

## Ummatics Research Agenda

The Ummatics Institute aims to produce, foster, and facilitate research that addresses critical questions pertaining to the unification of the Muslim Umma, particularly in civilizational, sociopolitical, and economic domains, broadly construed. This research agenda attempts to identify and outline these questions and offer a bird's-eye view of the research program they comprise. It is designed to guide and inspire the systematic and expansive scholarly exploration of issues relevant to fostering a unified Islamic civilization. The objective is to generate a robust body of research that informs the “why,” (importance and need) “what,” (conceptual and institutional models) and “how” (methods and strategies of transformation) of unification efforts.<sup>1</sup>

The research produced through this agenda will directly inform community initiatives and activism, strategic decision-making at all levels, and policy recommendations across GEM personas that advance ummatic unity in practical ways.<sup>2</sup> In an era where the Umma faces fragmentation due to geopolitical rivalries, neocolonial structures, and economic dependencies, this agenda also serves as a response to these forces, seeking to develop knowledge frameworks that contribute to greater autonomy, self-sufficiency, and unified agency. A core aim of this agenda is not only to generate new research but to help articulate an ummatic epistemology—one that reorients research priorities, methodologies, and knowledge production in service of Islamic civilizational renewal rather than subsuming ummatic concerns into pre-existing secular frameworks.

The mode of articulation this agenda adopts is to outline three broad domains of research, specific topics within each domain, and sample guiding questions within each topic.<sup>3</sup> The identified topics represent broad areas of research requiring multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary attention. Each topic can be thought of as occupying a terrain of multiple vertical and horizontal vectors.<sup>4</sup> The

---

<sup>1</sup> Much of the Ummatics Institute's research focus thus far has been on the “why,” that is, on the *sharʿī* obligation and material necessity of ummatic unification. See, for example, Uthman Badar, ed., “Classical Texts Series,” *Ummatics*, <https://ummatix.org/classical-texts-series/>; Ovamir Anjum, *Why Ummatics: A Series of Contentions*, *Ummatics*, June 12, 2024, <https://ummatix.org/why-ummatix-a-series-of-contentions/>; and Joseph J. Kaminski, “Irredeemable Failure: The Modern Nation-State as a Nullifier of Ummatic Unity,” *Ummatics*, Dec 14, 2022, <https://ummatix.org/geopolitics-and-international-relations/irredeemable-failure-the-modern-nation-state-as-a-nullifier-of-ummatic-unity/>. The present agenda shifts the focus toward the “what” and “how” of unification.

<sup>2</sup> “Globally Empowered Muslims” (GEMs) refers to individuals who are actively engaged in using their skills, knowledge, and influence to positively impact the Umma, often with a focus on unity, renewal, and ethical action aligned with Islamic principles and in a way that transcends nation-state boundaries and divisions. GEM personas include academics, *ʿulamāʾ*, creatives, political analysts, journalists, community leaders, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and other influential segments.

<sup>3</sup> The division of the domains and topics is for analytical clarity and research scope-feasibility. In reality, these categories are deeply interconnected and cannot be strictly separated, as they manifest holistically in social and political life. Some of these interconnections are captured in the last section of this agenda.

<sup>4</sup> These vectors are not rigid distinctions but heuristic tools to map the broad methodological and epistemological approaches required for ummatic research.

vertical vectors constitute the subject-matter domains—civilizational, sociopolitical, economic; the horizontal vectors represent the types of expert knowledge required, prominently the normative and ethical (*Shariʿa*), the conceptual and analytical (philosophy and theory), and the historical and empirical (social and applied sciences). Further, the list of questions in each topic is illustrative, not exhaustive, providing a broad conceptual map rather than a rigid research blueprint. They highlight overarching inquiries, leaving the specification of precise research questions to area experts who can refine them based on domain-specific methodologies and considerations.

Significant research on many of these questions has already been conducted by scholars working independently or within various universities and research institutes.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of articulating a new ummatic research agenda is not to disregard this scholarship, but to build upon it and develop it further. Despite the valuable contributions of existing research, there remains a pressing need for more systematic and programmatic inquiry explicitly geared toward advancing the ummatic good of unification. Building on prior research means that the starting point in each topic is to produce a literature review mapping out relevant scholarship and identifying gaps that require fresh investigation.<sup>6</sup> By synthesizing past insights and advancing new lines of inquiry, this agenda aims to establish a structured and goal-oriented research framework that generates knowledge in direct service of the unification efforts.

