Differences between Islam political system and Democracy

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Abstract

Islam is a worldwide political system which is complete and has the privileges of both worlds, it has explanations for each and every part of live, while democracy is only a governmental system, in Islmam political system every individual is directly involved in governance and can participate in decision-making. The leader is both politically and religiously authoritative, the ruler serves for life as long as he upholds justice and adheres to Islamic law. While in democracy the government is based on the people's will, and laws can be changed according to public demand. The leadership structure is weaker, as public pressure can lead to frequent changes in governance.

This study is important for world government leaders and political parties, as they are responsible for their people and really striving for stability, this study let them know what do follow and what type of regime to go with.

The aim of this study is to let the world (Muslims and non-Muslims) know the real structure of Islam political system, and make them accept the completeness and courtesy of Islam over democracy.

I have conducted this study library based, I have utilized from pertinent books and scholars' views and have my own views as well.

Finally, I have come up with the result that; Islamic Sharia is complete and correct not only political but also social, economic, legal and moral system, which has explanation for each and every part of life, while democracy only refers to governance system, in Islam the ruler is Allah (swt) while in democracy publics rule,

Every individual is directly involved in governance while in democracy People participate indirectly through elected representatives. The leadership structure is weaker, as public pressure can lead to frequent changes in governance.

Key words: Islam, political system, democracy, government.

Introduction:

Islamic state is a system of life what has covered each and every aspect of life and is based on Islamic rules and regulations, its governance system is run through the stabilized, concrete, correct, curtsied and complete structure.

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Whereases democracy is a governance system that is based on peoples' well and opinions, the core principle in democracy is the demand of nation, so in this research the differences between Islamic system and democracy is discussed.

Objective of the study:

Each and every research has its own objectives, and the objectives of this study are as below:

1.   To elaborate the principles of the Islamic state
2.   To let people know that Islamic system is a complete system which has verdicts for each part of life.
3.   To clarify the differences between Islam political system and democracy.

Methodology of the study:

1.   I have conducted this study library based.
2.   I have utilized from pertinent books and scholars' views and have my own views as well.

Literature review:

1.   In 1996 John L. Esposito and John O.Voll published their article in New York Oxford University press under the title of (Islam and Democracy); in their article they have mentioned that:

Islam and democracy are the two main influential political systems in twentieth century, they have said that Islam political system is enforced by Muslims, and it started to be strengthen after the Islamic revolutions especially after the Islamic revolution of Iranians in 1979. In this article they have focused that how Islamic societies have carried on with Islamic principles and how they faced the challenges, their main focus is on Islam political system, but my article is all about the differences between Islamic state and democracy.

2.   In 2010 july 27th Fahmy Howeidy has published his article under the title of Islam and Democracy on BRILL online journal, in this article the have mentioned that:

This article sates how the civilizational dissertation of Islam differs from that of democracy but doesn't essentially mean that it reverses it. Knowing that this juxtaposition encourages diversity and distinction, this paper clarifies the factors of ambiguity that surround this religion and system in order to expose the real dimension of their difference. The study is organized as follows:

The very first, it talks about the seven characteristics of the Islamic state. Second, it discusses the significance of consultation (al-shūrā) and the necessity of questioning the rulers in Islam political system. Third, the article answers the question "Where does democracy correspond to Islam and where does it differ?". Several prominent opinions are examined in the fourth part, before displaying the main positions from

the 1980s, vis-à-vis democracy, in part five. Part six displays the fatwas of al-Qaradawi. At the end of the article, the paper emphasizes the methods that can be taken towards Islamic ruling (sharīʿah)

The difference between my article with above mentioned article is clear, I have only discussed the differences whereas the above-mentioned article is all about Islam political system.

3.   In 2018, Professor Basharatullah Sheenwary has discussed the types of political regimes in his book (General principles of constitutional law), in his book, chapter fourth he discussed the types of democracy (direct, indirect and mixed), whereas he hasn't discussed the political system of Islam, meanwhile hasn't compared the democratic and Islamic systems too.

4.   In Fundamentals of political sciences book, Mr. professor Hijratullah Ekhtyar discussed the introduction to democracy, types of democracy, principles of democracy, advantages and disadvantages of democracy, but he hasn't written about Islam political system, which is the contrast of my article with his text book.

