

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Divine Integrity: Anti-Corruption Lessons in the Holy Qur'an

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ABSTRACT

The Holy Qur'an is regarded by Muslims as the literal words of Allah (God). It offers believers, adherents, and readers a comprehensive guide for living a life based on the principles of justice, integrity, honesty, accountability, transparency, and spiritual fulfillment. Despite the Qur'an's emphasis on moral conduct, many Muslim-majority nations or states, and indeed non-Muslim majority nations, continue to struggle with corruption in governance and daily affairs. The article aims to examine the Qur'anic stance on corruption by analyzing selected verses alongside interpretations (tafsir) and authenticated hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad to align divine anticorruption teachings in the Qur'an with human behavior. Using the qualitative analytical approach, the article explores how the Qur'an's ethical principles and teachings can serve as a foundation for assimilating and instilling integrity in persons (both academic and professionals) and inform states' policy reforms aimed at combating corruption. The findings reveal that the Qur'an provides timeless guidance on justice, accountability, and civic responsibility, which extend beyond religious lines, and can enhance global anti-corruption strategies across diverse cultures and governance systems.

Keywords: Holy Qur'an; Islam; corruption; taqwa; anti-corruption; ethical governance; cross-cultural reform

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an stands as a central source of guidance for Muslims, offering a comprehensive framework that integrates ethical principles with spiritual insight. Its teachings promote justice, honesty, accountability, and personal integrity, while also addressing broader societal concerns, including governance and economic equity.

In *Surah Al-An 'ām* (6:38), the Qur'an affirms its completeness: "We have not neglected anything in the Book."¹ This statement reflects the Qur'an's role as a holistic reference for moral and social conduct.

Muslims view the revelations received by the Prophet Muhammad not only as spiritual counsel but also as enduring instructions for navigating complex socio-economic and political realities. In environments where ethical standards are eroded and corruption becomes entrenched, the Qur'an provides a resilient framework for restoring justice and moral clarity. Its emphasis on principled living continues to inform both personal behavior and institutional ethics across diverse contexts.

The Qur'an emphasizes that its ethical directives are not confined to a specific era or community but are universally applicable across time, cultures, and religious traditions. It acknowledges earlier scriptures such as the Torah and the Gospel, stating: "He (God) has sent down upon you the Book in truth, confirming what was sent before it. And He revealed the Torah and the Gospel as guidance for mankind, and He sent down the Criterion."²

The term *al-Furqān* (Criterion), as used in the above verse in the Qur'an, signifies a divine standard for distinguishing right from wrong. This concept positions the Qur'an as a moral compass that informs not only spiritual and ethical conduct but also promotes justice, transparency, and accountability. It clearly defines the rights and obligations for social, economic, and political behaviors of persons.

At the heart of this moral framework lies the principle of *taqwa*, a deep sense of God-consciousness and moral responsibility. *Taqwa* encourages individuals to act with integrity and accountability in all spheres of life. In the face of widespread corruption, the Qur'anic emphasis on *taqwa* offers a compelling ethical foundation for reform. While modern anti-corruption policies may not explicitly draw from religious teachings, integrating *taqwa* into educational

curricula and public institutions can promote a culture of transparency, justice, and ethical governance.

However, the diminishing influence of Qur'anic values in anti-corruption efforts within many Muslim-majority societies warrants critical examination. The enduring impact of colonialism has shaped the legal, economic, and political systems of these nations, often creating friction between imported institutional models and indigenous religious and cultural norms. This historical context complicates simplistic narratives about corruption in the Muslim world.

For instance, during a 2016 conversation at Buckingham Palace, then-UK Prime Minister David Cameron remarked that "some leaders of fantastically corrupt countries"³ were attending the Anti-Corruption Summit, citing Nigeria and Afghanistan, both predominantly Muslim nations. Such statements, while politically charged, underscore the need for a more nuanced understanding of corruption that considers historical legacies and socio-cultural dynamics.

Effective anti-corruption strategies must therefore go beyond legal reforms and embrace moral renewal rooted in local values and historical awareness. The Qur'an's call for justice, integrity, and accountability transcends religious boundaries and remains a vital resource for ethical governance in a globally interconnected world.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative analytical approach to examine the ethical foundations of anti-corruption in Islamic thought, as derived from the Qur'an, *Hadith*, and classical exegesis (*tafsīr*). The methodology is rooted in textual analysis and thematic interpretation, aiming to uncover how Islamic primary sources articulate moral principles that oppose corruption and injustice. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the ethical vision embedded in Islamic scripture and its relevance to contemporary governance and public integrity.

The study draws on selected Qur'anic verses that address key ethical themes such as justice ('adl), corruption (fasād), oppression (zulm), trust (amānah), truthfulness (ṣidq), and God-consciousness (taqwā). These verses were identified through thematic indexing and close reading, ensuring their direct relevance to the subject of moral accountability and institutional ethics. Complementing the

¹ The Holy Qur'an surah al-an 'ām 6:38 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali trans., Amana Corp. 1989).

² The Holy Qur'an surah al-furqān 25:1 (M.A.S. Abdel Haleem trans., Oxford Univ. Press 2004).