Finally, this research agenda represents the Ummatics Institute’s attempt to map out the key areas and questions that require scholarly attention in addressing the challenge of ummatic unification. As a human endeavor, it is necessarily improvable in various ways—important topics or questions may have been overlooked, more refined framings, categorizations, or categories may be possible, etc. The purpose of making this agenda public is two-fold. First, to invite the sort of critical feedback that will facilitate these improvements. This agenda is envisioned as a living document, meant to evolve as new challenges, research findings, and intellectual contributions emerge. Accordingly, its refinement is an ongoing process, demanding continuous engagement from scholars and institutions committed to ummatic research. The second purpose is to invite such scholars and institutions to partake in the research itself, short of which this would not be a genuinely ummatic effort. Proper ummatic research cannot be an isolated or localized endeavor; it must be built through collective scholarly discourse and shared intellectual labor.

For further information, questions, or feedback, or to collaborate on research on any of these topics, please reach out to [research@ummetics.org](mailto:research@ummetics.org).

---

<sup>5</sup> Examples of such research initiatives include the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT—<https://iiit.org/en/home/>), International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC-IIUM—<https://institute.iium.edu.my/istac/>), International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI—<https://www.iiu.edu.pk/>), International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IIAS—<https://iais.org.my/>), Markaz al-Ḥaḍāra lil-Dirāsāt wa al-Buḥūth (<https://hadaracenter.com/>), al-Sharq Strategic Research (<https://research.sharqforum.org/>), Centre for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA—<https://www.izu.edu.tr/en/ciga/home>), Maqasid Institute (<https://maqasid.org/>), Ayaan Institute (<https://ayaaninstitute.com/>), Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics (CILE—<https://www.cilecenter.org/>), Markaz Namāʾ lil-Dirāsāt wa al-Buḥūth (<https://nama-center.com/>), and numerous others.

<sup>6</sup> For an example of this, see Mustafa Salama and Younis Sarwer, “Literature Review on Political Unification,” *Ummatics*, December 27, 2024, <https://ummetics.org/litrev-political-unification/>.

## 1. Civilizational and Intellectual Renewal

*Broad Area Objective:* To delineate and inspire a renewed Islamic civilizational ethos that is strongly grounded in the Islamic tradition and open to the best elements of modernity.<sup>7</sup>

### Theorizing Modern Islamic Civilization

Understanding the foundations and defining features of Islamic civilization in the modern period, and what it means for this civilization to be unified, is central to fostering an ummatic ethos that remains rooted in divine guidance while confidently addressing contemporary realities.<sup>8</sup> This area explores topics such as the following:

- **Conceptualizing a Modern Islamic Civilization:** Examining the social imaginaries, ethical dispositions, and epistemological frameworks that shape a modern Islamic *weltanschauung*, and analyzing how political, economic, social, and cultural domains ought to be interrelated within an Ummatic paradigm.
- **Theorizing Unity:** Identifying the markers of a *unified* Islamic civilization and how they manifest in governance, cultural practices, and intellectual traditions.
- **Ummatic Frames:** Identifying core beliefs and interpretive frames necessary for an ummatic worldview at the individual, communal, and state levels. This includes minimal necessary frames, such as *tawhīd*, and recommended frames, such as the prioritization of Umma over national or sectarian affiliations. Also explored are beliefs and frameworks that are un- or anti-Ummatic, including sectarianism, nationalism, and ideologies rooted in exploitation or individualism.
- **Role of Arts, Literature, and Language:** Investigating how arts, literature, and education shape public discourse and foster civilizational confidence, with particular emphasis on how Arabic and regional languages contribute to the construction of a shared cultural and intellectual heritage.
- **Critique of Dominant Civilizational Paradigms:** Engaging with the likes of secularism, liberalism, capitalism, materialism, nihilism, and subjectivism, assessing their existential crises and aporias. Additionally, examining intellectual movements like modernism, postmodernism, and decoloniality, adapting their critical insights and analytical methods and tools where relevant, while filtering them through Islamic normative frameworks. Analyzing nationalism and racism as divisive forces within the Umma and exploring strategies to counteract them in favor of a unified civilizational vision.

---

<sup>7</sup> “Civilization” is used here, for want of a better term, in its descriptive and analytical sense of a distinct way of life, society, and culture, of a particular region or group, not in its evaluative or colonial sense of an “advanced” society or culture contrasted with “lower” or “uncivilized” ones. For a critical intellectual history of the concept, see Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> “Modern” Islamic civilization refers to the contemporary articulation of Islamic civilization as it manifests in the late modern period. This is not to suggest a break with the past; rather, there is historical continuity of “essence” with past Islamic civilization, with divergence in various forms and expressions.

This study aims to provide a structured intellectual intervention that reasserts an ummatic civilizational vision in the modern world, offering both theoretical clarity and practical pathways for renewal.

