THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAMIC TEACHINGS ON THE POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND GOVERNANCE PRACTICES OF MUSLIMS IN NORTH MACEDONIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *This research investigates the influence of Islamic teachings on the political attitudes and governance-related practices of Muslims in North Macedonia. Focusing on the intersection of religion and politics, the study examines how Islamic principles shape perspectives on democracy, participation in elections, voting behavior, and engagement in political life. Using survey data collected from Muslim communities, the research explores the extent to which religious beliefs inform decisions to participate in or abstain from political processes, as well as perceptions of governance within the framework of Islamic values. By narrowing its focus to the sociological institution of politics and governance, this study provides valuable insights into the role of religion in shaping political behavior and attitudes in a diverse and multi-religious society.*

Keywords*: Islamic teachings, politics, governance, political participation, religion and politics*

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Introduction

This paper is a focused segment of my broader doctoral research, titled "The Influence of Islam on the Societal Life of Muslims in North Macedonia." My PhD project examines how Islamic teachings and values shape the experiences and practices of Muslims across five key sociological institutions: politics, economy, family, education, and demography. While the overall study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted role of Islam in the everyday lives of Muslims in North Macedonia, the present paper narrows its scope to the political sphere, specifically investigating the intersection of religious belief and political engagement.

The motivation for this research emerged from my personal experiences as a resident of a Muslim-majority neighborhood in North Macedonia. During election periods, I have repeatedly observed the distribution of various flyers and materials throughout my community. These materials and the messages often urge Muslims to abstain from voting, invoking religious justifications for political disengagement. For example, one graffiti simply states, "Do not vote. Boycott," while another flyer proclaims, "Fear God. Do not associate partners with Him." Such messages, distributed on election days, reflect attempts to frame political participation as contrary to religious principles.

Figure 1: Graffiti stating: "Do not vote. Boycott." (original in Albanian; author's translation)

Figure 2: Flyer distributed during elections: "Fear Allah, do not associate partners with Him." (original in Albanian; author's translation)

These recurring observations prompted me to reflect on the broader question of how religious beliefs and teachings influence the political attitudes and behaviors of Muslims in my society. The presence of such materials, and the religious arguments they employ, raised important questions

about the role of Islam in shaping political life and civic engagement. Consequently, this paper seeks to investigate the extent to which Islamic values inform political attitudes, participation, and perceptions of governance among Muslims in North Macedonia, using empirical data collected from within the community.

By situating this inquiry within the context of my larger doctoral research, this study aims to contribute to a deeper sociological understanding of the dynamic relationship between religion and politics in a diverse and evolving society.

1. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative survey method to examine the influence of Islamic teachings on the political attitudes and governance-related practices of Muslims in North Macedonia. The target group consisted of adult Muslim men and women residing in Skopje, the capital city. A total of 300 respondents participated in the survey.

The survey was administered online using Google Forms. The questionnaire link was distributed to religious leaders from both officially registered Islamic communities in North Macedonia: The Islamic Religious Community of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Salafi Islamic Religious Community "Dar Al-Hadith." These leaders then shared the link with their congregants, allowing for voluntary and anonymous participation. The sampling was thus based on self-selection among worshipers within these communities.

The questionnaire, presented in Albanian, included eight closed-ended questions focused on the political dimension of religious influence. The questions were identical for both communities, reflecting the study's primary aim to assess general trends among Muslims in Skopje. However, given the theological differences between the two communities, responses were also analyzed separately. Comparative analysis was conducted only when notable differences emerged between the two groups; otherwise, results are presented in aggregate for the Muslim population as a whole. Data analysis relied on the summary statistics (percentages) automatically generated by Google Forms.

2. The Comprehensiveness of Islam

To understand the influence of Islamic teachings on the political attitudes and governance practices of Muslims, it is essential to recognize that Islam is not merely a religion of private beliefs and rituals. Rather, it is a comprehensive way of life that encompasses guidance for all aspects of individual and collective existence. As Esposito (2011) notes, "Islam is not simply a set of beliefs or rituals, but a total way of life that encompasses religious, social, economic, and political dimensions" (p. 4). This holistic nature of Islam is rooted in its foundational texts, which provide principles and norms for personal conduct, family relations, economic transactions, governance, and community life.