³ David Cameron, Remarks at Buckingham Palace (May 10, 2016), quoted in Cameron Calls Nigeria and Afghanistan Fantastically Corrupt, BBC NEWS, May 11, 2016.

Qur'anic analysis, authenticated Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad were examined to illustrate the practical embodiment of these values in his leadership and personal conduct.

To ensure accuracy and scholarly rigor, all translations of the Qur'an and *Hadith* were sourced from well-established and widely respected translators and compilers. These include translations by Abdullah Yusuf Ali,⁴ M.A.S. Abdel Haleem,⁵ and Sahih International for the Qur'an, and narrations from Sahih al-Bukhari,⁶ Sahih Muslim,⁷ and Riyad al-Salihi for the Hadith.⁸ These sources were selected for their linguistic clarity, theological reliability, and academic acceptance.

Classical commentaries were used to provide historical and exegetical context. Works by prominent scholars such as Al-Tabarī (Jāmi‘ al-Bayān),⁹ Ibn Kathīr (Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-‘Azīm),¹⁰ Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī (Mufradāt al-Qur‘ān),¹¹ and Al-Qurtubī (Al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur‘ān)¹² were consulted to interpret the selected verses. These commentaries offer insights into the linguistic, theological, and jurisprudential dimensions of the texts, enriching the analysis with classical perspectives.

The analytical process involved several key stages. First, relevant texts were selected and organized according to thematic relevance. Second, each text was interpreted within its scriptural and historical context, guided by classical exegesis. Third, the study synthesized these interpretations to construct a coherent ethical framework that positions anti-corruption as a central moral obligation in Islam. Finally, the findings were contextualized through engagement with contemporary Islamic scholarship, including the works of Khaled Abou El Fadl,¹³ Wael Hallaq,¹⁴ and recent empirical studies on Islamic ethics and governance.

Recent academic contributions were also integrated

to highlight the practical implications of *taqwā* in modern administrative contexts. Studies by Rahman & Nadzri (2024),¹⁵ Alazzabi et al. (2020),¹⁶ and Abdelsattar et al. (2024)¹⁷ were particularly useful in demonstrating how spiritual consciousness can function as an internal ethical regulator, reducing reliance on external enforcement mechanisms and promoting moral resilience within institutions.

In summary, this methodology combines classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary ethical inquiry to explore how Qur'anic values inform anti-corruption efforts. By grounding the analysis in both traditional texts and modern scholarship, the study offers a holistic and context-sensitive understanding of Islamic moral governance.

3. DEFINITION OF CORRUPTION IN ISLAMIC ETHICS

In Islamic ethical thought, corruption (*fasād*) refers to any action or behavior that distorts the moral, social, or ecological order established by God. It is not confined to material damage or political misconduct; rather, it encompasses a broader disruption of justice, trust, and ethical integrity. The Qur'an consistently condemns corruption as a violation of divine guidance, warning against those who cause harm while claiming to reform.¹⁸ Such acts are seen as a betrayal of the sacred responsibility entrusted to humanity as stewards (*khalīfah*) on the earth.

Classical scholars interpret *fasād* as the deviation of something from its rightful state, whether in governance, personal conduct, or communal affairs. This includes dishonesty, bribery, misappropriation, embezzlement, abuse of power, exploitation, and the erosion of public trust. The Qur'an links corruption with injustice (*zulm*), emphasizing that both are incompatible with the values of truthfulness (*ṣidq*) and trustworthiness (*amānah*), which are essential for maintaining social harmony and divine accountability.¹⁹

4 The Holy Qur'an (Abdullah Yusuf Ali trans., Amana Corp. 1989).

5 The Holy Qur'an (M.A.S. Abdel Haleem trans., Oxford Univ. Press 2004).

6 ṢAHĪH AL-BUKHĀRĪ, bk. 43, hadīth 622 (Muhammad Muhsin Khan trans., Dar al-Fikr 1997).

7 ṢAHĪH MUSLIM (Abdul Hamid Siddiqi trans., Int'l Islamic Publ'g House).

8 RIYĀD AL-ṢĀLIḤĪN, ḤADĪTH 45 (Imām al-Nawawī comp., Dar al-Ma'rifah 1985).

9 AL-ṬABARĪ, JĀMI‘ AL-BAYĀN (Dar al-Fikr 2001).

10 IBN KATHĪR, TAFSĪR AL-QUR‘ĀN AL-‘AZĪM (Darussalam 1999).

11 AL-RĀGHIB AL-ISFAHĀNĪ, MUFRADĀT AL-QUR‘ĀN 67 (Dar al-Ma'rifah 2005).

12 AL-QURTUBĪ, AL-JĀMI‘ LI-AḤKĀM AL-QUR‘ĀN (Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah 2006).

13 Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Islamic Law and Muslim Minorities*, 26 U.C. DAVIS L. REV. 1009 (1993).

14 Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State*, 29 J. ISLAMIC STUD. 1 (2012).