## Ummatic Sociality and Communalities

Ummatic sociality (patterns and modes of social interaction) and communalities (quality and modes of shared identity, cooperation, and mutual responsibility) prioritize collective well-being (*ṣalāḥ*), moral accountability (*amr bil-ma'rūf*), and mutual support (*tawāṣaw bil-ḥaqq*, *ta'āwun*). Key areas of inquiry include the following:

- **Principles and Institutions:** Examining the spiritual, ethical, and structural foundations that sustain ummatic social life—what might be conceptualized as ummatic “civil society.” This includes analyzing the roles of *masājīd*, *madāris* (educational institutions), *awqāf* (endowments), and social welfare networks in fostering both social solidarity and material welfare.
- **Contemporary Institutional Forms:** Investigating how modern institutional models, such as incubators, accelerators, cooperatives, and digital networks, can strengthen ummatic social cohesion and self-reliance. By integrating these with traditional Islamic structures, the study seeks to identify sustainable models for community development and economic empowerment.
- **Ethos of Service and Community-Driven Governance:** Exploring how ummatic sociality contrasts with the individualistic tendencies of secular social models, emphasizing a service-oriented and communal approach to governance and social interaction.
- **Fostering Broad-Based Participation:** Assessing strategies for ensuring ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic inclusivity in ummatic communal life. This includes evaluating multilingual initiatives, equitable resource distribution, and representative community councils that reflect the diversity of the Umma.

By drawing from historical Islamic community initiatives and contemporary best practices, this research aims to articulate a vision for a cohesive and participatory ummatic public sphere that strengthens communal ties and addresses modern challenges through an ethos of unity and shared responsibility.

## Managing Deep Differences within the Umma

Managing deep differences within the Umma is essential for fostering unity and effective collective action while respecting diversity. This research examines the following dimensions:

- **Nationalistic divides:** Investigating the historical roots of nationalist sentiments and developing frameworks that prioritize the shared destiny of the Umma over parochial loyalties. This includes critiquing nationalism as a divisive force and exploring strategies for reframing identity around ummatic solidarity.
- **Theological and jurisprudential differences:** Exploring frameworks for managing theological and legal pluralism while upholding the ethos of tolerance and pursuit of truth. This includes analyzing historical precedents where differences were accommodated without leading to

fragmentation. *Adab al-ikhtilāf* is important here, but even more so political mechanisms to manage deep differences.

- **Understanding sectarianization and conflict:** Analyzing the factors that turn differences into sources of conflict, including political instrumentalization, economic disparities, and historical grievances. This includes studying how external influences and internal dynamics exacerbate divisions within the Umma.
- **Linguistic and ethnic diversity:** Identifying ways to foster cultural diversity while cultivating a shared ummatic identity. This involves examining historical and contemporary models of multilingual and multiethnic communities within the Umma.
- **Conflict resolution and peacebuilding:** Examining past and present peacemaking efforts in actual conflicts and extracting lessons from both successes and failures. This includes studying the ideological, political, and socio-economic forces sustaining division and proposing justice-based reconciliation frameworks beyond mere conflict mitigation. Likewise, evaluating how community leaders, religious scholars, and state actors can contribute to reconciliation efforts, applying Islamic ethics and contemporary conflict resolution paradigms.
- **Intercommunal and sectarian disputes:** Analyzing intercommunal disputes, sectarian divisions, and grievances with non-Muslim constituencies, identifying recurring structural and ideological drivers of conflict that require urgent resolution. This includes a comparative analysis of mediation councils, *shūrā*-based mechanisms, and transitional justice frameworks to assess their effectiveness in fostering sustainable peace.

By integrating lessons from successful reconciliation efforts with Islamic principles, this research aims to develop strategies that reinforce ummatic solidarity and strengthen the collective identity of the Umma.

## Social Change and Revival

Understanding how societies change and revive is essential for fostering meaningful transformations within the Umma. The study focuses on the following key themes:

- **Vectors of societal transformation:** Investigating key forces of social change, including political culture, belief systems, and institutional frameworks, to identify patterns and principles that inform transformation.
- **Islamic approaches to social change:** Examining the normative Islamic direction on societal transformation by drawing from Qur'anic guidance, the *Sīra* of the Prophet ﷺ, and the practice of the early *khulafā'* and *'ulamā'*. This includes engaging with long-standing debates on revolution versus evolution, radical versus pragmatic change, and their relevance to contemporary contexts.
- **Historical ummatic efforts:** Mapping and critically assessing significant ummatic reform and revival efforts from the early 19th to late 20th centuries, including intellectual trends, social reformers, and political movements, in order to learn from past successes and failures.

- **Insights from modern research on social movements:** Analyzing how contemporary theories and case studies on social movements and systemic change can inform ummatic approaches. This includes evaluating strategies such as grassroots mobilization, narrative framing, and the use of digital platforms to enhance collective action.
- **GEM personas:** Exploring the ummatic frames specifically relevant for key GEM (Globally Empowered Muslims) personas and their roles in facilitating social change. This involves examining how these personas adopt, internalize, and apply ummatic frames in their respective domains, such as academics shaping discourse, creatives influencing cultural narratives, and policymakers implementing ummatic policies.