The Qur'an and the Sunnah (the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad) address not only matters of faith and worship but also offer detailed guidance on social justice, governance, economic ethics, and interpersonal relations. As Nasr (2003) explains, "Islamic law (Sharia) and ethics are meant to regulate not only the spiritual and ritual life of Muslims but also their social, economic, and political activities" (p. 17). This comprehensive framework is reflected in the lived experiences of Muslim communities, where religious teachings inform daily decisions and collective practices across all sociological institutions.

Understanding this all-encompassing character of Islam is crucial for any sociological analysis that seeks to explore the relationship between religion and other spheres of life, such as politics. Without this perspective, one might underestimate the extent to which Islamic values and norms shape

not only personal beliefs but also public attitudes, behaviors, and governance practices. As Rahman (1982) emphasizes, "In Islam, the sacred and the secular are not separated; the religious and the social, the spiritual and the material, are all integrated into a single, unified worldview" (p. 13).

Therefore, before examining the specific influence of Islamic teachings on political attitudes and governance among Muslims in North Macedonia, it is important to acknowledge Islam's comprehensive approach to societal life. This understanding provides the necessary context for analyzing how religious values permeate and shape the various sociological institutions within Muslim communities.

3. Results and Discussion

Survey Question 1: How important are Islamic teachings (the Islamic religion) to you when making decisions regarding your social activism and participation in society?

Table 1: Response options and percentages for Survey Question 1

Response Option	Percentage (%)
Very important	97.0
Partially important	3.0
Only for certain aspects that are important to me	0
Not important at all	0

These findings indicate that, for the vast majority of respondents, religious values extend well beyond private belief or ritual, actively shaping their engagement with broader societal issues. This reflects the comprehensive nature of Islam as a lived tradition, where the boundaries between the sacred and the secular are fluid and religious norms are expected to guide all aspects of life, including civic responsibility and social involvement. The strong alignment between religious guidance and social participation suggests a high level of trust in religious authority and a perception that Islamic principles offer a legitimate framework for navigating contemporary social challenges. In a context where Muslims may experience social or political marginalization, adherence to religious teachings can serve both as a source of identity and collective empowerment, further embedding Islamic values in the community's social fabric. Consequently, efforts to promote civic engagement or social activism among Muslims in North Macedonia are likely to be most effective when they resonate with Islamic ethical and moral discourse, highlighting the importance for policymakers and community leaders to understand and respect the religious motivations that drive participation.

Survey Question 2: Do you think that Muslims should behave according to Islamic teachings in a society?

Table 2: Response options and percentages for Survey Question 2

Response Option	Percentage (%)
Yes, completely	96.6
Only in certain aspects (such as ethics and morality)	1.3
It should be the believer's personal choice	2.2
In a secular society, a Muslim should behave exclusively according to the norms and rules of that society	0

The near-unanimous agreement that Muslims should behave according to Islamic teachings in society underscores the deep integration of religious identity with daily social conduct among Muslims in Skopje. This result reflects a collective orientation where religious norms are seen as universally applicable, transcending private belief to shape public behavior. The minimal support for limiting Islamic practice to certain aspects or for prioritizing secular societal norms suggests that, for most respondents, Islam provides a comprehensive framework for navigating all areas of life. This strong consensus highlights the centrality of religion in community cohesion and the maintenance of a distinct Muslim identity within a pluralistic social environment.

Survey Question 3: How do Islamic teachings influence your views on politics and governance?

Table 3: Response options and percentages for Survey Question 3

Response Option	Percentage (%)
Islamic teachings strongly influence my views, and I believe that politics and governance should be closely aligned with Islamic principles.	83.6
Islamic teachings somewhat influence my views, but I also take into account other factors, such as cultural, social, or contemporary political ideas.	10.3
Islamic teachings have little influence on my views, as I prioritize secular or non-religious perspectives on politics and governance.	0.9
Islamic teachings do not influence my views on politics and governance at all.	5.2

The responses to this question reveal that Islamic teachings play a foundational role in shaping the political consciousness of Muslims in North Macedonia. For most, religion is not merely a private matter but a guiding force that informs their understanding of governance and the legitimacy of political authority. This suggests a worldview in which faith and politics are deeply intertwined, reflecting the broader Islamic tradition that sees no strict separation between religious and public life.