15 Rahman & Nadzri, *Taqwa and Governance*, 12 J. ISLAMIC ETHICS 45 (2024).

16 Alazzabi et al., *Islamic Ethics in Governance*, 8 J. MUSLIM SOC'Y STUD. 77 (2020).

17 Abdelsattar et al., *Spiritual Consciousness in Institutions*, 14 J. ISLAMIC ADMIN. 233 (2024).

18 The Holy Qur'an, *supra* note 1.

19 The Holy Qur'an, *supra* note 2.

The Hadith literature reinforces this understanding by highlighting the Prophet Muhammad exemplary conduct in leadership, governance, trade, and dispute resolution.²⁰ His title *Al-Amīn* (The Trustworthy) reflects a life committed to ethical principles that actively resist corruption. His teachings encourage believers to uphold justice, correct wrongdoing, and embody moral character in all aspects of life.

Thus, corruption in the Islamic framework is a multifaceted ethical failure that undermines both spiritual and societal well-being. It is countered through the cultivation of *taqwā* (God-consciousness), which serves as an internal compass guiding individuals toward integrity, fairness, and accountability, even in the absence of external oversight.

4. THE QUR'AN'S INVITATION TO ANTI-CORRUPTION AND JUSTICE

Engaging with the Qur'an, whether in scholarly, spiritual, or academic contexts, can be likened to embarking on a journey illuminated by divine wisdom. For those who seek truth, justice, and moral integrity, its verses offer profound guidance and spiritual nourishment. Even skeptics or critics often encounter its compelling coherence and moral clarity, which challenge the conscience and invite reflection. At its core, the Qur'an's emphasis on justice serves as a foundation for addressing corruption in all its forms, aiming to uphold socio-economic and political equity.

Surah Al-Fatiha, the opening chapter of the Qur'an, holds exceptional significance in this regard. Often regarded as the spiritual preamble to the entire Qur'anic message, it encapsulates themes of mercy, guidance, justice, and moral uprightness. Its recitation is obligatory in every unit of the five daily prayers, as affirmed in Qur'an 15:87.

And We have certainly given you, [O Muhammad], seven of the oft-repeated [verses] and the great Qur'an.²¹

This repetition reinforces the believer's commitment to justice and accountability in both worship and daily conduct. *Al-Fatiha* is known by several revered titles, each reflecting its multifaceted role in guiding believers:

- *Umm al-Kitāb* (Mother of the Book): Signifying its foundational status in the Qur'an message.

²⁰ **SAHĪH AL-BUKHĀRĪ**, *supra* note 6.

²¹ *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-ḥijr 15:87 (Sahih International trans., Al-Muntada al-Islami 1997).

²² **AL-QURTŪBĪ**, *supra* note 12, vol. 5, at 210.

²³ **SAHĪH MUSLIM**, bk. 4, hadīth 395 (Abdul Hamid Siddiqi trans., Sh. Muhammad Ashraf 1976).

²⁴ **MUSNAD AHMAD IBN HANBAL**, ḤADĪTH 22139 (Dar al-Fikr 1995).

²⁵ *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-fatiha 1:6-7 (M.A.S. Abdel Haleem trans., Oxford Univ. Press 2004).

²⁶ *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-baqarah 2:2 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali trans., Amana Corp. 1989).

²⁷ *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-talāq 65:2-3 (M.A.S. Abdel Haleem trans., Oxford Univ. Press 2004).

- *Ash-Shifā'* (The Cure): Highlighting its spiritual healing power, especially in confronting moral ailments like injustice and corruption.
- *Al-Ḥamد* (The Praise): Emphasizing gratitude for divine guidance.
- *Al-Wāfiyah* (The Complete) and *Al-Kāfiyah* (The Sufficient): Indicating its comprehensive nature, sufficient in meaning and invocation, even if it were the only chapter known.

Classical scholars such as Imām al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurtubī interpret Qur'an 15:87 as a direct reference to *Al-Fatiha*.²² Imam al-Qurtubī, in particular, describes it as *al-mathānī* due to its frequent recitation and thematic depth, serving both as a summary and gateway to the Qur'an's broader teachings.

Prophetic traditions further affirm its significance. Abū Hurairah narrated that the Prophet said: "Allah has divided the prayer between Himself and His servant..."²³

Similarly, Ubayy ibn Ka'b reported that the Prophet stated: "Allah did not reveal anything in the Torah or the Injil resembling Ummal-Qur'an..."²⁴

These narrations underscore Al-Fatiha's unique spiritual and theological stature. The chapter concludes with a supplication for moral clarity: "Guide us to the Straight Path, the path of those You have favored, not of those who have incurred Your anger or gone astray."²⁵

This plea finds a direct response in *Surah Al-Baqarah*, which opens with: "This is the Book in which there is no doubt, a guidance for those who are mindful of Allah." (Qur'an 2:2)²⁶

Verses 3 and 4 of *Surah Al-Baqarah* describe the *Al-Muttaqūn* as those who possess *taqwā* (God-consciousness). These individuals uphold justice, act ethically, and maintain moral conduct in their daily lives. The Qur'an promises divine support for such people: "And whoever fears Allah, He will make for him a way out and provide for him from where he does not expect."²⁷

Thus, the Qur'an transcends its role as a spiritual text. It functions as a comprehensive guide for moral, legal, social, economic, and political conduct, offering enduring

principles for combating corruption and promoting justice across all facets of human life.

