Contemporary jurists like Sobhani Tabrizi argue that such peaceful political engagement is integral to constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression and political

participation, which are rooted firmly in both Islamic teachings and modern legal principles (19). This alignment between historical precedent and contemporary interpretation demonstrates the enduring legitimacy of peaceful dissent in Islamic governance.

However, Islamic jurisprudence also recognizes more dangerous modalities of opposition that go beyond intellectual or political disagreement and enter the realm of active threat to collective welfare. One such category is *baghy*, typically understood as armed rebellion against legitimate authority. Classical jurists developed sophisticated criteria for identifying *baghy*, distinguishing it from other forms of dissent based on its organized, violent nature. Works by Shahid al-Awwal and Shahid al-Thani delve into the legal nuances of rebellion, emphasizing that *baghy* involves organized military resistance aimed at destabilizing the political order (7, 8). Their discussions highlight that the presence of force and intent to challenge legitimate authority are essential conditions for categorizing an act as rebellion. Importantly, these scholars note that even in cases of *baghy*, Islamic law prescribes measured responses that prioritize restoration of order and reconciliation over punitive excess. Such jurisprudential insights demonstrate that the legal treatment of rebellion in Islam is governed by principles of justice and proportionality. Contemporary interpretations, drawing upon the jurisprudence of scholars like Khoei, reinforce these distinctions by asserting that legal classification must be carefully grounded in evidence and intent, preventing the misuse of rebellion accusations for political suppression (18). These doctrinal safeguards underscore that while violent opposition poses a serious threat, the state's response must remain disciplined and legally justified.

Closely related to *baghy* is the crime of *moharebeh*, which involves acts of armed hostility aimed at spreading fear, chaos, or insecurity. The legal distinction between *baghy* and *moharebeh* is subtle yet significant: while *baghy* refers to organized armed rebellion against the state, *moharebeh* focuses on individuals or groups who engage in acts of violence that terrorize the public without necessarily targeting the governing authority directly. Classical jurists explain that *moharebeh* involves acts such as highway robbery or violent intimidation that undermine social order, and Bahuti's interpretation of the concept emphasizes that such acts constitute a direct assault on public safety (22). Because *moharebeh* threatens the lives and property of citizens, Islamic jurisprudence treats it as a grave offense requiring decisive intervention. The distinction between these modalities allows the legal system to respond appropriately based on the nature of the threat—differentiating between rebellion, terrorism, and criminal violence. Misbah Yazdi's contemporary analysis of Islamic political authority highlights that the preservation of social security is a fundamental responsibility of the Islamic state, making the classification and legal treatment of violent acts essential for safeguarding the community (3). These distinctions ensure that the state does not conflate peaceful dissent with violent hostility, a principle crucial to preserving both justice and stability.

A further modality of opposition, one heavily scrutinized in both classical and modern contexts, is ideological deviation or dissent that intersects with sensitive religious boundaries. While intellectual disagreement is considered permissible, particularly in contexts of scholarly debate, Islamic jurisprudence recognizes that certain forms of ideological opposition may pose risks when they involve active attempts to undermine the religious foundations of the society. Tabataba'i's exegetical writings acknowledge that ideological plurality is a natural human condition but emphasize that deliberate efforts to erode fundamental Islamic values fall into a different category (1). Such distinctions underpin the jurisprudential treatment of offenses like apostasy when linked to public disorder or sedition. The theoretical writings of Javadi Amoli further clarify that ideological opposition must be evaluated not simply by its content but by its potential to affect public welfare and moral order (20). He argues that ideological

rebellion becomes criminal only when it threatens to destabilize social cohesion. The complexity of this modality lies in balancing intellectual freedom with communal integrity, an issue that jurists have debated for centuries.

Modern scholarship contributes additional nuance to the understanding of ideological opposition by examining its relationship with constitutional rights, media freedom, and political participation. Behroozi Lak and Kafili emphasize that modern Islamic governments must distinguish carefully between intellectual dissent expressed through lawful channels and covert ideological campaigns aimed at inciting rebellion or undermining national unity (15). Razmarā extends this analysis to the legal domain by demonstrating how constitutional protections of expression and association regulate ideological opposition while ensuring that destabilizing forms of dissent remain subject to legal scrutiny (21). These interpretations highlight that ideological opposition is not inherently problematic; rather, its legitimacy depends on its adherence to lawful expression and its separation from activities that threaten public order. Fathi's analysis of due process protections emphasizes that accusations of ideological subversion must be accompanied by clear evidence and subject to fair trial standards, preventing the misuse of such accusations to silence legitimate critique (14). These modern perspectives reflect a continuation of the classical juristic emphasis on justice, harm prevention, and ethical governance.

National security frameworks further shape the modalities of opposition in Islamic governance by providing criteria for distinguishing between acceptable dissent and harmful activities that compromise state stability. Abdollah Khani's concept of social and national security underscores that threats to cohesion, whether arising from political agitation, ideological extremism, or socioeconomic inequality, can weaken the foundations of the state (10). His work suggests that opposition must be assessed not only in terms of legal categories but also in terms of its sociopolitical consequences. This holistic approach aligns with Mandel's comprehensive definition of national security, which highlights the interconnectedness of political stability, economic resilience, and social harmony (11). Brzezinski's geopolitical analyses further illuminate how external actors may exploit internal dissent to destabilize states, making it essential for Islamic governments to evaluate opposition within a global context (17). These insights demonstrate that understanding the modalities of opposition requires attentiveness not only to jurisprudential categories but also to broader security dynamics.

At the intersection of legal and security-oriented modalities lies the category of sedition, a form of opposition that involves coordinated efforts to undermine the state from within. Unlike spontaneous dissent or individual criticism, sedition typically involves collective planning, dissemination of propaganda, or coordination with external actors. Shahid al-Thani's discussions on public disorder illuminate how acts of sedition differ from personal dissent by posing systemic risks to governance (7). In modern contexts, sedition may manifest through the formation of clandestine groups, dissemination of destabilizing misinformation, or collaboration with hostile foreign powers. Khoei's analysis underscores that such activities fall squarely within the realm of prohibited opposition because they directly threaten the integrity of the state (18). Modern interpretations by Rasekh and Bayat Kemenghi highlight the role of media in both fostering constructive debate and being misused for seditious purposes, illustrating the need for balanced regulation (9). These analyses collectively emphasize that sedition is distinct from legitimate opposition due to its destabilizing intent and coordinated nature.