5.   Assistant professor. Mohammad Irfan Qurishi (2020) in his book (Fundamentals of political science) has also mentioned about political systems, in his book he has discussed about; democracy and Islam political system as well, indeed he has strived the best in his book and has covered democratic and Islamic governance well enough. He has stated regarding the rules of democracy and Islam political system, but he hasn't compared these two systems which is the main difference between my article in Mr. Qurishi's study.

1.   Introduction to the Islamic State

The term Islamic State refers to a governance system based on Islamic principles, where the laws, policies, and governance structures align with the teachings of Islam. The concept has historical roots in the early Islamic caliphates, particularly during the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Khulafa-e-Rashideen).

1.1. Core Principles of an Islamic State

1. Sovereignty of Allah – The ultimate authority belongs to Allah, and the state functions under divine guidance as prescribed in the Qur'an and Hadith.

2. Rule of Law (Shariah) – Islamic law (Shariah) forms the legal foundation, ensuring justice, equality, and morality.

3. Justice and Welfare – The state prioritizes social justice, economic fairness, and the well-being of all citizens, including non-Muslims.

4. Consultative Governance (Shura) – Decision-making occurs through mutual consultation, as emphasized in the Qur'an (42:38).

5. Protection of Rights – The Islamic state guarantees fundamental rights, including freedom of religion, education, property, and security.

1.2 Historical Examples

1. State of Medina (622 CE) – Established by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), it was the first Islamic state with a written constitution (Mithaq al-Madina) ensuring religious freedom and governance under Islamic principles.

2. The Rashidun Caliphate (632–661 CE) – Led by Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, this period is known for its just governance and expansion of Islamic rule.

3. Later Caliphates – The Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman empires ruled vast territories under Islamic governance, implementing various degrees of Shariah law.

1.3 Modern Interpretations

In the contemporary era, different Muslim-majority countries apply Islamic principles in varying degrees. Some states, like Saudi Arabia and Iran, integrate Shariah into their legal systems, while others, like Pakistan and Malaysia, blend Islamic laws with modern governance structures.

The concept of an Islamic state remains a subject of debate among scholars, with discussions on democracy, human rights, and the role of religion in governance continuing to evolve.

Second Chapter: Foundations of the Islamic Government
First Principle: Sovereignty

In political terminology, sovereignty refers to supreme authority or absolute power. It is the ultimate decision-making authority whose will and command are the highest and serve as the source of law. In Islamic terminology, this concept is also called legislative sovereignty, meaning the sovereignty of the law.

The fundamental principle of the Islamic governmental system or Islamic politics is that sovereignty and supreme authority belong to the Creator alone. The source of law is not human intellect but divine revelation, primarily the Quran and Sunnah. The evidence of divine sovereignty is derived from the Quran, Sunnah, the actions of the rightly guided caliphs, the consensus of the Muslim community (Ijma), reasoning (Aql), and analogy (Qiyas).

Definition of Law (Hukm) in Language and Jurisprudence:

Linguistically, the word "Hukm" (law) comes from "Hakim," which means decision-making, command, wisdom, and knowledge. Ibn Manzur, an African scholar, stated that "Hukm" can refer to wisdom, knowledge, and fair judgment. Similarly, Ibn Duraid mentioned that any statement that offers guidance, corrects an error, or prevents a mistake can be called a "Hukm."

In jurisprudence, a legal ruling (Shari'ah Hukm) refers to the command of Allah regarding human actions, classifying them as obligatory, recommended, permissible, disliked, or prohibited. These divine commands are called Shariah laws, and the one who legislates them is called the "Hakim" (Lawgiver).

Second Principle: Consultation (Shura)

The second fundamental principle of the Islamic governmental system is Shura (consultation). In an Islamic state, the head of state is appointed through consultation with trusted representatives of the Muslim community. After being elected, all major decisions must be made with the approval of this consultative council. Modern Muslim political scholars refer to this Shura system as a form of Jumhuriya (republic).