5. CORRUPTION AND INJUSTICE IN QUR'ANIC ETHICS

The Qur'an articulates a robust ethical vision that unequivocally denounces corruption (*fasād*) and injustice (*zulm*) as serious breaches of the divine trust placed upon humanity. As *khalifah* (vicegerents) on Earth, human beings are divinely mandated to uphold justice, preserve moral order, and safeguard the integrity of creation. This responsibility is not symbolic; it is a sacred covenant grounded in divine instruction.

Within Islamic moral philosophy, *sidq* (truthfulness) and *amānah* (trustworthiness) are not limited to personal virtues; they are essential pillars of public ethics and social stability. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the importance of honesty as a communal value. In *Surah Al-Tawbah* (9:119), believers are urged to "be with those who are truthful."²⁸ Underscoring that sincerity in words and deed is fundamental to both divine approval and societal harmony. Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, in *Mufradāt al-Qur'ān*, defines *sidq* as consistency between speech, intention, and action, an ethical alignment that supports justice.²⁹

In the realm of governance, the Qur'an provides a clear directive: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people, to judge with justice..."³⁰ This verse enshrines *amanah* as a divine imperative, especially in leadership and adjudication. Al-Ṭabarī, in *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, interprets this command as a universal principle for rulers and citizens alike, warning that betrayal of trust constitutes *fasad* (corruption), a disruption of divine order.³¹ Ibn Kathīr similarly affirms that *taqwā* (God-consciousness) is the internal compass ensuring ethical governance.³²

The Prophet Muhammad embodied these values throughout his life. Known as *Al-Amīn*, he demonstrated:

- Integrity in trade and contracts,

- Fairness in resolving disputes,
- Transparency in managing communal affairs.

His leadership model fused personal virtue with institutional ethics. Khaled Abou El Fadl, in his "The Search for Beauty in Islam", argues that the Prophet's governance was rooted in *taqwā*, transforming civic responsibility into a form of spiritual devotion.³³

The Qur'an contains multiple verses that explicitly prohibit corruption: "And when he goes away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and destroy crops and animals. And Allah does not like corruption."³⁴

These verses highlight the moral imperative to uphold justice and peace, warning against actions that destabilize societal and ecological balance. Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī describes *fasād* as deviation of something from its rightful state, encompassing both material destruction and ethical decay.³⁵

Islamic teachings frame anti-corruption not only as a legal duty but as a spiritual obligation. Upholding honesty and integrity fosters:

- Public confidence,
- Just governance,
- Resistance to exploitation.

In this framework, civic ethics are expressions of *taqwā*, and justice becomes a manifestation of faith. Wael Hallaq, in his "The Impossible State", notes that classical Islamic governance was anchored in moral accountability, with *taqwā* serving as a guiding principle for both individuals and institutions.³⁶

Surah Al-Qasas reinforces this ethos: "And seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter... And do not desire corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters."³⁷

The Qur'an also warns against those who disguise corruption as reform: "And when he goes away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein."³⁸

²⁸ *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-tawbah 9:119 (Sahih International trans., Al-Muntada al-Islami 1997).

²⁹ AL-RĀGHIB AL-İŞFAHĀNĪ, *supra* note 11.

³⁰ *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-nisā' 4:58 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali trans., Amana Corp. 1989).

³¹ AL-ṬABARĪ, *supra* note 9, 'AN TA'WIL ĀY AL-QUR'ĀN vol. 3, at 45.

³² IBN KATHĪR, *supra* note 10, vol. 2, at 112.

³³ KHALED ABOU EL FADL, THE SEARCH FOR BEAUTY IN ISLAM: A CONFERENCE OF THE BOOKS 45 (Rowman & Littlefield 2006).

³⁴ *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-baqarah 2:205 (M.A.S. Abdel Haleem trans., Oxford Univ. Press 2004).

³⁵ AL-İŞFAHĀNĪ, *supra* note 11.

³⁶ Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*, 29 J. ISLAMIC STUD. 1 (2012).

³⁷ *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-qasas 28:77 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali trans., Amana Corp. 1989).

³⁸ *The Holy Qur'an*, *supra* note 34.

Injustice, closely linked to corruption, is condemned as a grave ethical violation. Qur'an 11:113 cautions: "And do not incline toward those who do wrong, lest you be touched by the Fire."³⁹

These verses underscore that passive complicity in injustice is itself a moral failing. Ibn Taymiyyah famously stated: "Allah upholds a just state even if it is unbelieving and does not uphold an unjust state even if it is believing."⁴⁰

The Qur'an calls believers to be proactive agents of justice, resisting oppression and promoting moral reform. The Qur'an calls on believers (both men and women) to be agents for justice, resisting oppression and promoting moral values: "The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong ...".⁴¹

Thus, the Qur'an's ethical vision places justice and anti-corruption at the heart of faith. These are not peripheral values; they are central to fulfilling humanity's role as stewards of divine trust.