A further modality of opposition concerns acts that involve direct threats to life, property, or public facilities, which Islamic jurisprudence classifies under violent criminal conduct rather than political dissent. Bahuti's interpretation of offenses involving threats, intimidation, or endangerment of public spaces places such acts squarely within the category of prohibited behavior that demands decisive intervention (22). The rationale behind this classification is

grounded in principles of harm prevention and community protection, which form core values in Islamic legal theory. Misbah Yazdi reinforces this view by stating that the Islamic state has a moral and legal duty to protect public welfare from acts of violence or intimidation that undermine social peace (3). The distinction between these violent acts and peaceful political dissent is essential for preventing the misuse of criminal classifications to suppress legitimate criticism.

The modality of foreign-backed opposition, whether through espionage, ideological infiltration, or collaboration with hostile states, represents another important category of dissent in Islamic political theory. Contemporary analyses by scholars like Brzezinski highlight that modern geopolitical realities involve constant strategic competition, making internal cohesion a critical factor in national resilience (17). In Islamic jurisprudence, foreign-backed opposition is treated with particular concern because it introduces external elements that threaten the autonomy and stability of the political community. Mandates for protecting national sovereignty, as discussed by Mandel, emphasize that states must maintain vigilance against foreign interference while simultaneously upholding internal justice and fairness (11). Razmarā's legal analysis suggests that constitutional frameworks must regulate interactions with foreign entities to prevent the exploitation of internal dissent for external agendas (21). These concerns reflect the recognition that while legitimate internal opposition contributes to good governance, opposition manipulated by foreign interests threatens the independence and integrity of the state.

In examining these diverse modalities, it becomes clear that Islamic governance distinguishes opposition not by its mere existence but by its impact, intent, and method. Peaceful political dissent is not only tolerated but integral to maintaining a just and accountable government, as reflected in both classical sources and modern constitutional scholarship. Violent rebellion, terrorism, and sedition represent modalities of opposition that threaten the core functions of governance and require decisive legal responses grounded in principles of justice and proportionality. Ideological disagreement occupies a middle ground, requiring careful assessment to ensure that intellectual freedom is preserved without allowing harmful destabilization. Foreign-backed opposition introduces additional complexities due to its potential to undermine national sovereignty and public order. Through these distinctions, Islamic political and legal theory demonstrates a sophisticated framework for assessing and responding to opposition, one that seeks to balance the imperatives of justice, stability, freedom, and security.

Rights of Political Opponents in an Islamic Government

The rights of political opponents in an Islamic government are rooted in a complex interplay between jurisprudential principles, historical precedents, constitutional guarantees, and the overarching ethical commitments that define Islamic governance. These rights do not emerge from secular liberal theories of political pluralism, but from the deeply embedded Islamic insistence on justice, human dignity, and accountable governance. Islamic political thought has long acknowledged the inevitability of political disagreement within society, and scholars have developed frameworks that distinguish constructive dissent from destructive rebellion. This distinction forms the conceptual foundation upon which rights of political opponents are recognized and legally protected. Classical jurists such as Allamah Hilli have emphasized in works like *Qawa'id al-Ahkam* that political authority in Islam is bound by the moral obligation to uphold justice and maintain public welfare, and these obligations necessarily extend to how rulers treat their critics (6). Thus, the Islamic legal tradition does not regard opposition as inherently illegitimate; rather, it evaluates political dissent through the lens of the harm principle, ensuring that protected rights are upheld so long as dissent does not cross into violence, sedition, or destabilization of the social order.

One of the most fundamental rights enjoyed by political opponents in an Islamic government is the right to free expression within the limits of public order and moral integrity. Historical examples offer strong support for this right. Scholars such as Saeedi show that Imam Ali tolerated harsh verbal criticism from political opponents and refused to suppress dissent that remained peaceful, even when such critiques questioned his leadership or decisions (5). Alikhani's analysis of Imam Ali's governance similarly highlights that the fourth caliph refrained from coercive measures against critics unless their actions posed a genuine threat to public safety or unity (4). These historical precedents are not incidental; they reflect a foundational commitment to open discourse within Islamic governance. The Qur'anic emphasis on consultation (*shura*) and admonition further reinforces the legitimacy of political dialogue and critique. Contemporary scholars such as Sobhani Tabrizi link these practices to modern constitutional rights, arguing that freedom of political expression in Islamic political systems stems not from imported models but from indigenous Islamic teachings that value moral discourse and accountability (19). Thus, peaceful political expression stands as a protected right rooted in both historical practice and doctrinal tradition.

Closely connected to the right of expression is the right to political participation, which includes the ability of opponents to engage in political decision-making, critique public policies, and advocate for alternative political visions. Islamic political theory does not restrict participation to those who affirm the ruling authority; instead, it affirms the duty of all citizens to contribute to public welfare and governance. Javadi Amoli's writings on guardianship and leadership underline that legitimate governance depends on the active moral engagement of the community, including those who disagree with the ruling authority (20). In this framework, opponents possess not only the right but also the responsibility to articulate their concerns for the refinement of governance. Misbah Yazdi similarly stresses that the Islamic state cannot fulfill its mission without accommodating internal critique, because the moral integrity of political authority relies on its responsiveness to the needs and objections of the people (3). These perspectives show that political opponents play a vital role in ensuring the moral accountability of rulers and that their participation is an essential feature of a just Islamic government.

