

Comparative Analysis of Shura Councils in Qatar and Saudi Arabia: Islamic Public Values in Governance

ABDULFATAH SAID MOHAMED, COLLEGE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES, HAMAD BIN KHALIFA UNIVERSITY, QATAR

Abstract

Shura, a Quranic principle rooted in mutual consultation and accountability, serves as a foundational element of Islamic governance, embodying values such as justice, inclusivity, and collective decision-making. This paper conducts a comparative analysis of the Majlis Al-Shura in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, examining their structures, roles, and alignment with Islamic public value within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Recent constitutional amendments in Qatar, following the November 5, 2024, referendum, have significantly altered the structure of its Shura Council. Qatar formerly used a hybrid system with partial elections before shifting to full appointment by the Emir. However, the new constitutional revisions abolished elections, making all members fully appointed by the Emir, aligning Qatar's governance structure more closely with Saudi Arabia's traditional model. Saudi Arabia's Shura Council has long followed a fully appointed model. Their approaches to lawmaking and public engagement reflect evolving interpretations of Islamic governance. The study draws on legal texts and stakeholder insights to explore how each council balances Islamic values with modern governance. The key challenges facing Qatar since the abolishment of elections include reduced public participation, limitations in legislation, and changing women's roles in governance. The study calls for greater transparency and civic engagement to align reform with Islamic values.

Keywords: Shura, Islamic Governance, Majlis Al-Shura, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Public Consultation, Constitutional Amendments, Islamic Public Values, Legislative Authority, Governance, GCC.

Introduction

Prior to the constitutional amendments passed through Qatar's November 5, 2024, referendum, the Shura Council operated under a hybrid system, with two-thirds of members elected and one-third appointed by the Emir. The recent reforms abolished this system, shifting to a fully appointed council model. While two-thirds were elected, one-third came from appointments made by the Emir. With new revisions to the Constitution, the structure of the Shura Council became totally appointive, abolishing the previously electoral system. This means greater

authority and centralization in the hands of the appointed Consultative Assembly, by the Emir himself. The referendum marked a new path away from democratic electoral participation toward a type of governance closer to Saudi Arabia's fully appointed Shura Council. These changes to the Constitution show that it is the Government's intention to streamline governance through stability and further executive decision-making without direct intervention by any electorally allowed process.

Shura, derived from the Arabic word for consultation, is a cornerstone of Islamic governance deeply rooted in Quranic teachings and Prophetic traditions. It emphasizes collective decision-making, accountability, and inclusivity, serving as a guiding principle for governance in Islamic societies. Quranic verses such as Shura 42:38—"Those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation—and Aal-E-Imran 3:159—"Consult with them in matters. After making your decision draw your confidence from God by heeding His divine directive for *Shura* which ensures justice and equity in your community (Sachedina 1988).

The initial Islamic concept has expanded throughout history to affect governance structures throughout the entire Islamic world including present-day Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) form the base of *Shura* alongside Quranic instructions which show him regularly seeking advice from his companions in these matters. Throughout history the Rightly Guided Caliphs set up *Shura* as their decision-making system which simultaneously honored Islamic values and protected popular responsibility (Abd Razak et al. 2023). The first caliph Abu Bakr received his position via a centralized consultation among followers who had directly touched the Prophet's path. Past practices created *Shura* into a fundamental element that establish Islamic governance's framework. *Shura* evolved into institutional bodies which gained prominence in Gulf states because these countries integrate Islamic standards with the preservation of traditional tribal norms and aligning with contemporary public governance. The adaptations demonstrate how cultural legacy must conform with present-day administrative needs. The Advisory and Legislative Councils of the Gulf Cooperation Council states, which include both Qatar and Saudi Arabia, demonstrate Islamic principles being integrated into state governance systems (Sachedina 2006). Despite differences in structure and authority, both councils play vital roles in embedding Islamic public values such as justice, consultation, and accountability into the governance systems of their respective states. This paper asks: how do Qatar and Saudi Arabia's Shura Councils preserve Islamic principles of governance while adapting to evolving political contexts? Through a comparative institutional analysis, this study contributes to broader discussions in public administration and policy by exploring how religious traditions inform contemporary governance models. As Gulf states navigate constitutional change and demands for participation, understanding the role of *Shura* offers valuable insights into non-Western frameworks for legitimacy, consultation, and institutional design.