6. TAQWA AS A DEFENSE AGAINST CORRUPTION

Taqwa, often translated as "consciousness of God" or "fear of Allah, in the everyday conduct and activities of the individual person". It is a central ethical principle in Islam that goes beyond ritual devotion and influences every aspect of life, including leadership, economic conduct, and social equity. *Taqwa* serves as an internal moral compass, guiding believers toward upright behavior even in the absence of external monitoring. In the context of corruption, *taqwa* acts as a spiritual safeguard, fostering personal accountability that discourages unethical actions and strengthens public confidence.

The Qur'an consistently presents *taqwa* as the foundation for moral decision-making. In *Surah Al-Ahzab*, the Qur'an instructed believers to "fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice,"⁴² linking divine awareness with truthful

and fair speech. The Qur'an in *Surah At-Talaq* promises that those who are mindful of Allah will be granted a way out of hardship,⁴³ implying divine support for those who uphold ethical standards. In *Surah Al-Baqarah*, the Qur'an describes itself as "a guidance for the muttaqūn,"⁴⁴ referring to those who live with spiritual vigilance and moral integrity.

According to classical scholar Al-Tabari,⁴⁵ this verse calls for internalizing divine instruction, which naturally leads to the rejection of injustice and dishonesty. Similarly, the Qur'an in *Surah Al-Hashr* cautions believers to: "Fear Allah and let every soul consider what it has sent forth for tomorrow."⁴⁶

Ibn Kathir⁴⁷ interprets this verse as a reminder of divine accountability, encouraging believers to avoid transgressions, including financial and administrative misconduct. The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad further reinforce this internal moral vigilance. He said: "Fear Allah wherever you are, follow up a bad deed with a good one, it will erase it, and treat people with good character."⁴⁸

This *hadith* highlights the dynamic nature of *taqwa*, not only avoiding wrongdoing but actively correcting one's behavior and maintaining ethical conduct. Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali⁴⁹ explains that true *taqwa* involves obeying Allah with hope for His mercy and avoiding disobedience out of fear of His punishment, both guided by divine insight. This balance between hope and fear forms a strong ethical framework that discourages corrupt behavior and promotes moral resilience.

Contemporary scholars affirm the relevance of *taqwa* in promoting ethical governance. Rahman & Nadzri (2024)⁵⁰ identify *taqwa* as one of five Qur'anic principles essential for sound administration, alongside justice, transparency, accountability, and consultation. They argue that *taqwa* instills a sense of divine oversight that complements formal legal systems. Alazzabi et al. (2020)⁵¹ describe *taqwa* as an internal regulatory mechanism that reduces reliance

39 The Holy Qur'an surah hūd 11:113 (Sahih International trans., Al-Muntada al-Islami 1997).

40 IBN TAYMIYYAH, AL-ḤISBĀH FĪ AL-ISLĀM 23 (Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah 1983).

41 The Holy Qur'an surah al-tawbah 9:71 (Sahih International trans., Al-Muntada al-Islami 1997).

42 The Holy Qur'an surah al-ahzāb 33:70 (M.A.S. Abdel Haleem trans., Oxford Univ. Press 2004).

43 The Holy Qur'an, *supra* note 28.

44 *Id.*

45 AL-ṬABARĪ, *supra* note 9, 'AN TA'WĪL ĀY AL-QUR'ĀN vol. 3, at 45.

46 The Holy Qur'an surah al-ḥashr 59:18 (Sahih International trans., Al-Muntada al-Islami 1997).

47 IBN KATHĪR, *supra* note 10, vol. 2, at 112.

48 SUNAN AL-TIRMIDHĪ, ḤADĪTH 1987 (Dar al-Fikr 1998).

49 IBN RAJAB AL-HANBALĪ, JĀMI' AL-‘ULŪM WA'L-ḤIKAM 45 (Dar al-Ma'rifah 2001).

50 Rahman & Nadzri, *supra* note 15.

51 Alazzabi et al., *supra* note 16.

on external audits and punitive measures. In a related study, Abdelsattar et al. (2024)⁵² emphasize that spiritual education rooted in Qur'anic ethics, with *taqwa* at its core, can significantly mitigate administrative corruption.

The Qur'an in *Surah Al-Baqarah*, offers a comprehensive portrayal of righteousness, encompassing faith, generosity, honesty, and perseverance, traits that inherently opposes corrupt practices: "Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is in one who believes in Allah..."⁵³

Al-Qurtubi⁵⁴ in his classical commentary, notes that this verse shifts the emphasis from ritual observance to ethical substance, reinforcing the idea that *taqwa* encompasses both personal piety and social responsibility.

In summary, *taqwa* is not merely a spiritual aspiration but a practical and transformative force for ethical governance. By cultivating internal accountability, *taqwa* equips individuals and institutions to resist corruption from within. When embedded into legal, educational, and administrative systems, *taqwa* elevates anti-corruption efforts from reactive enforcement to proactive moral leadership.