The right to legal protection and due process constitutes another essential safeguard for political opponents in an Islamic state. Islamic jurisprudence places a strong emphasis on procedural justice, ensuring that accusations, including those related to political dissent, are subject to rigorous standards of evidence and fair trial guarantees. Fathi's comprehensive work on criminal procedure in Iran stresses that constitutional and legal protections prevent arbitrary arrests or prosecutions based on political motives (14). He demonstrates that the rights of the accused—whether ordinary citizens or political opponents—include the right to be informed of charges, the right to legal representation, and the right to defend oneself in a fair judicial setting. These principles are deeply embedded in Islamic legal theory, where the sanctity of rights cannot be violated without compelling evidence. The jurisprudential contributions of Khoei reinforce this point by highlighting the necessity of applying legal maxims and evidentiary rules with precision, ensuring that political crimes are not fabricated or misclassified based on subjective interpretations (18). In this regard, political opponents enjoy robust protections against arbitrary state action, protections that are foundational to Islamic conceptions of justice.

Even when political opponents engage in public rallies, protests, or collective political movements, Islamic governance provides guidelines that protect their rights as long as such activities remain peaceful and lawful. Historical interpretations suggest that public gatherings, political assemblies, and advisory councils have long served as platforms for expressing criticism within Islamic societies. Modern legal scholars such as Razmarā argue that contemporary constitutions inspired by Islamic principles safeguard rights such as freedom of assembly and

association because these rights contribute to social vitality, political participation, and the peaceful articulation of grievances (21). Behroozi Lak and Kafili further contend that when governments establish transparent mechanisms for collective political expression, the likelihood of social unrest decreases, and political opponents are more likely to pursue their goals through institutional rather than confrontational means (15). These analyses affirm the principle that peaceful collective political action is a legitimate modality of opposition and that Islamic governments must facilitate such participation rather than suppress it.

A significant component of political opponents' rights also concerns their protection against unjust or excessive force. Islamic legal tradition mandates that rulers uphold proportionality and refrain from punitive measures that exceed what is necessary to preserve public welfare. The writings of classical jurists demonstrate that force may only be used against political opponents when they take up arms or engage in violent subversion. Shahid al-Awwal and Shahid al-Thani both articulate that peaceful dissent must never be treated as rebellion and that measures such as arrest, coercion, or violence are prohibited unless dissent escalates into threatening behavior (7, 8). Their discussions reveal a sophisticated legal framework that seeks to prevent unjust criminalization of political opponents. Contemporary scholars like Khomeini reaffirm these principles by emphasizing that the Islamic ruler must exercise restraint and avoid reactions based on personal animosity, focusing instead on the protection of the public welfare (13). These normative commitments illustrate that political opponents enjoy a level of immunity from government force as long as their actions remain within peaceful, lawful bounds.

The protection of political opponents from accusations of *baghy* or *moharebeh* is another central element of their rights, requiring that the state draw clear distinctions between legitimate dissent and violent rebellion. Given Islamic jurisprudence's strict definitions of *baghy* and *moharebeh*, authorities cannot label political opponents as rebels or hostile militants without substantial evidence of organized or violent intent. Bahuti's interpretation of acts constituting public endangerment illustrates that *moharebeh* is limited to cases where individuals employ force to induce fear or disruption (22). This definition prevents the state from misusing security-related charges to suppress non-violent political critics. Mandates for precision in legal classification are further reinforced by Misbah Yazdi, who argues that the Islamic government's legitimacy is undermined if it employs concepts like rebellion to delegitimize peaceful opposition (3). The works of Abdollah Khani additionally highlight that national security cannot be invoked arbitrarily; instead, claims of security threats must be grounded in objective assessments that distinguish genuine risks from mere political disagreement (10). These interpretations show that political opponents are protected from the misuse of security doctrine and are entitled to fair treatment that respects the legal boundaries of criminal classification.

Another right associated with political opponents in an Islamic government concerns their protection from foreign policy manipulation and coercion. Opposition groups often become targets of foreign powers seeking to exploit internal tensions. Scholars such as Brzezinski highlight how geopolitical actors may use domestic dissent as leverage, turning internal political disagreements into tools of international competition (17). Mandel similarly explains that national security frameworks in modern states must differentiate between legitimate internal opposition and opposition that is co-opted by foreign forces, because the latter threatens state sovereignty (11). Within the Islamic framework, this distinction is essential, as the legitimacy of political opponents must be assessed based on their domestic intentions and behaviors rather than presumed foreign affiliations. Razmarā stresses that constitutional safeguards must ensure political opponents receive protection from wrongful accusations of foreign alignment, which can otherwise be used to silence legitimate dissent (21). These principles ensure that political opposition is evaluated with fairness and that opponents are not unjustly equated with external threats.

Protecting the dignity and reputation of political opponents is also embedded in the Islamic ethical and legal tradition. Islamic jurisprudence prohibits slander, defamation, and personal attacks, and these protections extend to political discourse as well. Naraqi's ethical writings state that rulers must maintain moral conduct even in political conflict, ensuring that opponents are not demeaned or stripped of their human dignity (16). Such ethical constraints reflect Islam's broader commitment to respecting human honor, and they serve as safeguards against the dehumanization of political opponents. The emphasis on preserving dignity is also evident in Khomeini's theoretical works on governance, where he warns that political power must never be used to humiliate critics or violate their spiritual integrity (13). These ethical guidelines highlight that political opponents are entitled not only to legal rights but to moral respect, even when their views challenge the ruling authority.

Media freedom represents another domain in which political opponents enjoy significant rights. The ability to communicate political views, expose governmental shortcomings, and mobilize public opinion is essential for meaningful participation in governance. Rasekh and Bayat Kemenghi's analysis of press law demonstrates that the Islamic legal system, when faithfully applied, protects journalists and political opponents who express criticism within the bounds of public welfare (9). They emphasize that restrictions on the press must be narrowly tailored to prevent harm rather than suppress political dissent. Behrooz Lak and Kafili argue that transparent media environments reduce the likelihood of radicalization and allow political opponents to operate within lawful frameworks (15). In this sense, media rights are inseparable from broader protections afforded to political opponents, forming a central pillar of accountable governance.

