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Synergistic Analysis of Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil, Consultation, and Institutional Supervision in the Systemic Model of Oversight in Islamic Governance

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Abstract

The primary objective of this study is to move beyond the prevailing isolated and fragmented analyses found in the literature on Islamic political thought and to develop a conceptual-systemic model that explains the mechanisms of supervision and accountability in Islamic governance. Although Islamic thought has introduced diverse supervisory instruments, such as enjoining good and forbidding evil, consultation (*shūrā*), and institutional supervision, existing studies have largely examined each of these instruments in isolation, thereby overlooking their organic interconnections. The present article seeks to fill this research gap. The central problem of this research is to demonstrate that these mechanisms are not separate and isolated elements, but rather interconnected components of a unified and synergistic supervisory ecosystem designed to restrain political power. In other words, the main question is how, through a functional and systemic analysis of these doctrines, a comprehensive, multi-layered model can be developed that illustrates the evolutionary process of supervision—from a cultural-social foundation to a formalized political-institutional structure. To address this problem, the article employs a conceptual and documentary analysis methodology. In this approach, the key concepts (enjoining good and forbidding evil, consultation, and institutional supervision) are first reduced to their fundamental supervisory functions. Subsequently, by referring to religious texts and Islamic sources, their mutual relationships and operational mechanisms are extracted and formulated within a coherent systemic model. The findings of the research culminate in the presentation of a dynamic three-layered model for supervision. The foundational layer of this model is general supervisory culture, which, through the religious obligation of enjoining good and forbidding evil, institutionalizes public accountability and the demand for transparency throughout society, thereby generating the social capital necessary for effective oversight. The intermediate layer is participatory ex-ante supervision, which, by means of the consultation mechanism, channels supervisory culture into macro-level

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decision-making processes and, by making policymaking transparent, prevents arbitrary rule and autocratic decision-making. The final layer of the model is ex-post supervisory structure, which, through specialized and legal institutional bodies, evaluates the performance of rulers after actions have been taken and ensures effective legal accountability. One of the most important and key findings of this research is the explication of the synergistic interaction and cyclical reinforcement among these three layers. The analysis demonstrates that a strong supervisory culture leads to more effective consultative councils; transparent councils, in turn, provide the tools and information required for effective institutional oversight; and finally, efficient institutional supervision – by fostering a sense of accountability among rulers – once again strengthens the general supervisory culture, thereby creating a virtuous cycle of transparency and accountability. By linking individual responsibility, collective wisdom, and structured control, this model delineates a comprehensive supervisory system that encompasses both horizontal (people-centered) and vertical (institution-centered) oversight, ultimately offering an effective framework for realizing desirable Islamic governance.

Keywords

Islamic governance, supervision and accountability, systemic model, enjoining good and forbidding evil, consultation (*shūrā*), institutional supervision.

1. Introduction

Introduction Restraining political power and preventing corruption constitute one of the fundamental challenges of governance. Power, by its very nature, tends toward concentration and deviation; hence, the design of effective supervisory mechanisms is an undeniable necessity for achieving desirable governance. Islamic political thought, for this very purpose, introduces a set of mechanisms whose aim is not merely to control power but to elevate both the political system and society as a whole. Existing scholarly literature has rightly emphasized the importance of concepts such as enjoining good and forbidding evil (*al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-l-nahy ʿan al-munkar*) as an instrument of popular critique (Gorji, 2016; Montazer Ghaem, 2022) and the role of consultation (*shūrā*) in participatory decision-making (Mirza Mohammad, 2010; Ghazavi, 2013). Nevertheless, these studies have predominantly adopted an insular approach, analyzing each concept in isolation. Consequently, the organic interconnection and synergistic interplay among these mechanisms within an integrated supervisory system remain a significant research gap. The present article seeks to fill this gap by designing a coherent conceptual model and answering the following central question: How can a comprehensive, multi-layered model of supervision and accountability in Islamic governance be developed through a functional and systemic analysis of the doctrines of enjoining good and forbidding evil, consultation, and institutional supervision? The core claim of this study is that these three pillars are not discrete elements but rather complementary and deeply interwoven layers of a dynamic "supervisory system." The research's innovation lies in moving beyond isolated descriptions of these concepts and presenting a systemic model that elucidates the nature of their interaction and mutual reinforcement: the process begins with the cultural layer (enjoining good and forbidding evil) as the infrastructure of a culture of accountability, evolves in the participatory layer (consultation) into ex-ante supervision within decision-making processes, and ultimately culminates in the structural layer (institutional supervision) as ex-post control and the guarantee of accountability. To achieve this objective, the study employs a conceptual and documentary analysis methodology. In this approach, key concepts are first reduced to their core supervisory functions, after which their operational mechanisms and interrelationships are extracted through reference to religious texts and authoritative Islamic sources. Accordingly, the structure of the article is as follows: The first section elucidates the theoretical foundations and components of the proposed model. The second section, as the analytical core of the study, is devoted to a systemic

examination of the interconnectedness and mutual mechanisms of these layers. The third section presents the final integrated model. The article ends with a conclusion.

