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Maqasid al-Shari'ah, Climate Governance, and Ecological Responsibility: A Comparative Study of Islamic Environmental Ethics in Morocco and Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Climate change has emerged as one of the most significant ethical, political, and civilizational challenges confronting contemporary Muslim societies. This article comparatively examines how Islamic environmental ethics and maqasid al-shari'ah frameworks are operationalized within climate governance discourse in Morocco and Malaysia. While existing scholarship frequently treats Islamic environmentalism as a theological or symbolic discourse, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to the institutional and interpretive mechanisms through which Islamic ethical reasoning shapes environmental governance and public ecological engagement. Drawing upon comparative textual analysis of state environmental policies, religious institutional publications, climate governance initiatives, Islamic legal scholarship, and international environmental reports, the study demonstrates that contemporary Islamic environmental ethics increasingly functions as a mediating framework linking religious legitimacy, ecological responsibility, and sustainable governance. The findings reveal that Moroccan climate governance discourse generally emphasizes religious-national stewardship rooted in Maliki jurisprudential traditions and monarchic environmental legitimacy, whereas Malaysian environmental initiatives more frequently integrate Islamic developmental ethics, public policy modernization, and participatory sustainability discourse. The article argues that maqasid al-shari'ah increasingly provides a flexible interpretive mechanism through which Muslim societies negotiate tensions between economic development, ecological sustainability, and religious authority. This

study contributes to Islamic studies scholarship by integrating Islamic jurisprudence, environmental humanities, political ecology, and comparative governance analysis into an interdisciplinary framework for understanding contemporary Islamic environmental ethics.

Keywords: Islamic environmental ethics, maqasid al-shari‘ah, climate governance, sustainability, political ecology, Morocco, Malaysia, contemporary Islam

INTRODUCTION

The accelerating climate crisis has transformed environmental sustainability into one of the defining ethical and political concerns of the twenty-first century. Rising global temperatures, desertification, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, deforestation, pollution, and extreme weather events increasingly affect social stability, economic development, food security, migration patterns, and public health across global societies. Muslim-majority countries are particularly vulnerable to climate-related disruptions due to geographic exposure, rapid urbanization, unequal resource distribution, and developmental pressures. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (2024), many regions across North Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East face severe ecological stress associated with water insecurity, rising temperatures, and environmental degradation.

These developments have generated growing scholarly and institutional interest in the relationship between religion and environmental governance. Religious traditions increasingly participate in global environmental discourse by articulating ethical frameworks concerning ecological responsibility, stewardship, sustainability, and public accountability. Within Islamic intellectual traditions, environmental ethics historically emerged through interconnected concepts including khalifah, amanah, mizan, islah, and the prohibition of fasad (Foltz, Denny, & Baharuddin, 2003). Contemporary Islamic environmental discourse frequently reinterprets these concepts to address modern ecological crises and sustainable development challenges.

The expansion of Islamic environmental ethics reflects broader transformations within contemporary Islamic thought. Muslim scholars, policy institutions, civil society organizations, and international Islamic bodies increasingly frame climate change as not merely a technical or scientific issue but also a moral and civilizational challenge requiring ethical transformation. The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change (2015) represents one of the most visible examples of transnational Islamic environmental engagement, emphasizing ethical responsibility, ecological justice, and sustainable development.

Nevertheless, the relationship between Islamic ethics and environmental governance remains analytically contested. Some scholars argue that Islamic environmentalism primarily functions symbolically without significantly influencing policy implementation or institutional transformation (Johnston, 2012). Others contend that Islamic ethical frameworks possess substantial potential for mobilizing public ecological awareness and legitimizing sustainability initiatives within Muslim societies (Kula, 2021).

Early scholarship on Islam and ecology often focused on theological principles concerning stewardship and balance. Nasr (1996) argued that ecological crisis partly reflects the desacralization of nature within modern industrial civilization and emphasized the metaphysical dimensions of Islamic cosmology. Izzi Dien (2000) similarly explored Qur'anic and jurisprudential foundations of environmental ethics.