Overall, the rights of political opponents in an Islamic government reflect a coherent and multifaceted framework rooted in justice, accountability, and ethical governance. Peaceful political expression, participation, assembly, and critique are protected as essential components of a just Islamic polity. Political opponents enjoy legal safeguards, including due process, protection from arbitrary arrest, and immunity from wrongful classification as rebels or hostile agents. They are entitled to dignified treatment and protection from defamation, and they benefit from constitutional and ethical guarantees that ensure their role in political discourse is recognized and valued. Through this combination of historical precedent, juristic principle, modern constitutional reasoning, and security-based moderation, Islamic governance provides political opponents with a safeguarded but responsible space to articulate dissent while preserving the collective welfare and stability of the community.

Rights of Ideological Opponents in an Islamic Government

The rights of ideological opponents in an Islamic government constitute one of the most nuanced and philosophically complex areas of Islamic political jurisprudence. Unlike political opposition, which focuses on disagreement about governance, policies, or distribution of power, ideological opposition concerns disputes over fundamental beliefs, doctrinal interpretations, and the underlying worldview that shapes public ethics. Islamic governance, grounded in divine sovereignty and a revealed moral order, must confront the challenge of protecting freedom of belief while safeguarding the religious, cultural, and ethical identity of the community. This delicate balance shapes the framework through which the rights of ideological opponents are recognized, regulated, and safeguarded. Foundational Islamic exegesis, such as that of Tabataba'i in his monumental *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, underscores that human beings are endowed with the capacity for free thought and that coercion in matters of belief contradicts the Qur'anic principle that truth must be embraced through conviction rather than compulsion

(1). This exegetical outlook forms the philosophical foundation for acknowledging ideological diversity within an Islamic polity and for delineating the rights of those whose beliefs differ from the dominant theological framework.

One of the primary rights afforded to ideological opponents is the right to internal belief without state intervention, a principle grounded in both Islamic ethical teachings and jurisprudential interpretations. Naraqi's reflections on moral governance emphasize that rulers must distinguish between internal belief, which lies beyond the realm of coercive authority, and outward actions that may harm the community (16). His argument aligns with the broader Islamic legal principle that accountability before God pertains to the inner domain, whereas accountability before the state concerns external actions. This distinction is crucial because it ensures that ideological opponents are not persecuted solely for holding divergent theological views. The protection of personal belief is not merely a concession; it is embedded in Islamic theology, where moral responsibility must derive from free choice. Thus, ideological opponents maintain the intrinsic right to hold beliefs that differ from those of the state, provided such beliefs do not translate into actions that threaten public welfare.

The right to express ideological perspectives within defined ethical boundaries represents another significant freedom for ideological opponents. While Islamic governance emphasizes the importance of preserving public morality and strengthening communal identity, it also recognizes the value of intellectual exchange and doctrinal debate. The jurisprudential insights of Allamah Hilli, articulated in *Qawa'id al-Ahkam*, highlight that scholarly disagreement and interpretive plurality have long existed within Islamic intellectual tradition and that such diversity enriches the pursuit of truth (6). Early Islamic history, characterized by extensive theological debates, further demonstrates that ideological variation was tolerated when expressed respectfully and without inciting social discord. Classical jurists such as Shahid al-Awwal and Shahid al-Thani discuss the limits of acceptable discourse and emphasize that the threshold between lawful expression and punishable deviation lies not in the content of belief itself but in its potential to disrupt social stability (7, 8). Their writings clarify that ideological opponents may articulate differing views so long as they avoid defamation of sacred values, incitement to rebellion, or propagation of ideas that threaten collective identity. These doctrinal protections reflect a sophisticated interplay between intellectual freedom and social responsibility.

The right to due process is also essential in protecting ideological opponents from unjust accusations of heresy, apostasy, or sedition. Islamic law has traditionally placed strict evidentiary requirements on allegations that concern deviations of belief, recognizing the gravity of such accusations and the potential for their misuse. This jurisprudential caution is mirrored in modern legal analyses such as those of Fathi, who underscores that contemporary Iranian criminal procedure requires rigorous investigation, legal representation, and judicial oversight in cases involving ideological accusations (14). He argues that the Islamic legal system must adhere to procedural safeguards to prevent wrongful convictions or politically motivated charges, especially when the subject matter involves sensitive theological issues. Khoei's work on legal maxims similarly reinforces that accusations of ideological deviation must be assessed through impartial legal standards rather than through political sentiment (18). These procedural protections ensure that ideological opponents are shielded from arbitrary prosecution and from the possibility that the state might weaponize religious categories for political ends.

In Islamic governance, ideological opponents also retain the right to personal security and human dignity, even when their beliefs contradict official doctrine. Islamic ethics strongly prohibit humiliation, degradation, or bodily harm against individuals solely on the basis of their convictions. Khomeini's reflections on governance make this clear by emphasizing that the Islamic ruler must uphold the dignity of all citizens, including those who challenge prevailing

ideas, and must refrain from punitive actions unless clear, harmful transgressions occur (13). This ethical imperative extends beyond legal obligations and speaks to the moral character of the state itself. Naraqi's ethical treatises affirm that rulers must act with compassion and fairness, particularly in dealings with individuals whose beliefs place them at odds with dominant norms (16). This protection of dignity ensures that ideological disagreement does not result in social marginalization or personal harm.

The right to intellectual engagement and scholarly debate is another domain in which ideological opponents experience meaningful protection. Islamic intellectual history is replete with examples of robust debate among scholars representing diverse theological schools. The writings of Javadi Amoli highlight that Islamic governance is strengthened, rather than weakened, by thoughtful engagement with competing ideas because such engagement fosters a deeper understanding of truth and enhances the moral legitimacy of leadership (20). Misbah Yazdi similarly asserts that ideological critique contributes to the refinement of Islamic governance by illuminating weaknesses, exposing inconsistencies, and prompting necessary reform, so long as such critique remains grounded in reasoned argument rather than subversive intent (3). These perspectives underscore that ideological dialogue is an essential feature of Islamic governance, not an adversarial threat.