2. Parts of a Systemic Model of Supervision: A Functional Explanation of the Three Layers

This study conceptualizes supervision in Islamic governance not as a singular mechanism, but as a dynamic, three-layered supervisory system. Each layer possesses a distinct yet complementary function, and through their interaction, they collectively form a complete supervisory cycle. This section provides a concise introduction to the functions of these three layers, thereby laying the groundwork for the systemic analysis of their interactions in the subsequent section.

2.1. First Layer: The Cultural-Social Foundation (Based on Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil)

The foundation of the Islamic supervisory system is a cultural-social infrastructure formed through the religious obligation of enjoining good and forbidding evil. This doctrine, by establishing collective responsibility, transforms society from a collection of passive individuals into a sensitive and proactive organism (Quran 3:104, 3:110). In our model, the primary function of this layer is not merely an ethical exhortation; rather, it generates the social capital essential for effective supervision. By emphasizing criticism of rulers as its highest manifestation (Kulaynī, 1986, vol. 5, p. 57), this doctrine institutionalizes throughout society a demand for transparency and accountability, thereby preparing the ground for the activation of the subsequent layers of the model. In essence, this layer serves as the driving engine and guarantor of the entire system's dynamism, keeping Muslims on a path of perpetual transformation and perfection (Taleghani, 1983, vol. 5, p. 284).

2.2. The Second Layer: Participatory and Ex-Ante Mechanism (Based on Consultation)

The culture of accountability generated in the first layer is transformed in this second layer into a formalized political mechanism. Consultation, as a fundamental principle (Quran 42:38), channels the supervisory culture directly into macro-level decision-making processes. The primary function of this layer is to exercise ex-ante supervision. By obligating rulers to consult and by

aggregating collective wisdom, it prevents arbitrary and autocratic decision-making. It subjects proposed decisions—before they are finalized—to scrutiny and evaluation by experts and representatives of the people. This process not only reduces the margin of error in decisions but also, by ensuring transparency at the policymaking stage, generates the data and evidence required for performance assessment in the subsequent layer (ex-post supervision).

2.3. The Third Layer: Institutional and Ex-Post Structure (Based on Specialized Supervision)

Function in the model: Ensuring ex-post control, legal regulation, and specialized accountability.

The supervisory cycle is completed by this layer, which assumes responsibility for ex-post control. Whereas supervision in the first layer is general and cultural, and in the second layer participatory and ex-ante, in this third layer supervision becomes structured, specialized, and governed by law. Since the evaluation of complex governmental performance requires expertise (Nahj al-Balāgha, Letter 53), Islamic thought emphasizes the necessity of supervisory institutions. These institutions—whose concrete forms vary according to time and circumstances (ranging from the historical institution of *ḥisba* to contemporary bodies such as parliaments or courts of audit)—are tasked with comparing the actions of rulers, after they have been carried out, with declared laws and objectives, and with continuously monitoring the continued validity of their competence and eligibility. This layer transforms accountability from a mere moral obligation into a legal and structural process, thereby guaranteeing the integrity and efficiency of the entire system of governance.

3. Analyzing Systematicity: Mutual Mechanisms in Islamic Supervision System

The strength of the proposed model lies not in the isolated analysis of each layer, but in understanding the dynamic and synergistic interactions among them. This section examines the mechanisms that transform these three layers into a unified and effective system. These interactions are analyzed along three main axes:

3.1. The Mechanism of Transitioning from Culture to Participation: How Does Enjoining Good Reinforce Consultation?

Within the framework of the proposed systemic model, enjoining good and

forbidding evil is not an isolated pillar but the foundation and driving engine of the entire supervisory system. By cultivating a pervasive culture of accountability, this obligation nurtures responsible citizens who create the necessary conditions for the activation of the two other pillars: participation in decision-making through consultation and performance oversight through institutional supervision. In practice, the supervisory culture arising from enjoining good and forbidding evil institutionalizes a societal demand for transparency and participation. This demand naturally finds structural and political expression in the mechanism of *shūrā* (consultation). Thus, as the cultural layer, enjoining good and forbidding evil prepares the ground for the participatory layer. The rationale for its existence rests on the rational and religious principle that the fates of individuals within a society are interconnected, and indifference toward deviations or the abandonment of virtues endangers the integrity of the entire political and social order (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, 1990, vol. 16, p. 123). This culture of universal supervision, in reality, generates the social capital essential for the effectiveness of *shūrā* and for conferring legitimacy upon specialized supervisory institutions. In the absence of such a foundation, consultative councils would be reduced to ceremonial bodies, and institutional oversight would degenerate into an impotent tool. From this perspective, enjoining good and forbidding evil institutionalizes a culture of universal supervision and a spirit of accountability-seeking throughout society, thereby laying the groundwork for the realization of transparency and justice.