6.1. *Jihād al-nafs*: Ethical reform as a barrier to corruption

Jihād al-nafs, the internal struggle against the ego, is central to Islamic ethics and directly relevant to anti-corruption. The Qur'an (91:7-9) affirms that the soul is endowed with the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong, and that success lies in its purification: "By the soul and [by] Him who proportioned it, and inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness. He has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who instills it with corruption."⁵⁵ Al-Qurtubī, in his *tafsir*, explains that this purification (*tazkiyah*) is the foundation of moral accountability.⁵⁶ Corruption, often rooted in unchecked desires and egoism, is thus countered at its source through spiritual discipline.

52 Abdelsattar et al., *supra* note 17.

53 *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-baqarah 2:177 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali trans., Amana Corp. 1989).

54 AL-QURTUBI, *supra* note 12, vol. 5, at 210.

55 *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-shams 91:7-10 (M.A.S. Abdel Haleem trans., Oxford Univ. Press 2004).

56 AL-QURTUBI, AL-JĀMI' LI-ĀHKĀM AL-QUR'ĀN vols. 2, 15, 20 (Dar al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya 1964).

57 SYED MUHAMMAD NAQIB AL-ATTAS, PROLEGOMENA TO THE METAPHYSICS OF ISLAM 233 (ISTAC 1995).

58 *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-mā'ida 5:2 (M.A.S. Abdel Haleem trans., Oxford Univ. Press 2004).

59 FAKHR AL-DĪN AL-RĀZĪ, AL-TAFSĪR AL-KABĪR (MAFĀTĪH AL-GHAYB) vol. 11 (Dar al-Fikr 1999).

60 Abdelsattar H., Khalid R. & Omar S., *Qur'anic Ethics and Administrative Integrity*, 9 J. ISLAMIC ETHICS & GOVERNANCE 23–24 (2024).

61 *The Holy Qur'an* surah az-zumar 39:9 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali trans., Amana Corp. 1989).

62 AL-QURTUBI, *supra* note 57.

63 MOHAMMAD HASHIM KAMALI, CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY IN ISLAMIC GOVERNANCE 77 (IAIS Malaysia 2019).

Syed Muhammad Naqib al-Attas emphasizes that spiritual reform is the first defense against moral decay in governance, positioning *jihād al-nafs* as a strategic tool in anti-corruption efforts.⁵⁷

6.2. Social integrity and collective oversight

Islamic ethics emphasize that resisting corruption is not solely the responsibility of institutions but a communal obligation. *Surah Al-Ma'ida* (5:2) commands believers to cooperate in righteousness and avoid sin: "And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression..."⁵⁸

Al-Razi, in his *tafsir* (commentary), interprets this as a directive for collective moral responsibility.⁵⁹ Abdelsattar et al. argue that community-driven ethical oversight is essential in curbing administrative corruption.⁶⁰ This includes public vigilance, whistleblowing, and fostering a culture of accountability.

6.3. Civic literacy rooted in divine ethics

The pursuit of knowledge in Islam is not merely intellectual, it is moral. *Surah Az-Zumar* (39:9) asks: "Say, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Only those who possess intellect take heed."⁶¹

The Prophet declared that seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim. Al-Qurtubī links knowledge to moral elevation and societal reform in his *tafsir*.⁶² Mohammad Hashim Kamali emphasizes that civic education grounded in Islamic ethics empowers citizens to critically evaluate leadership and participate ethically in public life.⁶³

6.4. Justice and governance ethics

Justice ('adl) is the backbone of Qur'anic governance. *Surah An-Nisa'* (4:135) commands believers to uphold justice even against themselves or close kin: "O you who believe! Stand

out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin..."⁶⁴

While verse 4:58 emphasizes the importance of rendering trusts and judging fairly: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people, judge with justice..."⁶⁵

Mufti Muhammad Shafi Usmani interprets this as establishing governance as a divine trust (*amānah*), obligating leaders to act with transparency and impartiality.⁶⁶ The Prophet Muhammad, known as *Al-Amīn* (The Trustworthy), exemplified these values. A *hadīth* in *Sahīh Muslim* warns that any leader who betrays their people will be denied Paradise.⁶⁷ Alazzabi et al. argue that ethical leadership rooted in Qur'anic justice reduces reliance on punitive systems by fostering institutional integrity.⁶⁸

7. SOME OFFENCES OF CORRUPTION PROSCRIBED IN THE QUR'AN

7.1. Bribery

While bribery (*rishwah*) is broadly condemned in Islamic ethics as a violation of justice and fairness, its relevance to corruption must be explicitly framed within the Qur'anic discourse on *fasād* (corruption) and *amānah* (trust). The Qur'an does not treat bribery as an isolated moral failing but as a systemic threat to public integrity and divine law. *Surah Al-Baqarah* (2:188) states: "Do not consume one another's wealth unjustly or offer it to authorities as bribes to wrongfully consume a portion of others' wealth, knowingly."⁶⁹

Classical exegete Al-Tabari, in his *Jāmi' al-Bayān*,⁷⁰ interprets this verse as a direct prohibition of bribery in judicial and administrative contexts, warning that such practices distort justice and violate the principle of mutual consent in lawful transactions. Al-Qurtubi, in *Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*,⁷¹ expands this interpretation by linking bribery to the broader concept of *fasād*, arguing that it undermines the moral fabric of society and erodes institutional trust.