At the same time, Islamic jurisprudence draws clear distinctions between ideological disagreement and ideological subversion—categories that bear directly on the rights of ideological opponents. Subversion refers to activities that weaponize belief systems to undermine the religious, ethical, or political foundations of the state. Bahuti's interpretation of disorder-causing offenses illustrates that when ideological activities move beyond internal belief and peaceful expression into deliberate attempts to destabilize social cohesion or provoke rebellion, they are no longer protected under the umbrella of ideological rights (22). This threshold reflects the broader Islamic principle that individual freedoms must not compromise collective welfare. Abdollah Khani's work on social and national security extends this reasoning by explaining that ideological extremism can become a conduit for broader security threats when it fractures societal unity or becomes entangled with hostile foreign agendas (10). In such cases, the state maintains the legitimate authority to intervene, though even then, interventions must remain proportionate and legally justified.

Foreign-backed ideological movements represent a particularly sensitive modality of ideological opposition, one that challenges the balance between freedom of belief and national security. Brzezinski's geopolitical analyses highlight that modern global competition often exploits internal ideological divisions, transforming them into strategic vulnerabilities (17). Mandel's treatment of national security similarly stresses the risks posed by internal dissent that is amplified or directed by foreign powers, illustrating that safeguarding national sovereignty requires vigilance without resorting to authoritarian suppression (11). Within the Islamic governance framework, these concerns necessitate careful evaluation of ideological groups to distinguish authentic domestic dissent from campaigns engineered to destabilize the state. Razmarā's analysis reinforces that constitutional protections must prevent wrongful accusations of foreign involvement, ensuring that ideological opponents are not unjustly punished under the guise of national security (21). These insights reveal that ideological rights must be preserved even in the face of global political pressures.

Media freedom constitutes an additional area in which ideological opponents exercise significant rights. The ability to express theological interpretations, critique dominant narratives, and engage in public debate is fundamental to meaningful ideological participation. Rasekh and Bayat Kemenghi's analysis of press law demonstrates that Islamic legal systems, when properly interpreted, support media environments that facilitate

intellectual diversity while preventing slander and harm (9). They argue that freedom of ideological expression is essential for maintaining an informed public and for allowing theological positions to be evaluated transparently. Behroozi Lak and Kafili extend this reasoning by asserting that media platforms provide ideological opponents with constructive avenues for dialogue, reducing the likelihood that dissent will migrate into clandestine or radicalized spaces (15). These modern interpretations reaffirm that ideological rights are deeply integrated into the broader ecosystem of communicative freedoms.

The right to remain free from wrongful accusations of apostasy is another critical component of the protections afforded to ideological opponents. In Islamic jurisprudence, apostasy is considered a serious theological deviation, yet classical jurists caution that its legal application must be approached with extreme care. Shahid al-Thani's discussions highlight that apostasy accusations must meet stringent evidentiary and intentional criteria, ensuring that individuals are not punished merely for intellectual exploration or scholarly disagreement (8). Khoei's analysis of legal maxims insists on similar precision, noting that theological error must not be conflated with criminal behavior unless accompanied by public disorder or aggressive actions (18). These protective measures reflect a jurisprudential commitment to intellectual sincerity and to preventing the instrumentalization of religious authority for political suppression.

Islamic history reinforces that ideological tolerance is not an anomaly but a consistent pattern of governance. Saeedi's study of Imam Ali's approach to ideological opposition illustrates that the Imam frequently engaged opponents in debate rather than coercion and refrained from punitive action unless opposition manifested through violence or sedition (5). Alikhani similarly observes that Imam Ali regarded ideological diversity as inevitable and even beneficial, provided that it did not compromise public stability (4). These historical precedents remain instructive for contemporary Islamic governance and strengthen the doctrinal basis for modern protections.

Taken together, these philosophical, jurisprudential, constitutional, and historical insights reveal that the rights of ideological opponents in an Islamic government constitute a robust and multidimensional framework. Islamic governance acknowledges the sanctity of personal belief, the value of intellectual discourse, the need for procedural safeguards, the ethical obligation to preserve human dignity, and the importance of distinguishing lawful ideological disagreement from harmful subversion. Ideological opponents are entitled to express their views, engage in scholarly debate, and participate in public discourse without fear of arbitrary persecution. These rights are bounded only by the imperative to protect communal welfare, social cohesion, and national security. Through this intricate synthesis of justice, freedom, and responsibility, Islamic political jurisprudence offers a coherent and morally grounded framework for protecting ideological pluralism within the context of divine governance.

Foundations of Freedom of Belief and Religion in Islam

The foundations of freedom of belief and religion in Islam rest upon a rich and multilayered intellectual tradition that draws from Qur'anic teachings, prophetic practice, classical jurisprudence, and ethical philosophy. At the heart of this tradition lies the principle that faith must be grounded in conviction rather than coercion, a principle repeatedly emphasized in classical exegesis and juristic treatises. Tabataba'i's commentary in *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* underscores that genuine belief arises from inner recognition and spiritual insight rather than external pressure, reflecting the Qur'anic injunction that "there is no compulsion in religion" (1). This foundational verse has long been interpreted as an affirmation of the intrinsic freedom of the human intellect and conscience, establishing that religious adherence must emerge from voluntary acceptance. Accordingly, the Islamic tradition views the freedom

of belief not as an imported philosophical ideal but as a divinely grounded norm that shapes personal responsibility and moral accountability.

This Qur'anic emphasis on free choice is closely linked to the Islamic view of human diversity. Naraqi's ethical writings explain that human beings differ in temperament, understanding, and interpretive inclination, and these differences naturally produce a plurality of beliefs within any society (16). Rather than treating such diversity as a threat, Islam recognizes it as a condition inherent to humanity's moral and intellectual makeup. From this perspective, freedom of belief is not merely tolerated but acknowledged as an essential aspect of human nature. The prophetic tradition reinforces this acceptance, as demonstrated by the Prophet's interactions with various belief communities, including Jews, Christians, and pagan tribes, all of whom lived under Islamic rule with protected rights as long as they adhered to the terms of peaceful coexistence. This historical precedent illustrates that ideological plurality is compatible with Islamic governance when it is situated within a framework of mutual respect and social order.