By integrating Islamic principles, historical lessons, and contemporary social change theories, this research aims to develop actionable strategies for fostering ummatic revival and transformation.

## Environment and Technology

The Islamic conception of the “environment”—or more precisely, the non-human *khalq Allah*—is rooted in the principles of *khilāfa* (stewardship) and *amāna* (trust), emphasizing humanity's responsibility to preserve and protect creation as a divine trust. Similarly, science and technology are seen as tools for human well-being when guided by ethical and spiritual principles. Major lines of investigation in this area include:

- **Critique of dominant frameworks:** Analyzing how Islamic perspectives on the environment and technology differ from secular models, which often prioritize exploitation and “mastery over nature” for economic gain and “progress.” This includes a critical examination of the basic categories used (nature, environment, science, technology) and the assumptions they reflect.
- **Technology-society-environment:** Exploring how technological advancements influence the way we live and the environment in which we live, as well as the nexus of all three elements.
- **Environmental degradation and climate change:** Investigating both mitigation and adaptation strategies that uphold justice and intergenerational responsibility. This includes assessing the most effective policies for sustainable resource management, renewable energy development, and environmental accountability within an ummatic framework.
- **Role of local communities:** Examining how grassroots governance, biodiversity conservation, and knowledge-sharing networks contribute to environmental stewardship and sustainable living, ensuring that ecological responsibility is integrated into everyday community life.
- **Emerging technologies:** Evaluating emerging technologies—AI, blockchain, cybersecurity, and the like—and their role in ummatic governance and social organization. This comprises how these technologies can enhance transparency, financial autonomy, and economic cooperation, while ensuring their use aligns with Islamic ethical imperatives.

By combining Islamic teachings with contemporary debates on environment and technology, this research aims to propose actionable guidelines for integrating technological advancements in service of ummatic resilience and ethical responsibility.

## Education

The integration of traditional Islamic learning with modern disciplines is essential for nurturing ummatic minds that are both intellectually rigorous and spiritually attuned. This topic is explored through the following inquiries:

- **Holistic education:** Exploring strategies for integrating *naqlī* and *ʿaqlī* disciplines to create a holistic educational framework that synthesizes Islamic revealed knowledge with rational and empirical sciences, ensuring that students are equipped to engage with contemporary challenges while remaining grounded in Islamic values.
- **Pedagogical approaches and the place and form of education:** Identifying methods that foster critical thinking, creativity, and spiritual reflection, ensuring that learning nurtures both intellectual depth and moral development. Further, assessing whether prevalent educational models—such as modern schools and universities—facilitate or hinder ummatic educational objectives, and exploring better alternative structures.
- **Epistemological pluralism:** Examining how Islamic educational institutions can cultivate intellectual humility and openness to diverse perspectives while maintaining the integrity of Islamic orthodoxy and traditional scholarship.
- **Curriculum contextualization:** Investigating how educational curricula can be tailored to local cultural contexts while preserving the universality of Islamic principles, ensuring that education remains both relevant and firmly rooted in tradition.
- **Collaboration between institutions:** Exploring how *madrasas*, universities, and research institutes can foster interdisciplinary knowledge-sharing and innovation, bridging gaps between traditional Islamic sciences and contemporary fields of study.

By drawing on historical models of Islamic education and modern advancements in pedagogy, this research aims to propose comprehensive frameworks that cultivate leaders who embody both academic excellence and spiritual integrity, contributing to the flourishing of the Umma.

## 2. Political Unification and Transformation

*Broad Area Objective:* To understand and propose mechanisms for fostering *Shari'a* governance and political unity and cooperation among Muslim-majority countries and communities.

### Political Unification

Political unification within the Muslim Umma is not only a religious obligation but also crucial for fostering collective strength and resilience. The research is structured around the following focal points:

- **Barriers to unification:** Investigating historical and contemporary obstacles to political unity, including dynastic tendencies, ideological divisions, colonial legacies, and geopolitical pressures.
- **Conditions for successful unification:** Examining the factors that determine when and how sovereign states successfully unite, identifying the political, economic, and social conditions that sustain unification efforts. This includes assessing historical and modern examples of political federations to determine viable pathways for Muslim unity while identifying approaches that have proven ineffective.
- **Strategic leadership in unification efforts:** Identifying which Muslim countries are best positioned to lead or participate in unification efforts, based on geopolitical influence, economic strength, cultural leadership, and feasibility.
- **Stakeholder incentives and resistance:** Understanding the motivations of governments, civil society, and economic actors in either supporting or opposing political unification and analyzing the political and material interests at play.