More recent scholarship increasingly examines the socio-political and institutional dimensions of Islamic environmental discourse. DeLoughrey and Handley (2011) argue that environmental ethics must be analyzed within broader political and historical structures involving colonialism, development, and resource governance. Likewise, contemporary Islamic environmental scholars emphasize the role of governance institutions, economic policy, and civil society participation in shaping ecological outcomes.

Despite these developments, several major limitations remain within existing Islamic studies scholarship. First, much literature remains overly theological and insufficiently connected to governance analysis and environmental policy. Second, comparative studies examining how different Muslim societies operationalize Islamic environmental ethics remain relatively underdeveloped. Third, existing research frequently overlooks the role of *maqasid al-shari'ah* as an adaptive interpretive framework mediating contemporary sustainability discourse. Fourth, limited attention has been devoted to how state structures, legal traditions, and socio-political contexts influence Islamic ecological governance. Fifth, contemporary scholarship often inadequately integrates political ecology with Islamic jurisprudential analysis.

This article addresses these gaps through a comparative study of Islamic environmental ethics and climate governance in Morocco and Malaysia. The comparative selection is analytically significant for several reasons. Morocco represents a North African monarchy characterized by centralized religious authority, Maliki legal traditions, and internationally recognized renewable energy initiatives. Malaysia represents a Southeast Asian Muslim-majority state shaped by developmental modernization, plural governance structures, and institutionalized Islamic administration within a multicultural society.

Both countries actively employ Islamic ethical language within environmental discourse while simultaneously pursuing ambitious economic development agendas. However, they differ significantly regarding political structures, legal traditions, institutional religious authority, environmental policy frameworks, and civil society participation. These differences allow systematic comparison concerning how Islamic environmental ethics is interpreted, institutionalized, and operationalized.

The article develops an analytical framework linking Islamic interpretation, environmental governance, institutional adaptation, and public ecological engagement. Specifically, it argues that *maqasid al-shari'ah* increasingly functions as a mediating interpretive mechanism through which Muslim societies reconcile economic modernization, ecological sustainability, and religious legitimacy.

The comparative findings demonstrate that Moroccan environmental governance discourse generally emphasizes religious stewardship linked to monarchic legitimacy and national ecological modernization, whereas Malaysian discourse more frequently integrates developmental sustainability, Islamic institutional

participation, and participatory environmental education. These differing approaches reveal broader transformations in contemporary Islamic governance and environmental ethics.

This study therefore contributes to Islamic studies scholarship by integrating Islamic legal theory, political ecology, environmental humanities, and comparative governance analysis into an interdisciplinary framework capable of explaining contemporary Islamic environmental transformation.

Accordingly, the primary objective of this article is to comparatively examine how Islamic environmental ethics and *maqasid al-shari'ah* frameworks shape climate governance, ecological responsibility, and sustainability discourse in Morocco and Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative interdisciplinary Islamic studies methodology integrating comparative jurisprudential analysis, political ecology, environmental humanities, and socio-religious governance interpretation. The research design is theoretically grounded in *maqasid al-shari'ah* theory, Islamic environmental ethics, and comparative governance studies concerning sustainability and ecological policy. The comparative logic is based upon examining Morocco and Malaysia as two influential Muslim-majority societies that actively incorporate Islamic ethical language into environmental governance while differing substantially in political structure, legal traditions, ecological conditions, and institutional religious organization. Morocco was selected because of its centralized monarchic religious authority, Maliki jurisprudential heritage, and internationally recognized renewable energy initiatives. Malaysia was selected because of its hybrid legal system, developmental state model, institutionalized Islamic bureaucracy, and active integration of Islamic discourse within public policy and sustainability programs. The principal units of analysis include climate governance policies, Islamic institutional publications, environmental education initiatives, sustainability reports, Islamic legal scholarship, and transnational environmental declarations.