The ethical dimension of freedom of belief also forms a central part of Islamic thought. Khomeini's writings on governance emphasize that spiritual transformation must occur through persuasion and moral guidance rather than compulsion, noting that coerced belief lacks sincerity and moral worth (13). This ethical stance stems from the broader Islamic conception of human dignity, which bestows upon individuals not only the freedom to believe but also the responsibility for their beliefs. The moral agency of individuals is central to the Islamic worldview, and the legitimacy of personal faith depends on the freedom to choose. Consequently, coercive attempts to impose belief violate not only legal principles but also ethical norms deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. The writings of Javadi Amoli further reinforce this view by arguing that God's designation of humanity as morally responsible beings implies the necessity of free choice, because accountability has no meaning in the absence of freedom (20). These philosophical insights show that freedom of belief emerges from the very logic of moral responsibility in Islam.

The legal foundations of religious freedom in Islam are elaborated through the distinctions drawn by classical jurists between inner belief and outward actions. Islamic jurisprudence has historically recognized that internal conviction lies beyond the jurisdiction of human law. Allamah Hilli's discussions in *Qawa'id al-Ahkam* clarify that the domain of the heart belongs solely to God, and that legal punishment concerns external behaviors that harm public welfare rather than internal beliefs (6). This doctrinal principle provides the foundation for legal protections extended to individuals with divergent beliefs. It ensures that ideological deviation or theological dissent alone does not constitute a criminal offense in Islamic law. Shahid al-Awwal and Shahid al-Thani add nuance to this framework by distinguishing the internal realm of belief from public acts that disrupt social order (7, 8). Their discussions emphasize that while outward actions may fall under legal scrutiny when they produce harm, internal beliefs cannot be compelled, coerced, or punished by the state. These classical distinctions remain central to contemporary understandings of religious freedom within Islamic governance.

The protection of religious minorities in Islamic history provides further evidence of Islam's commitment to freedom of belief. The category of *ahl al-dhimma*, referring to protected Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian communities, reflects a legal structure in which non-Muslims were granted autonomy in personal religious practices and internal communal affairs. Historical writings show that these communities maintained their rituals, courts, and religious doctrine while living under Islamic rule. Saeedi's analysis of Imam Ali's governance highlights how the Imam upheld the rights of diverse religious groups, ensuring their safety, property, and freedom of worship as long as they respected the norms of the broader Islamic society (5). Similarly, Alikhani notes that Imam Ali viewed the

protection of non-Muslims as an ethical and political obligation, treating them with fairness irrespective of theological difference (4). These historical examples affirm that freedom of belief extends not only to internal conviction but to communal religious practice within a diverse sociopolitical environment.

Modern legal scholars have expanded on these classical ideas by examining the role of constitutional law in safeguarding religious freedom within Islamic states. Sobhani Tabrizi's comparative analysis of constitutional frameworks demonstrates that modern Islamic governments integrate principles of freedom of conscience into their legal systems, enabling believers and ideological minorities to practice their faith within regulated boundaries (19). His work argues that constitutional protections for freedom of belief are not foreign impositions but logical extensions of Islamic jurisprudential principles. Razmarā likewise highlights how public law in contemporary Islamic republics ensures that religious minorities and ideological opponents are entitled to civil rights and legal protections, reflecting the enduring relevance of classical doctrines to modern governance (21). These analyses show that freedom of belief has a coherent place within both classical and modern Islamic legal thought.

Another significant dimension of religious freedom in Islam concerns the distinction between personal belief and proselytization. While individuals retain the right to internal belief, Islamic governance imposes certain ethical boundaries on public proselytizing activities that may disrupt social harmony or challenge the ethical foundations of the community. Bahuti's legal writings illustrate that while personal belief remains protected, the state may regulate outward actions that threaten public order or propagate harmful ideologies (22). This regulatory approach does not contradict religious freedom; rather, it reflects the Islamic emphasis on maintaining communal integrity while respecting individual sovereignty. Abdollah Khani's insights into national and social security further illuminate how ideological activities that undermine social cohesion may fall under regulatory oversight, particularly when such activities intersect with extremist tendencies or foreign interests (10). These concerns illustrate the balance that Islamic governance seeks to maintain between individual freedom and communal welfare.

In the contemporary geopolitical context, the freedom of belief must be interpreted in light of global challenges, including ideological radicalization, foreign manipulation, and the instrumentalization of religious discourse for political ends. Brzezinski's analysis of global ideological conflicts highlights that modern states face complex pressures that necessitate careful delineation between legitimate ideological plurality and movements that threaten national stability (17). Mandel's work on national security similarly underscores the need for states to protect themselves from ideological challenges that stem from or contribute to geopolitical tensions (11). In Islamic governance, these insights reinforce the need to protect freedom of belief while establishing safeguards against ideological subversion that jeopardizes the broader community.

The role of media in shaping religious discourse is also a critical component of contemporary freedom of belief. Rasekh and Bayat Kemenghi argue that a transparent media environment allows individuals to explore, articulate, and debate religious ideas without undue restriction, strengthening intellectual freedom while preventing the spread of harmful misinformation (9). Behroozi Lak and Kafili similarly maintain that the provision of lawful public platforms for religious and ideological dialogue reduces the likelihood of clandestine radicalization and encourages constructive engagement (15). These perspectives affirm that the freedom of belief in Islam does not operate in isolation but interacts with broader communicative and social rights.

Altogether, the foundations of freedom of belief and religion in Islam reflect an integrated system of theological, ethical, legal, and historical principles that collectively affirm the sanctity of conscience while safeguarding social cohesion. Islam's recognition of intellectual diversity, its emphasis on voluntary belief, its ethical commitment to

human dignity, its jurisprudential distinctions between internal belief and harmful action, and its historical protection of religious minorities all point toward a sophisticated framework for freedom of belief. This framework is further reinforced by modern constitutional interpretations, national security considerations, and communicative freedoms, demonstrating that the protection of belief remains a central and enduring feature of Islamic governance.