Religious texts, particularly the Quran and hadith, elevate this obligation far beyond a mere individual duty and transform it into a political-social action. Verse 104 of Surah Āl ʿImrān—"Let there arise from among you a group that invites to what is good, enjoins what is right (*al-maʿrūf*), and forbids what is wrong (*al-munkar*)" (Quran 3:104)—constitutes a foundational directive for the formation of active cores of civil society. This "group" or community of specialists (whether interpreted through the partitive sense of "min" or as expository) represents the awakened conscience of society, tasked with supervising the conduct of others and especially those in power (Tabatabai, 1997, vol. 3, p. 373). Verse 110 of the same surah further declares the superiority of the Islamic ummah to be conditional—not inherent—upon its active performance of enjoining good and forbidding evil, thereby tying the legitimacy and elevation of the community to its sense of responsibility. This "group" or cadre of specialists forms the initial nucleus of the very elites and experts who, in the second layer (*shūrā*), assume the role of ex-ante

supervision over major decisions. The scope of this obligation reaches its climax in Quran 9:71: "The believing men and believing women are allies of one another; they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong," sketching a network of mutual and universal supervision among all citizens, male and female alike. In this framework, Muslims are duty-bound to prepare from among themselves a community equipped with the qualifications and capacity to fulfill these two divine obligations (Montazeri, 1988, p. 227). Such universal supervision reinforces a culture of accountability and immunizes society against corruption. Hadith literature places even greater emphasis on this political dimension. Imam al-Bāqir describes enjoining good and forbidding evil as the means for "establishing the other religious obligations, securing the roads, and restoring usurped rights" (Kulaynī, 1986, vol. 5, p. 55)—all core functions of an effective government. Numerous traditions further insist on preventing rulers from wrongdoing, such as the directive: "Consider the ugly deeds of oppressors and corruptors reprehensible in your hearts and express displeasure with your tongues." For this reason, enjoining good and forbidding evil is regarded as "the pillar and foundation of the religion" (Amidī, 1987, p. 332) and the guarantor of the community's social vitality. Rulers, therefore, must act in such a way that all people—without fear of their position—feel free to remind them of what is right and wrong, place their conduct under critical scrutiny, and, by gaining credibility and participating in affairs, discover their true role (Mostafapour, 2007, p. 2). This link between enjoining good and forbidding evil and "establishing religious obligations" demonstrates that the duty is not merely an individual act but a structural precondition for realizing the objectives of governance—objectives whose fulfillment by the government will later be evaluated by ex-post supervisory institutions.

Imam ʿAlī (peace be upon him) states: "The lowest state in which righteous people may regard rulers is when it is assumed that they love arrogance and that their affairs are founded upon pride. I dislike that you should even imagine that I love to be praised or that I enjoy hearing flattery. By the grace of God, I am not like that. Even if, in human nature, I were inclined toward it, I have abandoned it out of humility before Allah, the Exalted, so that He may keep me within what is more befitting for Him … Therefore, do not address me as tyrants are addressed, nor behave toward me with the wary caution you show toward oppressors lest you incur their anger, nor approach me with pretense and dissimulation. Do not think that the truth will be burdensome for me to hear or that I seek self-aggrandizement. Indeed, whoever finds it