Primary data sources include state environmental policy documents, publications from Islamic councils and ministries, contemporary Islamic environmental scholarship, international climate governance reports, sustainability frameworks, and peer-reviewed academic studies published between 2000 and 2026. Analytical interpretation was conducted through thematic coding of ecological ethics, governance narratives, *maqasid*-oriented reasoning, sustainability discourse, and institutional legitimacy mechanisms. Comparative validation was achieved by triangulating policy materials with Islamic legal scholarship, political ecology literature, and environmental humanities research in order to identify convergent and divergent interpretive structures across both cases. Ethical considerations involved reliance upon publicly verifiable institutional and academic sources without speculative attribution of political intention. The study acknowledges limitations including the evolving character of climate governance, uneven environmental implementation data, and the absence of direct ethnographic fieldwork concerning local ecological communities. Nevertheless, the comparative interdisciplinary methodology provides a robust analytical framework for examining the interaction between Islamic ethics, governance structures, and environmental sustainability.

Findings and Discussion

1. Historical Foundations of Islamic Environmental Ethics and Ecological Stewardship

The comparative findings demonstrate that contemporary Islamic environmental governance in Morocco and Malaysia is deeply rooted in broader historical transformations involving Islamic jurisprudence, state formation, developmental modernization, and global ecological discourse. Contrary to assumptions that Islamic environmentalism is merely a recent reactive phenomenon, the evidence indicates substantial continuity between classical Islamic ethical concepts and contemporary sustainability discourse.

Classical Islamic intellectual traditions historically articulated ethical understandings concerning environmental balance, responsible resource use, and social accountability. Qur'anic references to *mizan* (balance), *khalifah* (stewardship), and the prohibition of corruption on earth (*fasad fi al-ard*) provided conceptual foundations for later jurisprudential and ethical reflection concerning human relationships with nature. Medieval Islamic legal traditions also addressed questions involving water distribution, land use, public welfare, and protection of communal resources.

However, the comparative evidence demonstrates that modern environmental governance emerged within significantly transformed socio-political conditions shaped by colonialism, industrialization, urban expansion, and global developmental policy. In Morocco, environmental governance became increasingly integrated into state modernization projects during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Climate initiatives frequently operate within broader narratives of national stability, renewable energy leadership, and monarchic stewardship.

Moroccan environmental discourse commonly links ecological sustainability with religious-national legitimacy. Official sustainability narratives frequently invoke Islamic stewardship concepts alongside state modernization agendas. The monarchy's religious status as *Amir al-Mu'minin* contributes to integrating ecological responsibility within broader frameworks of moral governance and public order.

In contrast, Malaysian environmental discourse developed within a developmental state context emphasizing industrial modernization, economic diversification, and institutional Islamization. Islamic environmental ethics in Malaysia frequently intersects with public education, halal industry regulation, green finance initiatives, and sustainable urban governance.

The comparative findings reveal substantial differences regarding institutional ecological framing. Moroccan discourse tends toward centralized symbolic stewardship connected to national identity and renewable energy modernization, whereas Malaysian discourse more frequently emphasizes participatory sustainability, educational engagement, and Islamic developmental ethics.

These differences reflect broader historical and political conditions shaping Islamic governance. Morocco's environmental ethics are strongly connected to centralized monarchic legitimacy and North African ecological vulnerability, while Malaysian environmental discourse reflects multicultural governance structures, developmental policy priorities, and institutionalized Islamic administration.

The findings therefore challenge homogenizing approaches to Islamic environmentalism. Islamic ecological ethics does not operate uniformly across Muslim societies but is mediated through distinct historical, legal, and political structures.

2. Maqasid al-Shari‘ah and the Institutionalization of Climate Governance

One of the most significant comparative findings concerns the growing role of maqasid al-shari‘ah within contemporary climate governance discourse. Both Morocco and Malaysia increasingly employ maqasid-oriented reasoning to justify environmental regulation, sustainability policy, and ecological responsibility.