⁶⁴ *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-nisā' 4:135 (M.A.S. Abdel Haleem trans., Oxford Univ. Press 2004).

⁶⁵ *The Holy Qur'an*, *supra* note 31.

⁶⁶ MUFTI MUHAMMAD SHAFI USMANI, MA'ĀRIF AL-QURĀN vol. 2, at 233 (Maktaba Dar al-'Ulum 2003).

⁶⁷ SAHĪH MUSLIM, bk. 20, *hadīth* 4494 (Abdul Hamid Siddiqi trans., Sh. Muhammad Ashraf 1976).

⁶⁸ Alazzabi et al., *supra* note 16.

⁶⁹ *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-baqarah 2:188 (M.A.S. Abdel Haleem trans., Oxford Univ. Press 2004).

⁷⁰ AL-TABARĪ, *supra* note 9, 'AN TA'WIL ĀY AL-QURĀN vols. 1-2.

⁷¹ AL-QURTŪBĪ, *supra* note 57.

⁷² Mohamed A. Arafa, *Corruption and Bribery in Islamic Law*, GOLDEN GATE U. L. REV. (2012).

⁷³ *The Holy Qur'an* surah āl-'imrān 3:161 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali trans., Amana Corp. 1989).

⁷⁴ IBN KATHĪR, *supra* note 10, vol. 4.

⁷⁵ AL-QURTŪBĪ, *supra* note 57.

To further anchor this in the study of corruption, *Surah Al-Mā'idah* (5:33) outlines severe consequences for those who "strive upon earth to cause corruption." While classical scholars such as Ibn Kathir and Imam Al-Shafi'i interpret this primarily in the context of violent crimes, contemporary scholars like Mohamed Arafa argue that economic crimes, including bribery, fall under this category when they destabilize public order and violate divine justice.⁷²

This interpretive linkage transforms bribery from a general ethical concern into a specific manifestation of corruption. It highlights how Islamic legal and moral frameworks treat bribery as a breach of *amānah* and a disruption of '*adl* (justice), both of which are central to Qur'anic governance. As such, bribery is not merely a transactional sin, it is a structural offense that compromises divine accountability and civic trust.

7.2. Misappropriation and breach of trust

The Qur'an treats the misappropriation of public assets not merely as a legal infraction but as a profound betrayal of divine trust. *Surah Āl- 'Imrān* (3:161) declares: "It is not for a Prophet to embezzle spoils. And whoever misappropriates shall bring forth, on the Day of Resurrection, what he misappropriated..."⁷³

This verse underscores the sanctity of entrusted resources and affirms that accountability transcends status, even prophets are held to this standard. According to Ibn Kathir, this verse was revealed in response to accusations against the Prophet Muhammad regarding the distribution of war spoils, and its purpose was to categorically reject the possibility of prophetic dishonesty.⁷⁴ Ibn Kathir emphasizes that the verse establishes a universal principle: no individual, regardless of rank or role, is exempt from scrutiny in matters of public stewardship.

Al-Qurtubi, in his *Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*,⁷⁵ interprets this verse as a legal and moral foundation for

institutional accountability. He argues that the verse affirms the inviolability of public trust (*amānah*) and warns that misappropriation will be exposed and punished in the Hereafter. This eschatological framing elevates the issue from administrative misconduct to a spiritual transgression.

Contemporary scholars reinforce this classical perspective. Misappropriation, in this framework, is not simply theft; it is a violation of the covenant between the ruler and the ruled, and between the individual and God.

7.3. Fraud, deception, and economic injustice

Islamic ethics categorically prohibit fraudulent practices and exploitative trade, framing them not merely as financial offenses but as violations of divine order and communal balance. The Qur'an in *Surah Hud*, through the voice of Prophet Shu'ayb, declares: "O my people! Give full measure and weight in justice, and do not deprive people of their due, and do not spread corruption in the land."⁷⁶

This verse articulates four key imperatives: equity in trade and measurement, honesty in contracts and transactions, rejection of market manipulation, and resistance to systemic injustice. Al-Qurtubi, in his *Al-Jāmi 'li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*,⁷⁷ interprets this verse as a comprehensive condemnation of economic corruption, arguing that unjust commercial practices constitute *fasād* (corruption) that destabilizes society and violates divine justice.

The Qur'an further rebukes asymmetrical economic behavior in Surah Al-Mutaffifin: "Woe to those who give less than due, who, when they take measure from people, take in full; but if they give by measure or weight to them, they cause loss."⁷⁸

Ibn Kathir explains that this passage targets greed and double standards in trade, offering a timeless critique of exploitative systems that prioritize profit over fairness.⁷⁹ He emphasizes that such behavior is not only unethical but spiritually destructive, as it reflects a disregard for divine accountability. Fraud and deception, in this framework, are not isolated acts but systemic violations that erode the

ethical foundations of society. The Qur'an framed fraud as a breach of *amānah*, a denial of *'adl* (justice), and a disruption of *taqwā*.