Shura in the Gulf States: Modern Context

In the Gulf region, *Shura* continues to play a pivotal role in governance, reflecting both Islamic and tribal values. The *Majlis Al-Shura* in Qatar operates as a semi-legislative organization through elected members accounting for two-thirds of its total membership, which represents growing public engagement. The king in Saudi Arabia has complete authority to select

members of *Majlis Al-Shura* despite following Islamic principles for consultation. The GCC framework enables these institutions to draw from Gulf unity but permits distinctive national variations in their procedures. Islamic cultural and tribal values have established themselves as fundamental factors which determine how governments are shaped. Gulf tribal traditions have always practiced collective decision-making together with elder reverence, which follows *Shura* principles of mutual consultation between leaders. Traditional beliefs from Gulf political culture determine how Shura Councils operate through their functions as venues for dialogue between modern state construction and Islamic cultural principles (Little et al. 1988). The research paper evaluates Shura legislative bodies in Saudi Arabia and Qatar by investigating legislative structures together with their public Islamic value alignment. These legislative bodies both place equal value on justice and both seek consulting public stakeholders, yet they maintain different structural frameworks because Qatar was allowing before 5 November 2024 elected officials to fill two-thirds of its council members while Saudi Arabia's council members are completely appointed (Drechsler and Chafik 2022). Through research into these councils' historical background combined with their constitutional foundation and present-day operational approaches the study illustrates Shura governance's ability to respond to contemporary political and social difficulties. This paper investigates how these councils can create open lines of communication without forfeiting their Islamic principles as well as their capacity to establish democracy and functions that break down gender barriers. This research explores how *Shura* represents a perpetual Islamic guideline, which today influences Gulf state government institutions, while showing how traditional values intersect with contemporary development.

The Concept of Shura: Islamic Public Value

In the context of Islamic governance, public administration derives its core principles from divine guidance, with *Shura* or mutual consultation serving as a foundational mechanism for ensuring accountability, justice, and inclusive decision-making. Islamic governance derives its fundamental principles from Quranic revelations together with traditional Prophetic practices which define strategic decision-making through principles of just systems and community-oriented responsibility. Through centuries, *Shura* developed its principles to address contemporary governance requirements, but it still maintains its Islamic foundations.

Quranic Foundations and Prophetic Traditions

The principle of *Shura* is explicitly mentioned in the Quran, most notably in Surah Ash-Shura 42:38, which describes believers as “those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation.” This verse underscores the importance of collective decision-making and positions *Shura* as an essential characteristic of a virtuous community. Similarly, Surah Aal-E-Imran 3:159 advises the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to consult his companions in governance matters, emphasizing the value of inclusivity and collaboration even within divinely guided leadership. Through his example the Prophet illustrated how consultation creates trust-based relationships while promoting inclusivity along with collective responsibility. *Shura* receives further legal support from Prophetic traditions in both authoritative governance systems and daily practice matters (Chandio and Chandio 2021). Through his practice of seeking input

from others, the Prophet presented how efficient leadership works by listening thoughtfully even though ultimate authority is retained by the leader. The essential foundation of *Shura* integrates sacred guidance with collective problem-solving to create an essential spiritual duty while also building practical governance structures.

Core Principles of Shura

Shura executes Islamic public principles through eight important characteristics which focus on accountable leadership and equitable justice alongside active citizen participation. According to Islamic governance principles leaders serve as stewards because they answer to both human community members and God. Through collective decision-making, *Shura* operates transparently while preventing autocratic decisions. *Shura* supports justice as a core value because it leads to fair decision-making that serves the complete community. The Quran explicitly associates justice with leadership, stating: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice (Surah An-Nisa 4:58)." The act of engaging communities remains essential in *Shura* because the collective wisdom of citizens demonstrates critical importance in their participation for governance. Islamic teaching mandates that community decisions need member-contributions to create inclusive governance, which represents every community interest. The concept matches Islamic teaching about community welfare since it prioritizes *Umma* (community) well-being instead of personal gain. Modern governance challenges demonstrate why these governance principles produce meaningful results. During a period when authoritarian rule and political centralization become stronger, *Shura* maintains value as a model for democratic governance and requires responsible leadership from political representatives.

Traditional components of *Shura* remain foundational in Gulf state governance systems even though institutions adapt this political practice to contemporary governance structures. *Shura* has evolved from traditional tribal meetings to formal state institutions where members of Qatar's *Majlis Al-Shura* and Saudi Arabia's *Shura* Council provide both legislative and advisory functions (Alshareef 2021). These bodies combine traditional Islamic doctrine with modern governmental methods to function as spaces for advising leaders about policies. America's *Shura* Council became fully democratic when they established elections to choose two-thirds of members according to modern presidential republic principles. The approach demonstrates both *Sharia* compliance and higher levels of public involvement. The Saudi Arabian *Shura* Council maintains full appointment power because its structure reflects both Islamic guidance from the kingdom's central leadership with an advisory council role. *Shura* demonstrates an ability to adapt its execution through political reforms according to the particular elements of each state's cultural settings (Uddin 2024). The slow implementation of *Shura* reforms stands as a major characteristic when adopting modern *Shura* systems throughout Gulf nations. Gulf states have adopted an evolutionary approach to governance reform by expanding their systems meticulously while keeping the reform by Islamic principles and regional custom. The method has enabled nations to create democratic political frameworks that match cultural identity and theological customs.