In Morocco, maqasid discourse is frequently integrated into state-centered environmental modernization narratives emphasizing collective welfare, resource preservation, and national ecological resilience. Renewable energy initiatives, water management policies, and sustainability campaigns are often framed within broader ethical language concerning stewardship and intergenerational responsibility.

Moroccan Islamic environmental discourse generally emphasizes preservation of life, prevention of harm, and public welfare as central ethical objectives supporting environmental governance. Climate policy therefore becomes associated not merely with economic modernization but also with religiously informed public responsibility.

Malaysian environmental discourse similarly employs maqasid frameworks but often in more institutionally plural ways. Islamic councils, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and governmental agencies participate in environmental awareness initiatives emphasizing sustainability, ethical consumption, and ecological citizenship.

The comparative evidence indicates that Malaysian institutions more frequently integrate maqasid reasoning with participatory environmental education and sustainable development discourse. Environmental responsibility is often linked to community engagement, ethical consumption, and public behavioral transformation.

These differences reveal broader interpretive variation concerning governance and public participation. Moroccan environmental ethics tends toward centralized stewardship models, whereas Malaysian approaches more frequently encourage distributed institutional participation and civic engagement.

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that maqasid al-shari‘ah increasingly functions as a bridge between Islamic jurisprudence and global sustainability discourse. Concepts such as *maslahah*, justice, and prevention of harm are regularly employed to interpret climate governance within broader ethical and developmental frameworks.

The comparative findings further indicate that Islamic environmental discourse increasingly extends beyond symbolic theological language toward practical governance mechanisms involving renewable energy, sustainable finance, environmental education, and urban planning.

This reflects broader transformations in contemporary Islamic legal thought. Maqasid-oriented jurisprudence increasingly enables Muslim societies to address complex global challenges lacking direct classical

precedents. Climate change therefore becomes interpreted not merely as a scientific issue but also as a moral and civilizational responsibility.

Table 1. Comparative Matrix of Interpretive Variables, Intellectual Mechanisms, and Scholarly Outcomes

Variable	Case/Syst em 1: Morocco	Case/Syst em 2: Malaysia	Empirical/Tex tual Evidence	Analytical Interpretatio n
Governance Structure	Centralize d monarchic environme ntal leadership	Hybrid developme ntal and participato ry governanc e	National sustainability initiatives and institutional publications	Political systems shape ecological authority
Jurisprude ntial Orientation	Maliki stewardshi p ethics	Developm ent- oriented maqasid reasoning	Climate policy and Islamic environmental discourse	Legal traditions influence sustainability interpretation
Maqasid Application	State- centered ecological preservatio n	Participato ry sustainabili ty and ethical developme nt	Environmental education and green policy frameworks	Maqasid mediates ecological modernizatio n
Public Participatio n	Symbolic national environme ntal responsibil ity	Communit y-oriented environme ntal engageme nt	Sustainability campaigns and civic initiatives	Participation models differ structurally
Institutiona l Religious Role	Monarchic religious legitimacy	Institutiona l Islamic bureaucrati c coordinatio n	Religious councils and environmental programs	Religious authority shapes ecological discourse
Environme ntal Priority	Renewabl e energy and water governanc e	Sustainabl e developme nt and urban ecological ethics	Climate adaptation initiatives	Ecological vulnerability influences policy focus
Educational Strategy	National ethical stewardshi p narratives	Public ecological literacy and civic ethics	Educational and media campaigns	Pedagogical approaches shape environmenta l culture
Scholarly Outcome	Ethical stabilizatio n and centralized sustainabil ity	Participato ry ecological pluralizatio n	Comparative governance discourse	Islamic environmenta lism is institutionally differentiated

The comparative matrix demonstrates that Islamic environmental governance is shaped less by abstract theology alone than by interactions among legal traditions, governance structures, developmental priorities, and socio-political conditions. Similar *maqasid* principles generate different institutional outcomes depending upon broader historical and political contexts.