The Status of Political and Ideological Opponents

The status of political and ideological opponents in an Islamic government emerges from an intricate balance between doctrinal principles, legal obligations, ethical norms, and the historical conduct of legitimate authority. Within the Islamic tradition, opposition—whether political or ideological—is not viewed uniformly as a threat; instead, it is understood through a multilevel evaluative framework that distinguishes peaceful dissent from destabilizing rebellion, internal belief from harmful action, and constructive critique from seditious agitation. This layered approach reflects the broader Islamic commitment to justice and public welfare, ensuring that opponents retain significant rights and protections while maintaining safeguards that preserve collective security. The doctrinal foundations laid by classical scholars such as Allamah Hilli demonstrate that political authority in Islam must remain accountable and cannot criminalize dissent without clear evidence of public harm (6). His jurisprudential writings emphasize that rulers are bound to uphold justice even toward those who oppose them, ensuring that a political system rooted in divine sovereignty does not devolve into arbitrary suppression.

The historical governance of Imam Ali has been repeatedly cited by scholars as a principal model for understanding the status of political and ideological opponents in Islamic governance. Saeedi's analysis shows that Imam Ali allowed extensive space for political criticism, refraining from punitive measures unless dissent escalated into rebellion that endangered public order (5). This approach is further illustrated in Alikhani's work, which notes that Imam Ali regarded dissenting voices as part of the natural diversity within the Muslim community, provided such voices did not adopt violent or subversive tactics (4). These historical precedents are not merely anecdotal but reflect an underlying principle that disagreement does not negate a person's right to security, dignity, or social participation. They also demonstrate that Islamic governance differentiates sharply between legitimate, peaceful opposition and forms of resistance that threaten societal stability. Thus, the status of opponents is shaped both by the manner in which they express their views and by the intentions and consequences of their actions.

Political opponents in an Islamic government occupy a protected space as long as their engagement remains peaceful and adheres to the ethical boundaries of public discourse. Freedom of expression, political participation, and the right to critique are all recognized within the Islamic framework as mechanisms that promote accountability and prevent tyranny. Sobhani Tabrizi's examination of comparative constitutional law explains that Islamic political systems integrate freedom of political participation as a fundamental component of public welfare, drawing upon Qur'anic ideals of consultation and moral engagement (19). This principle is echoed in modern political thought. Misbah Yazdi highlights that the moral legitimacy of an Islamic government depends not on the silencing of opposing views but on its willingness to listen to constructive criticism and respond with justice (3). Political opponents, therefore, do not stand outside the moral circle of the community; rather, they contribute to the intellectual and ethical refinement of governance. The acknowledgment of their rights reflects Islam's broader commitment to justice, in which rulers and citizens alike are held accountable before divine and moral standards.

Ideological opponents hold a similarly protected but more nuanced status. The Islamic tradition recognizes that internal belief is beyond the reach of state coercion, a principle rooted in the Qur'anic understanding of human

autonomy and repeatedly emphasized in theological and jurisprudential scholarship. Tabataba'i's commentary underscores that belief must arise through conviction rather than force, confirming that ideological dissent alone cannot be grounds for punishment (1). Naraqi's writings emphasize that rulers must deal with ideological opponents through ethical persuasion rather than coercive measures, ensuring that the spiritual dignity of individuals remains intact (16). Accordingly, Islamic governance respects the internal conscience of its citizens and prohibits the state from intervening in purely internal matters of belief. This protection forms the cornerstone of ideological freedom and guarantees ideological opponents a space for internal conviction and thoughtful reflection.

However, ideological opponents also interact with the public sphere, where the boundaries between belief and action become legally significant. Islamic jurisprudence draws a clear distinction between internal beliefs and public expressions that may threaten social cohesion or propagate harmful ideas. Bahuti's discussion of public order offenses shows that while beliefs themselves are immune from state coercion, outward actions that incite violence or undermine communal integrity may be subject to regulation (22). These distinctions help explain the dual status of ideological opponents: they are free to hold and privately reflect on their beliefs, but public actions that exploit ideological claims to destabilize society fall within the regulatory domain of the state. Shahid al-Awwal and Shahid al-Thani clarify that ideological disagreement must be tolerated unless it produces harmful consequences, illustrating that the Islamic conception of ideological freedom is both principled and pragmatic (7, 8). This jurisprudential framework ensures that ideological diversity is protected while community welfare remains safeguarded.

Procedural protections further enhance the status of both political and ideological opponents. Islamic law mandates rigorous evidentiary standards and fair judicial processes, preventing the misuse of accusations such as rebellion, apostasy, or sedition. Fathi's analysis of Iranian criminal procedure highlights that the legal system requires impartial trials, transparent investigations, and clear evidence before imposing penalties, especially in cases involving opposition or ideological deviation (14). Khoei's discussions reinforce the necessity of precision in applying legal maxims to ensure that political or ideological opponents are not wrongfully accused or punished (18). These procedural protections form a critical part of their status, ensuring that the government cannot arbitrarily infringe upon their rights or exploit religious categories for political suppression. They guarantee that opposition is judged according to objective legal criteria rather than the subjective preferences of the ruling authority.

The status of opponents in an Islamic government is also shaped by the ethical obligation of rulers to maintain fairness and dignity. The writings of Khomeini emphasize that even critics and dissenters must be treated with respect and that their human dignity cannot be violated unless they engage in actions that cause demonstrable harm (13). Islamic ethical thought places strong emphasis on avoiding humiliation, slander, or public shaming, and this applies to opponents as well. Naraqi's moral philosophy affirms that rulers who demean ideological or political opponents undermine the spiritual foundations of their own governance (16). These ethical imperatives elevate the status of opponents beyond mere legal subjects, acknowledging their moral and spiritual worth within the community.