Recognition by United Nations Education Sciences Culture Organization (UNESCO)

Shura together with the broader *Majlis* (Council) system receives international acknowledgment as an intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO formally added the *Majlis* to its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2015. This accreditation validates the *Majlis* as a fundamental community space where Gulf societies perform consultative, conflict mediation and socio-cultural interactions. Through the recognition of traditional *Shura* processes, society recognizes their continuous ability to build governance systems and maintain social unity. UNESCO's declaration establishes *Shura* as a modern concept which actively influences Gulf region governance as well as public customs today. The Gulf states prioritize the cultural value of the *Majlis* as part of their heritage to demonstrate their cultural heritage link between Islamic elements and present-day governance institutions, which maintain *Shura* central to their political matter. *Shura* exists as an ancient Islamic public value which bypasses every framework determined by era and cultural variability. *Shura* attains its philosophical foundation from Quranic guidance and Prophetic customs while providing fundamental standards of justice operation through responsible leadership and active civic duty. In contemporary Gulf interpretations of *Shura* demonstrates the ability of traditional values to execute modern-day governance. Recent reforms, alongside growing global recognition, have helped *Shura* bridge Islamic traditions with contemporary governance, fostering public administration systems rooted in justice and inclusivity.

Historical Evolution of Shura Councils in Qatar and Saudi Arabia

The concept of *Shura* has deep roots in Islamic tradition, serving as a consultative mechanism for governance. In the Gulf region, it has evolved into institutionalized bodies like the Shura Councils of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which reflect the fusion of Islamic values and modern statecraft. Both councils have unique histories and structures but share the overarching goal of aligning governance with *Sharia* principles and public values.

Constitutional Development and Establishment

Qatar's Shura Council is on a very different historical trajectory from its initial constitution date, the year 2004. That which began as no more than an advisory council gradually, through constitutional revisions, increased the level of power the body enjoys. In fact, the very first Shura Council elections of Qatar took place in 2021, as voters were permitted to choose two-thirds of its representatives while the remainder were appointed directly by the monarch. However, the 2024 constitutional amendments have rendered these electoral provisions null, and the council is now fully appointed. The new system brings Qatar's governance closer to the Saudi model, in which all members of the Shura Council are appointed by the ruler. This change would solidify national governance under the leadership of the Emir and make sure that state policies are in line with long-term national objectives without pressures from elections.

Islamic Public Value in the Council's Functioning

Public consultations, inclusiveness, and participatory governance have been an inherent part of the *Shura* system since its establishment in Qatar—a genuine reflection and practice of Islamic Public Value. Suffice it to say that without the election of members, the nature of public engagement with the Shura Council became different. While initially the electoral participation was one avenue to engage the citizens in the processes of governance, this council would function as a purely advisory organ where the public representatives were determined by appointments, not by direct elections. While the leadership believes this ensures stability and leads to governance along the lines of Islamic consultative traditions, the critics are anxious about reduced public direct influence on the legislative processes.

Qatar's Shura Council

Before Qatar's independence in 1971, governance largely revolved around tribal and informal councils, which acted as advisory bodies to the rulers. These advisory bodies drew from both Arab customs and Islamic principles to allow dispute resolution alongside the management of tribal business and Emir guidance about governance decisions. These native meeting spaces became the genesis of Qatar's contemporary Shura Council through which the government established a system of responsibility as well as justice alongside collective deliberation. Qatar started organizing its national governance system after achieving independence (Kay 2024). The Shura Council received its formal legislative start with the promulgation of the Interim Basic Law in 1970 which allowed for its establishment. The institution operated within advisory boundaries whereas its members received their positions through appointment by the Emir. The 2004 constitutional reforms in Qatar made historical progress because they officially positioned the Shura Council as an institution that aimed to create laws. Under Article 76 of the Constitution, the Shura Council received authority to draft legislation and to conduct oversight of executive power while finalizing national budgetary plans and government programs. Qatar achieved history when it staged its inaugural Shura Council electoral contest in 2021 allowing citizen voting that elected two-thirds of its Council members although the Emir maintained control over the appointments of the final one-third (Chandio 2021). The political change indicated substantial democratic development because it offered citizens the chance to participate more directly in running the government. Through the elections, Qatar demonstrated dedication to both political institutional transformation and cultural and Islamic values preservation. Core Islamic morality stands as the defining pillar which guides the operations of Qatar's Shura Council. All decisions follow the guiding illumination of *Sharia*, which directs policy creation through Islamic ethical standards and principles of justice. People have been prioritized as the council leads an ongoing public dialogue process while embracing inclusivity. The approach demonstrates dual goals: strict support for institutional validity and Qatar's targeted alignment of traditional values with present-day governance practices. Islamic values, which are thoroughly integrated into operations, demonstrate how the council serves as a link between historical heritage and progress toward an advanced future for Qatar.