The evidence further indicates that environmental legitimacy increasingly depends upon integration between ethical discourse and practical policy implementation. Symbolic ecological rhetoric without institutional sustainability mechanisms risks declining public credibility. Consequently, Islamic environmental ethics increasingly functions as both a moral and governance framework.

3. Climate Ethics, Developmental Modernization, and Public Ecological Responsibility

The comparative findings reveal that climate governance in both Morocco and Malaysia increasingly involves negotiation between developmental modernization and ecological sustainability. Muslim-majority societies face substantial pressures involving economic growth, urban expansion, industrialization, tourism, and energy transition while simultaneously confronting environmental vulnerability.

Moroccan environmental discourse frequently frames renewable energy initiatives and climate adaptation as components of national modernization and international environmental leadership. Large-scale solar energy projects and water sustainability programs are often presented as examples of ethical modernization consistent with Islamic stewardship principles.

At the same time, Moroccan ecological discourse tends to prioritize centralized governance coordination and macro-level sustainability planning. Public participation is encouraged symbolically through national ethical narratives, but environmental governance remains heavily state-directed.

Malaysian environmental governance more frequently incorporates educational and civic dimensions involving schools, mosques, universities, and civil society organizations. Islamic environmental campaigns commonly emphasize ethical consumption, anti-waste initiatives, and sustainable lifestyle practices.

The comparative findings reveal substantial differences regarding ecological citizenship. Malaysian discourse often encourages participatory environmental ethics involving public behavioral transformation, whereas Moroccan discourse tends to emphasize collective national responsibility mediated through centralized leadership.

Nevertheless, both cases demonstrate increasing integration between Islamic ethics and sustainable development policy. Environmental responsibility is no longer framed solely as a private moral concern but increasingly as a public governance obligation linked to economic planning, energy policy, and social welfare.

The findings further indicate that climate change increasingly influences broader Islamic ethical discourse concerning justice, inequality, and intergenerational responsibility. Environmental degradation disproportionately affects economically vulnerable populations through water scarcity, agricultural instability, and climate displacement.

This has important implications for Islamic jurisprudence and political ethics. Contemporary environmental crises require expanding legal and ethical frameworks capable of addressing collective ecological harms transcending traditional juridical categories.

The comparative evidence also demonstrates growing transnationalization of Islamic environmental discourse. International Islamic declarations, sustainability conferences, and global climate negotiations increasingly shape national environmental narratives within Muslim societies.

These developments contribute to broader transformations in contemporary Islamic public ethics. Climate governance increasingly becomes a site where religious legitimacy, global policy discourse, and developmental modernization intersect.

4. Islamic Environmental Ethics and the Future of Muslim Civilizational Discourse

The comparative findings demonstrate that Islamic environmental ethics increasingly contributes to broader debates concerning Muslim civilizational futures, ethical modernization, and global sustainability governance. Climate change has become not only an ecological challenge but also a question of moral legitimacy, developmental justice, and public accountability.

Moroccan environmental discourse frequently presents sustainability as evidence of ethical national modernization compatible with Islamic values and global environmental leadership. Renewable energy infrastructure and climate diplomacy contribute to constructing international legitimacy and developmental authority.

Malaysian environmental initiatives more commonly emphasize integration between Islamic ethics, sustainable development, educational participation, and multicultural civic engagement. Environmental responsibility is frequently linked to public morality, social responsibility, and ethical citizenship.

The comparative evidence indicates that both governance models possess strengths and limitations. Morocco's centralized environmental leadership may facilitate coordinated implementation and international visibility but risks limited grassroots participation. Malaysia's participatory institutional structure encourages broader public engagement but may generate uneven policy coordination and implementation variability.

Importantly, the findings reveal growing convergence regarding several ethical principles. Institutions in both contexts increasingly emphasize stewardship, prevention of harm, justice, moderation, and intergenerational responsibility as central Islamic ecological values.