By addressing these questions, this research aims to develop frameworks for fostering political unity that are grounded in Islamic ethical principles and informed by modern governance models.

### Institutional Design, Governance, and Statecraft

Theorizing governance and statecraft for a modern Islamic polity requires theorizing *Shari'a* governance and examining institutional models that uphold justice, accountability, and collective welfare. This area explores topics such as the following:

- **Frameworks for Unified Governance:** Exploring models of institutional organization that support a unified governance structure for the Umma and drawing lessons from historical Islamic governance models as well as modern federative systems.
- **Qualities and Institutional Architecture of an Islamic Regime:** Identifying the structural and legal architecture necessary for the *Shari'a* to flourish within both society and governance. This includes addressing foundational questions about the meaning and purpose of governance in an Islamic framework and how to transform contemporary political and legal systems to align with Islamic principles.



- **Institutional Relations:** Defining the roles and relationships between the legislative, executive, judicial, and consultative institutions, as well as the *‘ulamā’* and the people, ensuring that core institutions function within a coherent governance framework.
- **Decentralization and Local Representation:** Evaluating the extent to which power should be centralized or decentralized to balance efficient decision-making with local representation and adaptive governance.
- **Accountability Mechanisms:** Identifying structures and mechanisms that prevent authoritarian drift while ensuring governance remains adaptive, just, and responsive to societal needs.
- **Political Representation:** Assessing the potential role of political parties, alternative forms of representation, and governance models that prioritize unity and collective purpose over factionalism.

By engaging insights from both historical precedents and contemporary governance theories, this research aims to propose institutional designs that align with Islamic principles while addressing the political realities of the modern world, including the dominance of the nation-state paradigm and the challenges of global political structures.

## Judiciary

A well-structured judiciary is central to the administration of justice in any governance framework. Central to this study are the following areas of analysis:

- **Judicial structure and governance:** Exploring the optimal design of a *Shari‘a*-based judiciary and its relationship to executive and legislative bodies, balancing judicial independence with accountability.
- **Managing madhhab diversity:** Assessing mechanisms for integrating legal pluralism within a unified judicial system while maintaining coherence in adjudication. This includes evaluating historical precedents where multiple schools of jurisprudence functioned within a single governance system.
- **Balancing legal uniformity and creativity:** Investigating how courts can maintain legal continuity while allowing for *ijtihad*, ensuring rulings remain dynamic and contextually relevant.
- **Comparative analysis of *Shari‘a* courts:** Examining the historical and modern performance of *Shari‘a* courts, analyzing factors such as procedural integrity, judicial training, and public trust in shaping their efficacy.
- **Transitioning to *Shari‘a*-based legal systems:** Identifying practical steps for shifting from secular legal frameworks to *Shari‘a* governance, including phased approaches that gradually align legislation, judicial training, and legal institutions with Islamic principles while mitigating resistance.

By synthesizing insights from past Islamic legal traditions and contemporary judicial theory, this research aims to outline models for a judiciary that upholds the principles of justice, accountability, and legal consistency in an ummatic framework.

## Sociopolitical Transitions

Navigating sociopolitical transitions in ummatic directions within Muslim societies involves addressing the complexities of change while fostering stability, accountability, and trust in new ummatic governance regimes, where the possibility of these arises. This research area investigates the best ways to manage regime transitions, addressing both revolutionary contexts (such as Bangladesh and Syria in 2024) and routine transitions of power. The following are critical aspects of this research domain:

- **Developing transition frameworks:** Crafting universal roadmaps for governance transitions while also tailoring region-specific strategies to account for local political, economic, and social contexts.
- **Building public trust and legitimacy:** Exploring how transitional authorities can foster trust, maintain transparency, and build broad consensus through effective communication and community engagement during periods of uncertainty.
- **Internal and external threats:** Examining how military and police institutions can be reformed to prevent coups, destabilization, and factionalism, ensuring that security structures support rather than undermine favorable transitions. Similarly, assessing how shadow governments, politicians abroad, and foreign interference impact transitions, and identifying strategies to safeguard sovereignty and minimize external disruption.
- **Economic stabilization during transitions:** Investigating policies that prevent financial crises, ensure the continuity of essential services, and combat institutional corruption to maintain stability during shifts in governance.
- **Balancing justice and reconciliation:** Exploring approaches to holding previous regimes accountable while fostering unity and long-term reconciliation.
- **Encouraging grassroots participation:** Identifying methods to prevent transitions from becoming elite-driven by empowering local communities and civil society actors in post-revolutionary or post-election processes.

By integrating lessons from historical and contemporary examples, this research aims to propose adaptable frameworks of transition grounded in Islam and responsive to political realities.