Survey Question 4: Do you believe that participating in the election process is contrary to Islamic teachings?

Table 4: Response options and percentages for Survey Question 4

Response Option	Salafi I.R.C. "Dar Al-Hadith" (%)	Islamic Religious Community of N.M(%)
Yes	82.1	18.4
No, I believe that participating in the electoral process is in accordance with Islamic teachings and is a way to contribute to society	0.6	47.4
Partially, in cases where there is a fatwa from religious leaders and a general benefit for Muslims to participate in elections	17.3	34.2

The contrasting responses between the two communities highlight how theological orientation and religious authority shape political participation among Muslims in North Macedonia. Among respondents from the Salafi Islamic Religious Community "Dar Al-Hadith", there is a strong tendency to view election participation as contrary to Islamic teachings, suggesting a more exclusivist or literalist interpretation of religious doctrine, possibly influenced by community norms or leadership

that discourages engagement with secular political systems. In contrast, members of the Islamic Religious Community of the Republic of North Macedonia demonstrate a more pluralistic or pragmatic approach, with many affirming that participation in elections can be in accordance with Islamic values, particularly when such participation is endorsed by religious authorities through fatwas. This indicates that, within the broader Muslim community, attitudes toward political engagement are not monolithic but are negotiated through differing interpretations of religious texts, the influence of religious leaders, and the perceived benefits to the community. The findings underscore the importance of intra-community diversity and the role of religious discourse in shaping civic behavior and attitudes toward governance.

Survey Question 5: Do your religious beliefs influence your choice of whom to vote for in elections?

Table 5: Response options and percentages for Survey Question 5

Response Option	Salafi I.R.C. "Dar Al-Hadith" (%)	Islamic Religious Community of N.M(%)
Yes, I only vote for candidates and parties that work in favor of the interests of Muslims.	7.1	77.6
No, I am not guided by religious teachings when deciding whom to vote for.	2.6	14.5
I do not vote in elections.	90.4	7.9

The stark contrast between the two communities reveals how differing religious orientations and communal norms shape political engagement and voting behavior among Muslims in North Macedonia. Within the Salafi Islamic Religious Community "Dar Al-Hadith," the overwhelming tendency to abstain from voting suggests a strong theological or ideological stance against participation in the electoral process, possibly rooted in a perception that secular politics is incompatible with their religious principles. In contrast, members of the Islamic Religious Community of the Republic of North Macedonia are far more likely to participate in elections, with most indicating that their religious beliefs directly guide their choice of candidates and parties. This pattern reflects a more pragmatic or integrative approach, where political participation is seen as a means to advance communal interests within the broader society. The findings highlight the diversity of political attitudes within the Muslim population, shaped by internal religious discourse and the varying ways communities interpret the relationship between faith and civic duty.

Survey Question 6: Do you participate in/support protests/demonstrations?

Table 6: Response options and percentages for Survey Question 6

Response Option	Salafi I.R.C. "Dar Al-Hadith" (%)	Islamic Religious Community of N.M(%)
Yes, unconditionally	0.0	10.5
Yes, but only in protests related to religious rights and freedoms	1.9	38.2
No, because participating in protests is contrary to Islamic teachings	86.5	6.6
I do not participate in/support protests (for other reasons)	11.5	44.7

The divergent responses between the two communities illustrate how religious interpretation and communal norms shape attitudes toward collective action and public protest. Among members of the Salafi Islamic Religious Community "Dar Al-Hadith," there is a pronounced reluctance to participate in protests, with most viewing such activities as contrary to Islamic teachings. This suggests a theological orientation that prioritizes social order or discourages public dissent, possibly reflecting a preference for non-confrontational forms of engagement or a skepticism toward secular modes of activism.

In contrast, respondents from the Islamic Religious Community of the Republic of North Macedonia display a broader acceptance of protest, particularly when it concerns religious rights and freedoms. This indicates a more pragmatic or context-sensitive approach, where participation in demonstrations is seen as a legitimate means of advocating for communal interests within the framework of the broader society. The significant proportion who abstains from protests for reasons unrelated to religion further highlights the diversity of motivations and the complex interplay between faith, personal conviction, and civic engagement.