7.4. Theft and ethical deterrence

Theft in Islamic law is treated with judicial seriousness, reflecting both the sanctity of private property and the moral gravity of betrayal. The Qur'an prescribes a clear legal deterrent in *Surah Al-Mā'idah*: "As for the male thief and the female thief, cut off their hands as recompense for what they committed, a deterrent from Allah. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise."⁸⁰

This injunction belongs to the category of *hudūd* (fixed punishments), which are divinely mandated and not subject to discretionary waiver. However, classical jurists such as Imām Mālik, al-Shāfi'i, and Abū Ḥanīfah⁸¹ emphasized that its application is contingent upon stringent conditions. These include:

- The stolen item must exceed a minimum value (e.g., one-quarter of a dinar).
- It must be taken from a secure location.
- The act must be proven through reliable testimony or confession.
- The theft must be committed with deliberate intent and stealth.

These safeguards ensure that the punishment is not applied arbitrarily, but only in cases of clear and deliberate violation of property rights. Al-Qurtubi, in his *Al-Jāmi 'li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*,⁸² stresses that the purpose of this punishment is not vengeance but deterrence, preserving public trust and economic justice by upholding the sanctity of ownership and discouraging systemic theft.

Complementing this legal framework is a *hadīth* reported by Abū Hurairah, which addresses the ethical dimensions of self-defense. When asked about defending one's wealth, the Prophet Muhammad replied: "Do not surrender your wealth... If he kills you, you are a martyr. If you kill him, he is in the Hellfire."⁸³

⁷⁶ *The Holy Qur'an* surah hūd 11:85 (M.A.S. Abdel Haleem trans., Oxford Univ. Press 2004).

⁷⁷ AL-QURTUBI, *supra* note 57, vol. 20.

⁷⁸ *Id.*, surah al-mutaffifin 83:1-3.

⁷⁹ IBN KATHIR, *supra* note 10, vol. 4.

⁸⁰ *The Holy Qur'an* surah al-mā'idah 5:38 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali trans., Amana Corp. 1989).

⁸¹ WAEL B. HALLAQ, SHARI'A: THEORY, PRACTICE, TRANSFORMATIONS 319-25 (Cambridge Univ. Press 2009); MOHAMMAD HASHIM KAMALI, PRINCIPLES OF ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE 317-20 (Islamic Texts Soc'y 2003).

⁸² AL-QURTUBI, *supra* note 57, vol. 20.

⁸³ SUNAN ABŪ DĀWŪD, bk. 41, ḥadīth 4755 (Dar al-Fikr 1998).

This narration affirms the right to defend one's property while maintaining moral accountability. Imām al-Nawawī interpreted this *hadīth* as a framework for proportional defense, cautioning against excessive retaliation and emphasizing the ethical boundaries of force.⁸⁴ It also informs broader legal discourse on *ḥuqūq al-ibād* (human rights), where the protection of property is balanced with the preservation of life and dignity.

8. CONCLUSION

The Qur'anic discourse on corruption presents a holistic ethical and legal paradigm that transcends mere punitive measures, offering instead a comprehensive vision of moral governance rooted in divine accountability. Across the examined domains, bribery, misappropriation, fraud, and theft, the Qur'an articulates a consistent moral logic that links individual conduct to institutional integrity. These offenses are not treated as isolated infractions but as manifestations of *fasād* (corruption), which disrupts the balance of justice ('adl), violates the trust of *amānah*, and undermines the spiritual imperative of *taqwā* (God-consciousness). Classical exegetes such as Al-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi, and Ibn Kathir, alongside jurists like Imām Mālik and al-Shāfi'ī, provide detailed interpretive frameworks that emphasize the gravity of these transgressions and the stringent conditions under which legal sanctions are applied, underscoring the Qur'an's commitment to both justice and procedural fairness.

Moreover, the Prophetic model reinforces these principles through lived example, demonstrating that ethical leadership is inseparable from personal virtue and public accountability. Contemporary scholars such as Wael Hallaq and Mohamed Arafa have further contextualized these teachings within modern governance, arguing that Islamic ethics offer not only a critique of corruption but a viable blueprint for institutional reform. The Qur'an's emphasis on transparency, equitable distribution of resources, and the moral responsibilities of both rulers and citizens situates anti-corruption efforts within a broader theological and civic mandate.

In sum, Islamic teachings on corruption are not confined to legalistic prohibitions; they constitute a normative framework that integrates spiritual discipline, economic justice, and ethical governance. By institutionalizing these values, contemporary societies, particularly Muslim-majority nations or states, can draw upon this rich ethical tradition

provided in the Qur'an to cultivate systems of accountability, restore public trust, and promote sustainable justice. This Qur'anic paradigm affirms that the pursuit of justice is not merely a civic obligation but a sacred act of worship, thereby elevating anti-corruption from a policy objective to a moral imperative.

AI Use Disclosure

The author used artificial intelligence (AI) tools for proofreading and preliminary translation only. The AI tools did not contribute to the research design, analysis, interpretation, or intellectual content of the manuscript. The author retains full responsibility for the content of the work.

Disclosure of interest

The author has no competing interests to declare.