The evidence further indicates that future Islamic environmental discourse will likely require greater interdisciplinary integration involving economics, environmental science, political ecology, urban planning, and sustainability governance. Contemporary ecological crises cannot be addressed solely through theological rhetoric without institutional and policy transformation.

This has major implications for Islamic higher education and public religious discourse. Religious scholars increasingly require literacy concerning environmental science, climate policy, and sustainability governance in

order to engage contemporary ecological realities effectively.

The study therefore contributes to broader debates concerning Islam and modernity. Rather than resisting environmental governance or modernization, contemporary Islamic environmental ethics demonstrates adaptive engagement through which Muslim societies reinterpret classical ethical concepts within global ecological contexts.

Scholarly Propositions

Proposition 1: Maqasid al-shari‘ah increasingly functions as an adaptive interpretive mechanism linking Islamic jurisprudence with contemporary climate governance and sustainability ethics.

Proposition 2: Governance structures significantly influence how Islamic environmental ethics is operationalized, with centralized systems emphasizing symbolic stewardship and hybrid systems encouraging participatory ecological engagement.

Proposition 3: Contemporary Islamic environmental discourse increasingly transforms ecological responsibility from a private moral concern into a public governance and developmental obligation.

Proposition 4: The institutional credibility of Islamic environmental ethics depends upon the integration of religious legitimacy with practical sustainability implementation and public ecological participation.

These propositions collectively suggest that contemporary Islamic environmental ethics represents a significant transformation within modern Islamic governance discourse. Ecological sustainability increasingly functions as a site through which Muslim societies negotiate development, legitimacy, ethical responsibility, and global participation.

CONCLUSION

This article has comparatively examined how Islamic environmental ethics and maqasid al-shari‘ah frameworks shape climate governance, ecological responsibility, and sustainability discourse in Morocco and Malaysia. The findings demonstrate that contemporary Islamic environmentalism is not merely symbolic theological rhetoric but an evolving governance framework shaped by institutional structures, political conditions, legal traditions, and developmental priorities.

The comparative evidence reveals substantial variation in how Islamic ecological ethics is institutionalized and operationalized. Moroccan environmental discourse generally emphasizes centralized stewardship linked to monarchic legitimacy, renewable energy modernization, and national sustainability leadership. Malaysian environmental governance more frequently integrates participatory sustainability ethics, institutional Islamic administration, and civic ecological education.

A major theoretical contribution of this study concerns the role of maqasid al-shari‘ah as an adaptive interpretive framework mediating contemporary environmental governance. The findings demonstrate that

maqasid reasoning increasingly enables Muslim societies to reconcile developmental modernization with ecological responsibility and public ethical legitimacy.

The article further contributes to Islamic studies scholarship by integrating Islamic jurisprudence, environmental humanities, political ecology, and governance analysis into a coherent interdisciplinary framework. Existing scholarship often isolates environmental theology from institutional policy analysis. This study demonstrates that Islamic environmental ethics increasingly functions through interactions among governance systems, sustainability policy, and public ecological participation.

The findings possess broader societal and institutional implications. Muslim-majority societies may require stronger integration between environmental governance and Islamic ethical education in order to address climate vulnerability and sustainability challenges effectively. Islamic institutions similarly face increasing pressure to engage ecological crises not merely rhetorically but through practical policy advocacy and educational transformation.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The study relies primarily upon policy analysis and institutional discourse rather than ethnographic environmental fieldwork or quantitative climate governance measurement. Future research would benefit from comparative examination of additional Muslim societies, environmental activism networks, green Islamic finance initiatives, and local ecological practices within rural and urban Muslim communities.

Ultimately, this article argues that contemporary Islamic environmental ethics represents an important transformation within modern Islamic public thought. Climate governance increasingly functions as a critical arena through which Muslim societies negotiate moral responsibility, sustainable development, religious legitimacy, and global civilizational participation in the face of accelerating ecological crisis.

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