Saudi Arabia's Shura Council

King Abdulaziz Al Saud founded Saudi Arabia's Shura Council during his reign in 1927. The council followed traditional tribal practices from Arabia to give advice to the monarch about state issues. Originally, the council maintained clarity through its core mission to advise monarchs and acquire knowledge about governance challenges and public affairs as well as tribal interactions. Parliamentary consultation originated among Arab citizens through hundreds of years under Islamic and tribal government systems before the inaugural Shura Council was formed. Saudi Arabia conducted multiple reforms aimed at developing its Shura Council into an institution that met present political and social development standards. When King Fahd enacted his Basic Law of Governance in 1992, the shura council obtained expanded power through its official responsibilities (Rifai 2021). After implementing legal reforms, the council obtained authority to both form new policies and assess public sector matters and fiscal operations, though it still functioned as an advisory body to the King. Permanent professional dialogue occurred between the council's representative selection through a system of four-year terms. In 2013, King Abdullah broke tradition by selecting 30 women to join the Shura Council for the first time in Saudi Arabian history. The groundbreaking move granting women council members resulted gender equality in Saudi Arabia, which ended prolonged male dominance of national institutions. The council maintains its essential position of value while actively participating in policy development for economic and social transformations. Official government selection processes combined with voluntary advisory services allow this forum to grow into an indispensable consultative body (Chandio 2021). The operational activities of the Saudi Shura Council proceed using *Sharia* law alongside Islamic principles. Legislation and policy recommendations require proof that Moral and ethical principles from Islam direct their approach. Inside Saudi Arabia the council applies tribal cultural practices with procedural steps to construct values stemming from sociohistorical Saudi norms. Through combining historic foundations with contemporary aspirations, the council connects Saudi Arabia's past roots to its future goals through logical reconciliations of modern administrative frameworks with Islamic traditions and tribal customs. Through historical research it becomes possible to analyze which aspects Saudi Arabia and Qatar share, and which paths they follow separately in managing their Shura Council initiatives. The implementation of Islamic doctrine along with native tribal traditions keeps the councils active in facilitating both public engagement through participation and community consultation. The Government of Qatar promote democratic principles by employing fragmentary electoral systems for expanding public engagement. The Saudi Arabian Shura Council differs from others as it operates without an electoral provision because its government follows a centralized structure (Drechsler and Chafik 2022). In spite of their dissimilarities, these councils stay true to fundamental Islamic values of justice together with accountability as well as collective decision making which demonstrates the timelessness of *Shura* as a governing system.

Comparative Analysis of the Shura Councils

Qatar's Shura Council together with Saudi Arabia's Shura Council emerge as fundamental institutions because they adhere to Islamic consultation protocols and merge public content into policymaking structures. The councils that stem from Islamic traditions show tremendous

dissimilarities regarding their organizational makeup as well as their power to pass laws and the levels of public input and their functions in governance and policy formation. A comparative examination exists which examines each dimension through their Islamic public value framework.

Structural Features

Recent constitutional amendments in Qatar have transformed its governance structure to have a fully appointed Shura Council, just like the Saudi Arabian model. Qatar used to have a hybrid system where partial elections were allowed to give citizens a say in choosing legislative representatives. This component has been taken away in the 2024 referendum, vesting all powers of appointment in the hands of the Emir. In contrast, Saudi Arabia has traditionally had a wholly appointed Shura Council whose members are handpicked by the monarch, while the structure of both countries has been centralized, with their executive leadership retaining full appointment and decision-making powers. This would be a structural change in Qatar that does not follow from any previously trodden path toward electoral participation or legislative autonomy. Saudi Arabia and Qatar use different design systems to establish distinct political frameworks alongside multiple approaches for representation. The Shura Council of Qatar combines officials chosen by government representatives with those who earn election through popular voting. The Emir selects each of the fifteen seats while Queens occupy half of those council positions. Direct democratic voting mechanisms through which citizens select 30 councilors comprise half of the 45 council seats. Through its combination of direct elections with appointed members assisted by Emir oversight Qatar demonstrates progress toward democratic principles of governance (Rifai 2021). In 2021, the council structure reform established elections to enable citizens both to choose their council representatives and their decision-making power. National policy objectives take shape through women council members appointed and elected as part of Qatari governance. None of the 150 members of Saudi Arabia's Shura Council have appointment power; all members are directly appointed by the King, who retains full authority over membership selection. The present system unites advisory functions with royal supervision while sustaining royal institutional frameworks (Drechsler and Chafik 2023). Saudi Arabia made a historic step in 2013 by adding thirty women members to the council thus setting the stage for a significant transformation of its social and future political directions. The substantial addition of female members to Saudi Arabia's government shifted the country's national debate direction toward a modern interpretation of traditional gender roles. Because the council does not have election powers citizens are unable to influence decision making through selecting their council members resulting in selected leaders coming from tribal or elite backgrounds. Saudi Arabia maintains appointed governance through feminized and Islamic appointments whereas Qatar provides mixed public engagement while still employing tribal formats.