## Security and Defense

Theorizing and re-envisioning security and defense in an ummatic framework requires examining and critically interrogating the principles, structures, and institutions that ensure collective safety, justice, and resilience while preventing authoritarianism and militarization. This research examines key themes such as the following:

- **Structure and role of security institutions:** Defining the ideal remit, purpose, operational modes and mandates, and hard limits of security and defense institutions—such as police, intelligence agencies, and the military—to ensure they serve and protect society rather than oppress it.

- **Preventing authoritarianism and corruption:** Exploring mechanisms for reforming security institutions to prevent authoritarian overreach, depoliticization, and corruption while fostering transparency and accountability.
- **Civil-military relations:** Examining the ideal relationship between civilian authorities and military institutions, ensuring that military structures remain subordinate to legitimate governance while maintaining effective defense capabilities.
- **Coup-proofing ummatic governance:** Developing strategies to protect ummatic regimes from military takeovers by fostering loyalty to ummatic and constitutional principles rather than political factions or individuals.
- **Transitioning from military rule:** Investigating pathways for transitioning out of or reforming military-run states, with a focus on demilitarization, professionalization of security forces, and the reintegration of the military into a role that supports rather than dictates governance.

With a focus on Islamic norms as well as operational effectiveness and institutional design, this research aims to develop frameworks for security and defense institutions that align with ummatic principles of justice, transparency, and public trust.

## Minority Constituencies

Fulfilling the Qur'anic imperatives of justice, fair treatment, and mutual cooperation in good within the Umma and beyond requires a rethinking of how diverse demographic groups within a polity are conceptualized and treated. This inquiry delves into the following core aspects:

- **Rethinking demographic categories:** Assessing whether the secular liberal construction of “majorities” and “minorities” is the best way to conceptually carve up social demography or whether alternative Islamic categories and values provide a more sound and coherent framework. This includes comparative analysis with the classical Islamic *dhimma* model and thinking about what a modern *dhimma* model might look like, considering rights, responsibilities, and safeguards in a contemporary context.
- **Institutionalizing protection and representation:** Exploring mechanisms that ensure the fair participation of non-Muslim and Muslim minority constituencies, upholding principles of *shūrā* and legal safeguards in line with Islamic teachings.
- **Foreign manipulation:** Examining how neocolonial powers instrumentalize minority groups to destabilize societies for their own ends and proposing strategies to counteract such threats.
- **Muslim constituencies in non-Muslim lands:** Exploring how Muslims in non-Muslim-majority societies can navigate their dual responsibilities to their host nations and the broader Umma, focusing on religious preservation, principled civic participation, and ummatic solidarity.

By addressing these questions, this research aims to develop Islamically grounded frameworks for theorizing cohesive societies where all feel safe, secure, and part of the political community.

### 3. Economic Integration and Development

*Broad Area Objective:* To explore pathways for economic development in and integration among Muslim regions, defined through an Islamic lens.

#### Economic Integration

Economic integration within the Muslim world is essential for fostering shared prosperity, resilience, mutual interdependence, and independence from hostile foreign powers. Major lines of investigation include:

- **Intra-Muslim trade and SMEs:** Investigating strategies to enhance economic collaboration at both state and sub-state levels, with a particular focus on the role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as drivers of integration.<sup>9</sup>
- **Government support and regulatory frameworks:** Assessing how policies, incentives, and infrastructure investment can facilitate cross-border trade and business growth.
- **Barriers to economic cooperation:** Identifying structural and policy obstacles—such as trade tariffs, lack of standardization, and political fragmentation—and proposing solutions for establishing robust trading blocs among Muslim and friendly non-Muslim states.
- **Resource distribution and economic disparities:** Examining how natural and industrial resources can be leveraged equitably across the Muslim world to promote economic balance and reduce disparities.
- **Labor mobility and knowledge exchange:** Exploring policies that facilitate the movement of skilled professionals while mitigating brain drain, ensuring that talent is retained and utilized for ummatic development.
- **Monetary integration:** Assessing the feasibility of a monetary union among Muslim countries to reduce dependency on foreign reserve currencies and navigate global financial pressures.

By drawing from successful economic blocs and Islamic economic principles, this research aims to outline a vision for economic integration that aligns with ummatic ideals of mutual cooperation and shared development.

---

<sup>9</sup> While much research on economic integration and development focuses on state-level trade agreements and policies, this agenda highlights the vital role of sub-state actors—such as businesses, cooperatives, regional trade networks, and local communities—in fostering real economic interdependence and resilience. For frameworks that emphasize this approach, see Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Jamil ‘Abd al-Qādir Akbar, *Qaṣṣ al-Ḥaqq: al-‘Aql wa-Ḥatmiyyat al-Fasād*, 3 vols. (Irbid: ‘Ālam al-Kutub al-Ḥadīth, 2020).