In Arabic literature, hadith, and jurisprudence, the term Jumhur is used to indicate majority consensus. However, the modern concept of democracy originates from Greek philosophy, and some of its principles conflict with Islamic teachings.

Historical Instances of Shura in the Prophetic Era:

Mu'adh ibn Jabal narrated that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "In matters where no revelation has been given, I am like any other human being." Imam Al-Jassas explained that the Prophet was commanded to consult in both religious and worldly matters that had no explicit divine instruction.

The Prophet frequently sought consultation on various issues, including religious, military, and administrative affairs. One example is the consultation regarding the Adhan (call to prayer). Initially, different proposals were made, including using a horn (like the Jews) or a bell (like the Christians). However, Umar (RA) suggested appointing a person to call people for prayer loudly, a proposal that was accepted. The Prophet then assigned Bilal (RA) to deliver the Adhan.

The Head of State Cannot Override the Shura Council's Decision:

Some mistakenly believe that the head of an Islamic government has the authority to override the decisions of the Shura council. However, this is contrary to Islamic principles. The Quranic verse "Their affairs are decided by mutual consultation" (42:38) makes it clear that decisions must be made collectively.

The Caliph is appointed by the Shura council and acts as a representative of the people. Rejecting the council's decision would mean violating the trust placed in him, making his position invalid. Unlike the rightly guided caliphs, modern rulers do not possess divine endorsement, and if a leader rejects an agreed-upon decision, removing him from power is necessary to prevent dictatorship and tyranny.

Consultation with Experts in Different Fields:

The Islamic government requires that consultation be conducted with experts in different fields. Ibn Khuwiz Mand stated that in religious matters, the ruler must consult scholars, in military matters, military experts, and in administrative matters, specialists in governance.

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani emphasized that a nation that does not participate in decision-making or is ruled by a dictator cannot progress. Similarly, Baghdad University professor Abdul Karim Zidan stated that if a leader abandons consultation, he should

be removed because true authority lies with the Muslim community, and the ruler is merely a representative.

Who Should Be Consulted?

Since it is impractical to consult every individual in a Muslim nation, representatives should be chosen from knowledgeable, trustworthy individuals. In hadith, such representatives are referred to as 'Urafa' (leaders skilled in national affairs).

Third Principle: Allegiance (Bay'ah) to the Imam

The third fundamental principle of Islamic governance is that the ruler (Caliph or Emir) must be a trusted representative of the Muslim community. Inheritance-based monarchy, dictatorship, and autocracy have no place in Islamic governance.

The Quran mandates the Muslim community to implement Islamic rulings and uphold the faith. The ruler serves as their representative and is not entitled to power through inheritance or coercion but through the people's free will. The Islamic method of gaining public trust is through Bay'ah—a mutual pledge of allegiance between the people and the ruler.

Definition of Bay'ah:

Ibn Manzur defines Bay'ah as a bilateral contract where both parties pledge their full commitment to each other. The people entrust their governance and leadership to the ruler, while the ruler pledges to serve them justly under Islamic law.

Historically, Bay'ah involved physically giving one's hand to the leader as a symbolic gesture of trust and commitment. In modern times, this is equivalent to voting through ballots. The act of voting is an expression of confidence in a leader, while the leader's oath of office is a pledge to uphold the law and fulfill responsibilities.

Since the purpose of Bay'ah is to establish trust, using modern voting systems is acceptable. A leader may be chosen through general elections (presidential system) or by a parliamentary body (parliamentary system), both of which are valid under Islamic principles.

Fourth Principle: Qualifications of the Caliph

The fourth fundamental principle of Islamic governance is that the head of state (Caliph) must be a distinguished figure in terms of knowledge, righteousness, justice, and leadership abilities. The Islamic state is fundamentally an ideological and principled system, so its leader must be an exemplary role model in both belief and practice. At the very least, he must meet the essential criteria of a pious Muslim.

Islamic scholars have derived the qualifications of a leader from the Quran and Sunnah. Some of the key requirements include:

1. Faith (Iman): Since the ruler oversees the implementation of Islamic laws, interprets Islamic teachings, and engages in Ijtihad (independent reasoning), he must possess a strong understanding of Islam.