Legislative Authority and Decision-Making

Each Shura Council has unique control over lawmaking yet Saudi Arabia applies different decision-making behaviors to its governance structure. Under the provisions of the 2004

Constitution the Shura Council in Qatar exercises major legislative authorities. According to Article 76, the council holds power to create legislative initiatives and maintain budgeting oversight for government operations and undertake executive control functions. Article 69 grants the council permission to extend martial law implementation yet Article 107 requires council approval before implementing a national budget. According to Articles 105 and 109, members of the council maintain the right to propose legislation while also possessing the ability to question ministers. According to Qatar's constitution, the Shura Council holds vital roles in governance because it acquires significant executive and reform powers through its constitutional framework. Constituted as an advisory institution, Saudi Arabia's Shura Council maintains minimal legislative authority (Drechsler and Salah 2023). The council reviews proposed draft legislation and reviews the annual budget along with suggesting governance recommendations, yet all its actions remain advisory only. Saudi Arabia grants its king the power to make all final legislative decisions because the country maintains centralized governance. The Shura Council performs advisory duties while contributing substantially to policy development, which supports the Vision 2030 development plan. The Shura Council in Qatar exercises full legislative powers; however, Saudi Arabia's council functions only as an advisory body. These divergent approaches to governance highlight Qatar's participatory approaches in contrast to Saudi Arabia's centralized system.

Public Participation

The abolition of elections in Qatar began to change the scope of public involvement in governance. At one time, voter participation helped to determine the composition of legislative representation and instilled a degree of civic obligation within the Qatari citizen. The new reforms have narrowed this public engagement to advisory functions and not as direct electors. Although this, for the Government of Qatar, is seen as a way of better governance, it yet again raises critical questions regarding accountability and transparency in general to the public. Traditionally, Saudi Arabia has depended on tribal consultation as a system of indirect representation by the people. Since Qatar has moved into a fully appointed system, in terms of structure of governance both the countries currently fall into an administrative system wherein the executive supervision is seen more viable than immediate representation through election. Public participation defines the Shura Council of Qatar while creating a distinct path from Saudi Arabia's Shura Council. The establishment of elections during 2021 in Qatar generated a pivotal moment for democratic community participation. The country's citizens exercise power to choose two thirds of council members with votes conducted by secret ballots to boost transparency and maintain accountability (Rifai 2021). The designed electoral system maintains secure voter participation reaching approximately 63.5% in the last 2021 elections. The democratic process enables direct citizen participation in political governance, thus promoting both national ownership and political responsibility in the system. Gender equality and inclusivity boost their commitment when women act both as electoral participants and political aspirants. Service participation in Saudi Arabia exists at limited levels. People lack the power to pick members of the Shura Council because the state does not organize electoral systems. The council parallels its power base to a representation framework which integrates various tribal alongside societal communities to achieve balanced policy considerations. Saudi political institutions rely on tribal consultation

as their fundamental governing principle because Saudi Arabia stands as a society built by its historical dependence on tribal frameworks (Batchelor 2014). Through its electoral process Qatar achieves a direct pathway for public engagement, yet Saudi Arabia depends more heavily on a framework built from consultation practices. Under Saudi Arabia's management system, the nation focuses on tribal representation while consulting with tribes because its political structure relies on centralized oversight.

Role in Governance and Policy Development

Similarly, the Shura Council plays a key role in governance and policy development by strengthening national decision-making and accountability. Qatar's governance framework enforces financial oversight and guides government decision-making processes through the council's advisory and regulatory functions. The national budget requires council review until authorized for government spending to be consistent with public requirements and national priorities. Thus, its oversight function the council requires information from ministers so they can maintain executive accountability. The Shura Council performs two essential duties as a guard of executive performance and law writing authority to act as the foundation that bolsters transparency and accountability for Qatar's governing system. Through its advisory duties Saudi Arabia's Shura Council maintains comprehensive policy control across all executive functions. Through its advisory capacity, the council develops proposals which target economic advancement in addition to adjustments in social programs and legal frameworks. The Council supports Vision 2030 execution by assisting the government to establish policies which advance economic development alongside social advancement goals. The council advises policy development but cannot compel government departments to adopt their recommendations. Formal governance authority allows Qatar's Shura Council to make specific decisions, while the Saudi Council mainly serves as an advisory institution.