## Economic Development

Addressing the underdevelopment and low production capacities of many Muslim countries is critical for fostering self-sufficiency, prosperity, and economic resilience. The research is structured around the following focal points:

- **Structural causes of stagnation:** Investigating the factors that have contributed to economic underdevelopment, with a focus on reversing declining shares of the real economy and fostering industrialization and sustainable economic growth.
- **Global financial institutions and economic dependency:** Examining the influence of institutions such as the IMF and World Bank in shaping economic policies and exploring strategies for reducing reliance on these institutions while developing independent financial frameworks.
- **Key development sectors:** Assessing how investments can be directed toward manufacturing, agriculture, and technology, rather than speculative markets that lead to financial instability. Exploring how import dependencies can be reduced by strengthening production capacities and enhancing self-sufficiency through resilient global supply chains. Investigating strategies to achieve food security through innovations in farming, irrigation, and land management.
- **Role of sub-state actors:** Evaluating how decentralized economic initiatives, local enterprises, and regional trade networks contribute to economic resilience and development.
- **Technological sovereignty and innovation:** Identifying pathways for fostering technological self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and innovation, with a focus on the contributions of diaspora professionals to economic advancement.

By addressing these questions, this research aims to provide policy recommendations that support economic independence, foster ummatic collaboration, and promote sustainable growth aligned with Islamic principles of equity and stewardship.

## Islamic Moral Economy & Social Institutions

While capitalism tends to disembed economics from the social and moral realms, economic (production and distribution) activities are inherently tied to and should serve, rather than dictate, social relations and moral living. Key themes addressed in this area include:

- **Revitalizing *zakāt* and *waqf* institutions:** Investigating how Islamic economic mechanisms can be scaled transnationally to address socioeconomic disparities, foster self-sufficiency, and ensure the equitable distribution of wealth across the Umma.
- **Modern *waqf* structures and governance:** Exploring how *waqf* institutions can be restructured to support sustainable development projects, such as healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation, while ensuring transparency and effectiveness in resource management.
- **Public benefit priorities:** Identifying which areas of public welfare should be prioritized, particularly in regions most vulnerable to economic hardship and instability.

- **Integrating contemporary tools:** Assessing how digital finance, policy frameworks, and governance innovations can enhance the reach and efficiency of *zakāt*, *waqf*, and other economic institutions.

By drawing on both classical Islamic institutions and modern economic strategies, this research aims to propose frameworks that strengthen social institutions, reinforcing their role in building resilient, equitable societies that align with the principles of stewardship and collective care in Islamic moral economy.

## Political Economy in Transition

Transitioning to an Islamic economic framework requires a balanced approach that addresses practical realities while remaining faithful to Islamic principles and rulings. This research examines key themes such as the following:

- **Gradual vs. immediate transition:** Assessing the feasibility, risks, and benefits of both gradual and immediate shifts toward an Islamic economic system, identifying strategies to minimize economic disruptions such as hyperinflation and financial instability.
- **Interim policies and economic stabilization:** Exploring transitional measures that can lay the groundwork for full implementation, ensuring stability in markets, investment flows, and public confidence during the shift.
- **Economic power bases and stakeholder incentives:** Identifying key economic actors, financial institutions, and industry leaders who can facilitate transitions, and exploring policy incentives, partnerships, and capacity-building initiatives to gain their support.
- **Social and political considerations:** Examining how to navigate resistance, build consensus, and foster public trust in transitioning to an Islamic economic framework, ensuring broad-based participation and long-term stability.

By drawing on lessons from historical and contemporary economic transitions, this research aims to propose a comprehensive roadmap for implementing Islamic economic systems in ways that uphold economic justice, reduce inequalities, and promote collective well-being.

## State Financial Institutions & Currency

Effective state financial institutions are essential for advancing the economic welfare of the Umma and addressing the unique financial challenges it faces. This inquiry delves into the following core aspects:

- **Institutional design and reform:** Assessing the efficacy of existing financial institutions, identifying gaps in their operations, and proposing reforms that align with Islamic principles while ensuring long-term economic stability and resilience.
- **Islamic alternatives to *ribā*-based finance:** Exploring whether and how financial institutions can function without *ribā* while remaining viable within a predominantly interest-based international economic order. This includes examining alternative financial models and monetary policies to control inflation, stabilize currencies, and foster economic growth.

- **Public finance and infrastructure funding:** Investigating how state financial institutions can be leveraged to fund critical sectors such as infrastructure, healthcare, and education without incurring unsustainable debt or compromising Islamic financial ethics.
- **Currency:** Examining the normative Islamic position on various forms of currency—commodity-based (gold and silver), representative, fiat, and cryptocurrencies. This includes assessing whether fiat currencies can be considered permissible if they are managed transparently and backed by stable reserves or governance structures that uphold public trust. And if not, what are the implications for both having sufficient currency for real production and for operating in a fiat-based international order.
- **Currency transitions and alternative models:** Analyzing strategies for transitioning from the current fiat-based norm to an ideal Islamic currency model, considering interim steps to minimize economic disruption and evaluating the feasibility of returning to a gold and silver standard or integrating cryptocurrencies.