Contemporary legal and political analyses expand upon these classical principles to address the modern complexities of governance. Razmarā's exploration of public law demonstrates that constitutional protections for rights—such as freedom of conscience, expression, and association—operate within Islamic frameworks to safeguard the status of opponents (21). These protections ensure that political and ideological opponents have legitimate avenues for expression and recourse against injustice. Rasekh and Bayat Kemenghi extend this

reasoning into the domain of media, arguing that a transparent media environment protects opponents by providing lawful platforms for critique, debate, and intellectual diversity (9). Behrooz Lak and Kafili emphasize that inclusive political structures reduce the likelihood that opposition will turn radical or violent, illustrating the importance of integrating opponents into public discourse (15). These modern analyses show that the status of opponents is not static; instead, it is continually shaped by evolving constitutional and institutional dynamics.

National security concerns introduce further dimensions to the status of opponents. Abdollah Khani argues that opposition must be evaluated carefully to distinguish between legitimate disagreement and activities that genuinely threaten national stability (10). This distinction is echoed by Mandel, who notes that the preservation of national security requires balancing the protection of individual rights with the imperative of safeguarding the collective (11). Brzezinski's geopolitical insights further illuminate how internal dissent can become a vulnerability when exploited by external powers, emphasizing the need for vigilance while maintaining fairness toward domestic opponents (17). These perspectives demonstrate that the status of opponents is shaped not only by legal and ethical frameworks but also by strategic considerations in a global political environment.

In integrating these classical, legal, ethical, and geopolitical perspectives, it becomes clear that the status of political and ideological opponents in an Islamic government is defined by a sophisticated and balanced framework. Political opponents retain broad rights to express dissent, participate in political processes, assemble peacefully, and critique governmental decisions. Ideological opponents maintain the right to internal belief, scholarly engagement, and respectful public expression. Both groups are protected by legal safeguards, ethical norms, and constitutional principles that ensure they are not unjustly marginalized or suppressed. At the same time, Islamic governance reserves the right to regulate and restrain forms of opposition that cross the threshold into harm, violence, foreign manipulation, or ideological subversion. Through this balanced approach, Islamic political jurisprudence upholds justice and accountability while preserving the moral and social fabric of the community.

Conclusion

The analysis of political and ideological opposition in an Islamic government reveals a deeply structured, ethically grounded, and jurisprudentially coherent framework for engaging with dissent. Rather than reducing opposition to a binary divide of loyalty versus rebellion, the Islamic tradition approaches the matter through layered distinctions that consider intention, method, impact, and social consequences. At its core lies an insistence on justice, which acts as both a moral compass and a legal standard for determining how opponents should be understood and treated. The Islamic system, when viewed through its textual foundations, historical precedents, and legal scholarship, demonstrates that opposition is not only an inevitable part of social and political life but also an essential element of dynamic, accountable governance.

Political opponents occupy a recognized and protected space within Islamic political theory. Peaceful critique, constructive dialogue, and nonviolent political engagement are treated as expressions of civic responsibility rather than threats to governmental authority. This perspective ensures that governance remains transparent and responsive, preventing the concentration of unchecked power. Historical models, particularly the governance of Imam Ali, illustrate how political critique can serve as a corrective mechanism within the Islamic polity. His example demonstrates that rulers committed to justice must remain open to criticism and dissent, acknowledging their fallibility and maintaining humility in leadership. Such historical insights continue to shape modern understandings of how political opponents should be integrated into contemporary Islamic governance.

Ideological opponents also possess a significant status within the Islamic framework. Freedom of belief and conscience forms a foundational principle, emphasizing that genuine faith must arise from internal conviction rather than compulsion. Islamic jurisprudence draws important distinctions between internal belief, which lies beyond the domain of human authority, and outward actions that impact public welfare. This differentiation protects individuals from coercive intrusions into their conscience while allowing the state to regulate behaviors that harm communal stability. Moreover, the rich intellectual tradition of Islam, rooted in centuries of theological debate and interpretive plurality, shows that ideological diversity is not inherently destabilizing. Rather, it can refine theological understanding, enrich communal discourse, and deepen collective insight.

The legal protections afforded to both political and ideological opponents reflect the Islamic commitment to procedural justice. Fair trial standards, evidentiary requirements, and protections against arbitrary prosecution underscore the legal system's emphasis on precision, impartiality, and restraint. These safeguards prevent the misuse of political or religious accusations for personal or factional gain. They also ensure that labels such as rebellion, sedition, or apostasy are applied only in clear and legally justifiable circumstances. Such judicial safeguards embed a culture of accountability within the governance structure, limiting the potential for abuse of power.

Ethical considerations further elevate the status of opponents. Islamic governance is not solely a legal system; it is a moral project aimed at cultivating virtue, justice, and communal harmony. Ethical obligations require rulers to treat opponents with dignity, fairness, and compassion, refraining from humiliation, slander, or unnecessary coercion. This moral dimension reinforces the legal boundaries protecting opponents and ensures that the exercise of political authority remains aligned with the broader ethical vision of Islam.

At the same time, Islamic governance acknowledges that not all forms of opposition are benign. When opposition shifts from peaceful expression to violence, sedition, or collaboration with hostile forces, the state is permitted—indeed obligated—to intervene. This intervention is justified not by the existence of dissent but by its harmful consequences. The protection of society, national security, and public order becomes paramount in such cases. Even then, Islamic jurisprudence emphasizes proportionate responses, calibrated to the degree of harm posed. Such an approach ensures that security concerns do not override justice and that the government's actions remain bounded by ethical and legal constraints.

Taken together, these elements reveal a comprehensive system that neither idealizes opposition nor suppresses it indiscriminately. Instead, Islamic political jurisprudence provides a nuanced and balanced framework that protects legitimate dissent while addressing harmful actions with clarity and restraint. This dynamic equilibrium allows Islamic governance to remain responsive, just, and morally grounded.

Ultimately, the Islamic approach to political and ideological opposition demonstrates that a society rooted in divine principles and human accountability can accommodate diversity of thought while preserving social cohesion. By upholding rights, ensuring justice, and embracing ethical governance, the Islamic tradition offers a model in which opposition is not viewed as a weakness but as an opportunity for strengthening the moral and institutional fabric of the state.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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