Principles derived from *Sharia* that emphasize justice, consultation (*Shura*), accountability, and the public good, form the foundation guiding the Shura Councils of Qatar and Saudi Arabia in legislative and governance practices. The Shura Council working in Qatar functions under Islamic *Sharia* principles to ensure all decisions meet criteria of justice alongside accountability and public benefit (Islam 2012). The fundamental basis of legislative proposals and council decision processes uses *Sharia* to enhance public trust in the council's validity. When political systems embed Islamic values, governance becomes stronger because it connects policy development to neighborhood ethical and moral perspectives. The Shura Council in Saudi Arabia functions under Islamic guidance while *Sharia* maintains its role as the supreme source for legal regulations. Islamic values guide the council through its mission to deliver justice along with fairness and community welfare. Religious and cultural values called tribal values guide council members in their discussions to choose choices that suit Islamic principles and match local customs. Every council implements Islamic public values to establish their core operational principles. The implementation approach for these values differs between the two countries because Qatar uses collaborative methods while Saudi Arabia uses centralized tribal system consultations (Kay 2024). The comparative analysis between Qatar's Shura Council and Saudi Arabia's Shura Council shows their common Islamic heritage and their separate governance methods. The fully appointed council and advisory

function along with tribal consultation demonstrate Saudi Arabia's complete commitment to central governance. *Shura* functions through both councils as a governance framework within the Gulf region which implements justice alongside accountability while serving the interests of the public population.

Common Good and the Islamic Public Value in *Shura* Systems

The principles of justice and accountability are foundational to Islamic governance, deeply rooted in Quranic injunctions and Prophetic traditions. Surah An-Nisa (4:58) emphasizes justice, stating, "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice." This Quranic verse highlights fairness as a divine mandate in governance. Similarly, Surah Ash-Shura (42:38) underscores consultation as a mechanism to ensure fairness and accountability (Chandio and Chandio 2021). The Shura Councils of Qatar and Saudi Arabia activate these principles through legislative forums that enable advisory and legislative interactions. The act of oversight from the Al Shura Council in Qatar appears explicitly in Articles 69 and 76 of its constitution (Bolatito 2019). The council's legislative authority establishes transparent governing practices which maintain public trust while holding accountable political processes. The Saudi Arabian Shura Council operates as an advisory body, advising the King with recommended *Shari'a*-compliant solutions. Besides, the mutual supervisory mechanisms upheld by the councils affirm that leadership actions conform to Islamic values for safe and equitable social well-being. *Sharia*-established accountability processes have continued to depict the commitment to maintain responsible governance systems. Justice plays a central role that maintains open governance because it protects the transparency of public institutions while ensuring that decisions fulfill both human and divine requirements. *Shura* represents one fundamental practice of Islamic governance because Quranic teachings require comprehensive inclusive decision-making between leaders and their followers. Surah Aal-E-Imran (3:159) indicates that leaders are mandated to consult with their community, as this action represents humility together with inclusiveness. The Gulf countries institutionalized this form of civic engagement by establishing a system that carried cultural and religious customs in which people place great importance on neighborhood involvement.

Similarly, the Shura Council of Qatar conducted its first parliamentary elections in 2021 through partial citizen participation, which enhanced direct citizen involvement in the governing process. From an Islamic doctrinal standpoint, this approach allows decision-making by incorporating multiple resource perspectives. The Shura Council in Saudi Arabia blends tribal society representatives because Islamic traditions emphasize community diversity representation. In Muslim communities' traditional gatherings, called *majalis*, function as basic elements for *shura* democratic systems, thereby enabling complete societal involvement (Bolatito 2019). Through such forums operational government systems can effectively solve community issues through active citizen participation based on resident needs. However, the Qatar and Saudi Arabia government systems incorporate modern institutional mechanisms as well as traditional structures to achieve holistic community development through citizen participation in addition to team responsibility mechanisms. Due to the Shura Councils of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, traditionalist cultural principles function in tandem with modern government institutions.