By integrating insights from historical models and contemporary practice, this research aims to propose frameworks that enhance economic governance and ensure financial systems serve the public good while remaining compliant with Islamic legal and ethical mandates.

## Public and Fiscal Policy

The formulation of public and fiscal policy plays a critical role in fostering equitable resource distribution, economic justice, and collective well-being. This research examines key themes such as the following:

- **Centralization vs. decentralization:** Analyzing where Muslim-majority economies currently stand on the spectrum between centralized and decentralized economic management and identifying frameworks that balance efficient governance with local empowerment.
- **Regulatory frameworks and wealth distribution:** Exploring how regulations can prevent wealth concentration and economic monopolization while ensuring innovation and entrepreneurship are not stifled.
- **Ownership structures and economic governance:** Examining policies on public versus private ownership of key industries—such as energy, water, and transportation—to determine how they can best serve the public good.
- **Taxation and land reform:** Outlining principles for designing a *Shariʿa*-compliant tax system that ensures redistribution without excessive burdens and evaluating land reform strategies to prevent exploitation and guarantee equitable access to arable and non-arable land for productive use.
- **Public spending priorities:** Identifying the most critical areas for public investment, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, to ensure economic resilience and alignment with Islamic values of stewardship and collective welfare.

By addressing these questions, this research aims to propose public and fiscal policies that uphold economic justice while fostering sustainability, growth, and ummatic solidarity.

## Interconnections

The research agenda outlined above presents a comprehensive exploration of *interconnected* sociopolitical, economic, and civilizational questions that impact the Muslim Umma. While each topic has its specific focus, articulating it separately can obscure significant overlaps and synergies that highlight their entwinement and the necessity of holistic approaches. For instance, the call for political unification and governance models cannot be separated from the economic realities explored in topics such as fiscal policy, currency, and state financial institutions. Effective governance structures depend on financial independence, which, in turn, requires robust economic frameworks that are both self-sustaining and aligned with Islamic principles. Similarly, the civilizational renewal themes, such as ummatic frames, education, and the critique of alternative civilizational philosophies, inform and are informed by political and economic systems. The role of education in fostering an ummatic ethos, for example, is closely tied to the development of leaders and institutions capable of navigating sociopolitical transitions and promoting socially-embedded and morally-oriented economic policies.

Likewise, critiques of secular paradigms and their existential crises provide the intellectual basis for advancing alternative social imaginaries that shape policy-making and institutional reforms across domains. Moreover, the focus on social change, technology, and civil society underscores the importance of grassroots movements and community participation in sustaining unity and resilience. However, social movements, technological adoption, and civil society initiatives cannot succeed in isolation—they require legal frameworks, economic investments, and cultural narratives that reinforce an ummatic orientation. For example, addressing environmental issues involves not only ethical stewardship but also institutional support and the technological capacity to lead in green innovation.

Therefore, these interconnected dimensions emphasize that sociopolitical transformation and unification, economic development and integration, and civilizational and intellectual renewal are not parallel pursuits but interdependent processes that must be harmonized for the collective flourishing of the Umma. This interconnected framing positions this research agenda as a cohesive and holistic effort to address the complex challenges facing the Umma through an integrated approach that draws strength from each domain while reinforcing the others.

## Conclusion

The research agenda outlined above is not merely an intellectual exercise but a call to action. It seeks to reinvigorate ummatic scholarship in service of unification, political and economic self-sufficiency, and civilizational renewal. By grounding research in Islamic epistemological frameworks while engaging with contemporary methodologies, this agenda aspires to produce knowledge that is both principled and pragmatic, offering viable solutions to the structural challenges facing the Umma today.

Yet, an agenda alone does not create change—it requires the active participation of scholars, policymakers, activists, and institutions committed to ummatic unity. We invite researchers across disciplines to contribute to this project by producing robust theory and rigorous solutions-oriented studies that help advance these objectives. Collaboration is essential, as properly ummatic research



must emerge through a shared intellectual and practical effort that transcends geographic, linguistic, and institutional boundaries. Through collective effort and institutional collaboration, we can move beyond fragmented understandings and towards a coherent vision for the future of the Umma—one that is intellectually robust, politically viable, and economically resilient.

\* \* \*

For further information, questions, or feedback on this research agenda, or to collaborate on research on any of them mentioned topics, please reach out to [research@ummetics.org](mailto:research@ummetics.org).

#### Suggested citation

Ummatics Institute, “Ummatics Research Agenda,” *Ummatics*, Feb 11, 2025, <https://ummetics.org/research-agenda>