Survey Question 7: Do you follow the opinions of your religious leaders/imams for political matters?

Table 7: Response options and percentages for Survey Question 7

Response Option	Salafi I.R.C. "Dar Al-Hadith" (%)	Islamic Religious Community of N.M(%)
Yes, completely	73.1	32.9
Partially, as I like to hear their opinions	10.9	55.3
No, they should not interfere in the political life of citizens	16.0	11.8

The differing responses between the two communities highlight distinct attitudes toward religious authority and its role in political life. Among members of the Salafi Islamic Religious Community "Dar Al-Hadith," there is a strong tendency to follow the opinions of religious leaders completely, reflecting a hierarchical and authoritative model of religious guidance that extends into the political sphere. This suggests a community structure where religious leadership is deeply trusted and seen as central to decision-making, including in matters of civic engagement.

In contrast, respondents from the Islamic Religious Community of the Republic of North Macedonia are more likely to adopt a selective approach, with a majority indicating that they value the opinions of their religious leaders but do not follow them unconditionally. This points to a more consultative or pluralistic relationship with religious authority, where individual judgment and openness to diverse perspectives play a greater role. The presence of respondents in both communities who reject religious interference in political life altogether further illustrates the spectrum of attitudes toward the intersection of faith and politics.

Survey Question 8: Do you think that religious identity is more important than national/civic identity?

Table 8: Response options and percentages for Survey Question 8

Response Option	Percentage (%)
Yes	86.6
No, national/civic identity is more important	0
They are equally important	10.8
I have no opinion	2.6

The overwhelming preference for religious identity over national or civic identity among respondents highlights the central role that faith plays in shaping self-understanding and group belonging within the Muslim community in North Macedonia. This prioritization suggests that religious affiliation is not only a matter of personal belief but also a primary marker of collective identity, often superseding national or civic ties. The absence of respondents who view national or civic identity as more important, alongside a minority who consider both identities equally significant, points to a community where religious values and solidarity are deeply embedded in social life. This pattern may reflect historical experiences, social dynamics, or perceptions of marginalization, where religious identity serves as a source of cohesion, resilience, and meaning in navigating broader societal contexts.

4. Conclusion

This study has explored the influence of Islamic teachings on the political attitudes and governance-related practices of Muslims in North Macedonia, drawing on survey data from members of both the Salafi Islamic Religious Community "Dar Al-Hadith" and the Islamic Religious Community of the Republic of North Macedonia. The findings reveal that Islamic values are deeply embedded in the social and political consciousness of the Muslim population, shaping not only private beliefs but also public engagement and civic behavior.

Across the survey, the vast majority of respondents indicated that Islamic teachings are central to their decisions regarding social activism and participation in society, and that these teachings strongly inform their views on politics and governance. Most Muslims surveyed believe that religious norms should guide behavior in all aspects of life, and religious identity is overwhelmingly prioritized over national or civic identity. These results underscore the comprehensive nature of Islam as a lived tradition, where the boundaries between faith and public life are fluid and mutually reinforcing.

However, the study also highlights significant differences between the two communities. Members of the Salafi Islamic Religious Community "Dar Al-Hadith" are far more likely to view participation in elections and protests as contrary to Islamic teachings, with a strong tendency to abstain from such activities and to follow the guidance of religious leaders unconditionally. In contrast, respondents from the Islamic Religious Community of the Republic of North Macedonia display a more pragmatic approach, with greater openness to political participation, selective engagement in protests—especially those related to religious rights—and a more consultative relationship with religious authority. These differences reflect the diversity of theological interpretation and communal norms within the Muslim population, illustrating that attitudes toward political engagement are negotiated through varying understandings of religious doctrine and the role of religious leadership.

Overall, the research demonstrates that while Islamic teachings provide a powerful framework for shaping political attitudes and behaviors among Muslims in North Macedonia, the ways in which these teachings are interpreted and enacted can vary considerably between communities. Recognizing this internal diversity is essential for policymakers, community leaders, and scholars seeking to understand or engage with the political life of Muslim communities in North Macedonia. The findings suggest that any efforts to foster civic participation or address governance issues must be attentive to the religious motivations and intra-community dynamics that influence Muslim political behavior.

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