Therefore, Gulf countries depend on traditional Islamic values and their tribal norms to validate their existing governmental mechanism by the institutions based on a council, in retaining their political power. Thus, organizational working of the social groups jointly safeguards their consultative tradition through the activities which have built their democratic authority based on the heritage. In 2015, UNESCO finally gave official recognition to the traditional governing institution of *Majlis* by enrolling this organization on their official register, the International Organization for Education. Through the Al Shura Council of Qatar, Islamic social traditions combine with the real Qatari cultural customs in order to direct the state’s governance as well as the country’s modern development effort with preservation of traditional approaches. However, the council uses tribal traditions as its basic principle to create meaningful policies which support community practices involving religion and culture. The Shura Council of Saudi Arabia joins Islamic religious *Sharia* principles to tribal customs for maintaining Saudi Arabian cultural heritage alongside traditional practices. The councils advance Islamic principles in all matters of public governance by means of their established legislative activities and policy development processes. The governance structures maintain religious cultural tradition preservation for the Gulf region and guarantee active performance requirements. Shura Councils integrate Saudi Arabian cultural heritage alongside contemporary development as they establish governance structures which unify native cultural values with Islamic beliefs.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Shura Councils in Qatar and Saudi Arabia

Aspect	Qatar’s Shura Council	Saudi Arabia’s Shura Council
Governance Structure	Previously hybrid, now fully appointed by the Emir	Fully appointed advisory body under the King
Appointment vs. Election	Formerly two-thirds elected, now fully appointed	All members appointed by the King
Legislative Authority	Has legislative authority under Articles 69 & 76	Advisory role only, no direct legislative power
Public Participation	Public participation limited post-2024 reforms	No elections, relies on indirect consultation
Role in Governance	Enforces financial oversight and decision-making	Advises the King on Sharia-compliant policies
Use of Tribal Traditions	Integrates tribal customs into policies	Strong integration of tribal governance customs
Influence of Sharia	Sharia guides governance and policy decisions	Sharia is the primary framework for governance
UNESCO Recognition	Part of the Majlis tradition recognized by UNESCO	Part of the Majlis tradition recognized by UNESCO

Challenges and Opportunities in *Shura* Systems

In the absence of elections in Qatar, several aspects of governance point to questions of democratic participation and political involvement. There is a reduction in the influence wielded by the public in the making of legislation, with the disappearance of any opportunity for citizens to elect representatives. The previous hybrid system allowed, despite several

limitations, some levels at which participatory governance could take place. With a lack of electoral mechanisms, the people tend to disengage politically, decreasing public trust in governmental decision-making processes. Not to mention the effect on an eventual decrease of electoral competition, reduces chances for greater political debate or even reforming through the current concentrated power to be exercised under the executive. *Shura* systems in Qatar and Saudi Arabia face a major obstacle because they must strike the right balance between development and Islamic principles of governance. As highlighted in the uploaded documents, Shura Councils derive their legitimacy from Quranic principles and Prophetic traditions, which emphasize consultation (Shura 42:38, Aal-E-Imran 3:159) and justice. The demands of contemporary governance present challenges because it requires modernized structures that meet fast-evolving political forces even though these changes may contradict traditional governance frameworks (Drechsler et al. 2024). The electoral process of Qatar's Shura Council receives criticism because of its insufficient voter participation. The historical 2021 elections exposed both unusual voter participation rates and demanded more public involvement in democratic systems. The legislative jurisdiction of these councils represents a significant obstacle to their functioning. In Saudi Arabia, the Shura Council performs mainly as a consulting body because it does not possess comprehensive legislative capabilities to affect direct governance control. The restricted legislative abilities of these councils limit their capacity to produce meaningful policy reforms while depriving them of full public grievance engagement power (Ishak and Osman 2016). The inclusion of women and youth into government institutions faces considerable sensitivity in these systems. Both Qatar and Saudi Arabia now have women on their municipal councils, yet prejudice alongside deeply entrenched social customs block the realization of genuine gender equality. Complete implementation of these reforms moves at a sluggish rate because of broader community problems with achieving inclusive leadership representation.

Whereas the loss of electoral participation is a significant change, there are certain opportunities that come with the constitutional amendments. One such positive influence could be the efficiency with which the government operates. This is simply because the electoral constraints, which usually delay decisions will no longer be in place. Since an entirely appointed council means that the Emir still has full control over governance, this may well imply quicker times for passing legislation and implementing policy. Moreover, a fully appointed system might facilitate better governance based on expertise, as appointments can be made according to qualifications and experience rather than the results of electoral politics. In turn, it would put more onus on the government to ensure that the appointed members will represent diverse societal interests and enjoy public confidence. Despite these challenges, *Shura* systems in Qatar and Saudi Arabia present numerous opportunities for growth and innovation. One of the primary developments shows increasing numbers of women taking on leadership positions.