2. Justice and Piety: The Prophet (PBUH) instructed that consultation should be done with pious individuals. The Quran also forbids obedience to corrupt or immoral people.

3. Wisdom and Maturity: A ruler must be of sound mind and mature. If an individual cannot manage his own affairs, he is unfit to govern an entire nation.

Islam does not recognize monarchy, dictatorship, or autocratic rule. Instead, leadership must be based on merit, and the leader must be accountable to the people and adhere to Islamic principles.

Introduction to Democracy

Democracy is a system of government in which power is vested in the people, either directly or through elected representatives. It is built on the principles of political equality, participation, and accountability. The word "democracy" originates from the Greek words demos (people) and kratos (rule), meaning "rule by the people."

Key Features of Democracy:

1. Free and Fair Elections – Citizens have the right to choose their leaders through regular, transparent elections.

2. Rule of Law – Everyone, including government officials, is subject to the law.

3. Protection of Rights and Freedoms – Democratic societies protect fundamental rights such as freedom of speech, religion, and assembly.

4. Majority Rule with Minority Rights – While the majority's decision prevails, the rights of minorities are safeguarded.

5. Accountability and Transparency – Leaders must be answerable to the people, and government actions should be open to scrutiny.

Types of Democracy:

1. Direct Democracy – Citizens directly participate in decision-making (e.g., ancient Athens).

2. Representative Democracy – Citizens elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf (e.g., the United States, India).

Note: professor Mohammad Irfan Qurishi has added another type of democracy which is mixed democracy, which states that, in some decisions citizens participate directly while in some the participate via their representatives.

Importance of Democracy:

Encourages political participation and civic responsibility.

Ensures peaceful transitions of power.

Promotes human rights and equality.

Provides mechanisms for resolving conflicts through dialogue and law.

Democracy continues to evolve, adapting to new challenges and technologies while striving to uphold its core values of liberty, justice, and representation.

Differences Between Islamic Government and Republic

1. Historical Perspective

Caliphate: Unlike other political systems, the caliphate is one of the oldest forms of governance, dating back to the creation of mankind. According to Islamic belief, Allah appointed Adam (AS) as the first caliph on Earth, as mentioned in the Quran:

"And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels: 'Indeed, I will make upon the earth a caliph.'" (Al-Baqarah)

This implies that the caliphate is a divine system, whereas other regimes, such as democracy, originated from human innovation, particularly by the ancient Greeks.

Republic: The first recorded republic emerged in Athens, Greece, around 560 BCE. The historian Herodotus described this early republic as an aristocratic system created by the wealthy elite to manipulate the common people. Later, around 430 BCE, another form of republic developed in Sparta under the leadership of a military general, Lycurgus. This was a socialist republic aimed at the working class, advocating land redistribution and social freedoms.

2. Legal Basis

Republic: The source of law is the will of the people. Whatever the majority desires becomes the law, as democracy is defined as "government of the people, by the people, for the people." The representatives elected by the people determine laws based on public interests.

Caliphate: The fundamental source of law is Allah's divine legislation. The ruler (caliph) is responsible for implementing and upholding these laws. The caliph does not have the authority to create laws based on personal or public desires but must adhere strictly to Islamic teachings.

3. Majority vs. Minority Rule

Republic: The majority's decision is supreme, meaning laws and governance are determined based on the will of the majority.

Islamic Government: The majority does not dictate what is lawful or unlawful. Instead, divine guidance remains the ultimate authority. What Allah has declared halal (permissible) will remain so until the end of time, and what is haram (forbidden) will remain forbidden, regardless of public opinion.

3. Selection of the Head of State

Republic: The leader is chosen through elections, and the primary criterion is securing the majority of votes. There are no specific moral or religious qualifications required for leadership.

Caliphate: The leader must meet strict Islamic criteria, including piety, justice, and knowledge of Islamic law. Unlike a republic, where anyone can run for office, Islamic leadership is reserved for those who meet these qualifications.

5. Term of Office

Republic: The leader serves for a fixed term, usually four, five, or seven years, depending on the country's laws. Some countries allow re-election, while others impose term limits.

Caliphate: There is no fixed term for a caliph. He remains in power for life unless he is removed due to incompetence, insanity, imprisonment, apostasy, or corruption.