Thirty women received strategic positions at the Shura Council of Saudi Arabia when the government made its historic breakthrough decision in 2013. Similarly, the elected system reforms in Qatar continue to build opportunities to let women and younger citizens take part in government decisions. With increased inclusion of programs driven by the Shura Council, the positive outcomes at the level of society will also increase. Public participation is the fundamental way in which development takes place. According to the case research findings on Qatar, direct election system and representative selection in Qatar's 2021 political

elections succeeded in increasing representative accountability besides the citizen's political ownership. Thus, *Shura* systems require better outreach strategies because the new simplified voter registration will activate the political participation. The Shura Councils act as optimum models for Islamic government operations and their universal principles can work anywhere. This unique system merges Islamic social principles with current progressive techniques for the development of a unique mode of governance supporting the traditional Islamic teachings along with the modern development on progressive measures (Abd Razak et al. 2023). These systems of governance offer two important prospects: The route provides an avenue for Islamic nations to institute a system of governance based on the laws of *Sharia*, but still maintain democratic values. The leaders ensure that cultural and national values are protected through *Shura* systems by raising conscientious civil servants who then become the frontrunners of governance. The functional aspect of the council combines the current Muslim principles and tribal values, enabling the solution of present administrative challenges while upholding cultural heritage and community unity. In such a dual-function framework, the system is adaptable to current practices but also breaks free from global operating patterns

Conclusions

The comparative study of the Shura Councils in Qatar and Saudi Arabia highlights both similarities and differences in their structures, roles, and operations, reflecting their shared Islamic roots and unique political contexts. The transformation in the governance of Qatar after the 2024 referendum has represented a shift in the country's political landscape. Indeed, with no elections and an appointed Shura Council, Qatar comes closer to the Saudi model. Both have kept Islamic consultative principles enshrined for the councils; yet for Qatar, there has been an abdication of electoral participation that had formed a part of its earlier, however limited, democratic endeavors. However, such a shift means more than changes in the structures of governance: consequences in public engagement, political accountability, and legislative transparency. Several key recommendations can be identified in developing a model for new governance that will be effective long-term: increased transparency in the operations of the council, thus keeping the public trust. First, mechanisms should be established through which the government allows public consultations and more transparency with regard to legislation, so that even without the presence of elections, government and citizens' concerns are dealt with. Second, public awareness can be raised on understanding the role of the Shura Council and advisory engagement in governance. Community dialogue and structured mechanisms for public feedback can be compensatory measures for the loss of electoral participation of citizens. Lastly, increase the participation of women and the youth in governance to ensure varied contributions to decision-making at the national level. This will have to be reinforced with advisory roles and increased avenues for public participation to balance out executive authority against public representation.

By addressing these issues, Qatar is able to work through the various challenges presented by its constitutional amendments while still applying Islamic governance principles in a modern political context. These institutions implement fundamental Islamic public standards through Quranic principles, which contain justice across with consulting and accountability practices. *Sharia*-compliant institutions operate under present-day governance requirements through

their complete operational scope. Through its selection model, which combines chosen appointees with chosen members the Shura Council of Qatar demonstrates its dedication to public engagement. According to articles 76 and 107 of the constitution, the council receives power to direct national financial decisions and lead policy changes for the state. It functions exclusively based on King-selected appointees without any other structural membership within Saudi Arabian politics. Through the role of essential advisory position, the institution guides government policy-making and helps determine essential national governance decisions. In 2013, the council paved the way for female members to join its ranks, thus showing progress toward governance without paternalistic oversight. The primary technical implementation separates both of these entities but they jointly execute Islamic principles in their respective domains and uphold *Sharia* standards while maintaining community unity. The Gulf Region receives enhanced Islamic governance systems because the authorities maintain parallel priorities to protect cultural traditions. Similarly, by merging modern legislation drafting powers with their current transparency improvements Shura Councils can make stronger political contributions for both Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Operation transparency combined with additional legislative authority for elected council members results in greater governance impact by building public trust. A modern modelling approach to the Shura Council of Saudi Arabia should reconcile popular elections with the established consultative setup. The stated intention institutes two objectives: enhancing civic knowledge of decision-making processes while initiating activities to increase neighbor involvement in neighborhood concerns. Electoral participation in Qatar will increase due to vote education coupled with easier voting machinery. It will better provide Saudi Arabia with public inclusion, along with increased transparency in environmental dialogue within the local neighborhood communities. Councils have to strengthen the participation ability of women and youth in governance decisions because that would grow their authority in every decision-making process. Building gender equality informs momentum in extending female and youth representation in both development programs and reserved quota systems, leading towards diverse governance structures and new administrative practices. The measures would help both Shura councils unite essential Islamic principles along with advanced administrative practices to sustain the original Islamic foundation

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Abdulfatah Said Mohamed is Assistant Professor of Global Affairs, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Qatar. Formerly, has was a senior advisor for The Minster of State for Foreign Affairs, in Qatar. He has acted as consultant for the World Humanitarian Summit at the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs. He is a visiting Professor at the Graduate Institute in Geneva. He has obtained his PhD from University of Exeter and Master's degree in Management Sciences from University of Sheffield Hallam in the United Kingdom.