6. Authority of the Leader

Republic: There are two main types of republics:

Parliamentary Republic: The government operates under parliamentary control, and the head of state has a symbolic role.

Presidential Republic: The head of state has extensive executive powers.

Caliphate: The leader's authority is defined by Islamic law. He cannot rule arbitrarily but must govern within the framework of Sharia. His responsibilities include appointing ministers, enforcing Islamic laws, maintaining security, and protecting the nation.

Additional Key Differences

Islamic Government:

1. Every individual is directly involved in governance and can participate in decision-making.

2. The leader is both politically and religiously authoritative, ensuring all decisions align with Islamic principles.

3. The ruler serves for life as long as he upholds justice and adheres to Islamic law.

Republic:

1. The government is based on the people's will, and laws can be changed according to public demand.

2. People participate indirectly through elected representatives.

3. The leadership structure is weaker, as public pressure can lead to frequent changes in governance.

These distinctions highlight the fundamental ideological and structural differences between an Islamic government and a republic.

Discussions:

After the completion of this study let's have a look at the below discussions:

1.   What does Islam mean?

The real meaning of Islam is rooted in the Arabic word "سَلِمَ" (salima), which means peace, purity, submission, and obedience. From this root, Islam means:

> "Submission to the will of Allah (God) in peace."

2.   What are the Key Aspects of the Real Meaning of Islam?

-     Submission to One God

A Muslim fully surrenders to the will of Allah, recognizing Him as the one and only Creator, Sustainer, and Judge.

- Peace

Islam emphasizes inner peace through connection with Allah, and outer peace through justice, compassion, and good behavior toward others.

- Way of Life

Islam is not just a religion of rituals but a complete way of life—covering spiritual, moral, social, legal, and personal dimensions.

- Balance (Wasatiyyah)

Islam promotes balance in all things—between body and soul, individual and community, faith and reason.

- Mercy and Justice

The Qur'an often begins with "In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate," showing the foundation of mercy. Justice is also a key value in Islamic teachings.

3. What does democracy mean?

Democracy comes from the Greek words "demos" (people) and "kratos" (power or rule), meaning:> "Rule by the people."

4. What are the Key Features of Democracy?

1. People's Power   Citizens have the right to choose their leaders and influence laws, usually through elections.

2. Free and Fair Elections   Leaders are chosen by the majority, in a system where every adult citizen has one vote.

3. Rule of Law   Everyone—including leaders—is subject to the law.

4. Protection of Rights and Freedoms

People have the freedom of speech, religion, press, and assembly.

5. Majority Rule with Minority Rights   The majority makes decisions, but the rights of individuals and minorities are protected.

6. Accountability and Transparency

Leaders are accountable to the people, and government actions are open to public scrutiny.

5.. What differs Islam political system from Democracy?

In the Islamic political system, the ultimate authority belongs to Allah. All laws and governance are based on divine guidance found in the Qur'an and the Sunnah (teachings of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him). The role of the government is to implement Shari'ah law, ensure justice, and help people live according to Islamic values. Leaders are expected to be chosen through consultation (shura) among qualified individuals, and the most pious and capable person is preferred, not necessarily the one with the most votes.

In contrast, democracy places authority in the hands of the people. Laws are made through elected representatives, and the system allows for laws to change based on

majority opinion. The people choose their leaders through free elections, and the focus is on individual freedoms, human rights, and public will. There is no divine or unchangeable source of law; instead, laws can evolve with society.

So, the key difference is this: Islamic governance is God-centered, guided by unchanging divine law, while democracy is people-centered, driven by human reasoning and majority decisions

Findings

There are many differences between the Islamic political system and democracy; they are mentioned below:

In Islamic Government, every individual is directly involved in governance and can participate in decision-making. The leader is politically and religiously authoritative, ensuring all decisions align with Islamic principles. The ruler serves for life as long as he upholds justice and adheres to Islamic law, on the other hand in a democracy the government is based on the people's will, and rules can be changed according to public demand. People participate indirectly through elected representatives. The leadership structure is weaker, as public pressure can lead to frequent changes in governance.

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