difficult to hear the truth or to be offered justice will find acting upon them even more difficult. So refrain not from speaking the truth to me or from offering just counsel. I do not consider myself above error, nor am I secure from it in my actions—unless Allah suffices me in what is beyond my own power." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Letter 53) The jurisprudential conditions stipulated for this obligation—knowledge of the good and evil in question, probability of effect, persistence of the wrongdoer in sin, and absence of greater harm—do not restrict it; rather, they serve as mechanisms for rationalizing and enhancing the effectiveness of this public supervision (Mufīd, 1992). The limitation of individual knowledge concerning the criteria of *maʿrūf* and *munkar* creates the ground for aggregating and synergizing these insights, thereby giving rise to collective wisdom. This transforms supervision from an emotional reaction into a powerful action. Even more crucially, the condition of probability of effect specifically directs activists toward collective action: where individual criticism proves ineffective, coordinated group action to produce impact becomes itself a necessary preliminary for an obligation (Qutb, 1991, vol. 1, p. 477). This internal logic establishes the conceptual bridge for the transition from cultural supervision (enjoining good and forbidding evil) to participatory and structured supervision (*shūrā*). It also demonstrates how collective wisdom in Islamic thought germinates from within an ostensibly individual obligation. Ultimately, at its verbal level, enjoining good and forbidding evil encompasses and elevates political criticism. Whereas criticism is merely a civic right, enjoining good and forbidding evil transforms it into a religious-cum-political act, imbued with divine motivation and a far deeper sense of responsibility. By cultivating a pervasive culture of accountability, this obligation nurtures responsible citizens who create the necessary conditions for activating the two remaining pillars of the supervisory system: participation in decision-making through consultation and performance oversight through institutional supervision.

The jurisprudential conditions for the obligation of enjoining good and forbidding evil in Islamic jurisprudence are not intended to restrict this fundamental supervisory mechanism; rather, they serve to rationalize, enhance its effectiveness, and direct it toward clear objectives. After the condition of knowledge and awareness—which renders supervision informed and competent (one cannot excuse abandonment of the duty on grounds of ignorance; rather, one is obliged to pursue the necessary understanding and meticulously learn the criteria of *maʿrūf* and *munkar* precisely because the Quran makes it obligatory). The condition of probability of effect activates the

principle of real impact. The moment individual action proves ineffective, this very condition propels society toward coordinated and collective action that is capable of producing results. As Ayatollah Motahari points out, under such circumstances, organizing and seeking assistance from others to generate impact itself becomes a major obligation (Motahari, n.d., vol. 17, pp. 306–307). This internal logic constitutes the initial nucleus for the formation of civil society, pressure groups, and participatory institutions. Moreover, "effect" is understood more broadly: it includes influence not only on the immediate addressee but also on others who may intend similar acts in the future; thus the condition remains satisfied. Additionally, the effect is sometimes realized through repetition (Khomeini, 2000, vol. 2, p. 430). Consequently, one cannot take the mere absence of immediate impact on the specific addressee as justification for abandoning the duty. In certain cases, even if the wrongdoer is unaffected, silence may lead to other destructive consequences—such as the spread of innovations (*bidʿa*), the erosion of societal norms regarding sin, or the violation of sanctities. In such situations, remaining silent is impermissible. The Quran emphatically warns that concealing clear signs and guidance for humanity incurs the curse of Allah and of those entitled to curse (Quran 2:159; Hosseini & Rakhshandehnia, 2012, p. 8).

At its verbal stage, enjoining good and forbidding evil encompasses and elevates the very concept of political criticism. The relationship here is one of inclusion and elevation, not contradiction. Despite some superficial distinctions, the evidentiary basis of enjoining good and forbidding evil fully covers criticism while endowing it with two distinctive dimensions:

1) Transforming a right into a duty: Whereas in modern discourse criticism is typically framed as a "civic right" that one may exercise or forgo, enjoining good and forbidding evil elevates it to an act of worship with political import. This approach furnishes citizens with an inner, enduring, faith-based motivation to refuse silence in the face of corruption and injustice. The Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) declared that, after faith in God and maintaining ties of kinship, these two obligations are among the most exalted deeds in the sight of Allah (Ṭūsī, 1986, vol. 6, p. 176). Whoever undertakes them becomes the vicegerent of God and His Messenger on earth (Ṭabrisī, 1993, vol. 3, p. 486). This elevation from "right" to "duty" generates the sustained energy required for public supervision, which, in the second layer (*shūrā*), translates into active participation and, in the third layer (institutional supervision), into structured accountability-seeking (Najafi,

Mofatteh, & Movahedi Savoji, 2017, p. 6).

2) Conferring divine legitimacy: By linking criticism of power to pursuit of closeness to God and accountability before Him, this obligation bestows upon criticism a religious and moral legitimacy that makes it far more difficult for tyrannical rulers to counter. The critic is no longer merely a political dissenter but one fulfilling a divine command.

Consequently, enjoining good and forbidding evil provides a comprehensive framework for public supervision that is simultaneously rational and strategic, while being underpinned by profound religious motivation and legitimacy. By cultivating responsible and proactive citizens, this pillar creates the conditions necessary to prevent political and social deviations and prepares the ground for the activation of the subsequent layers of supervision—namely consultation and institutional oversight.

3.2. The Mechanism for Connecting Ex-Ante and Ex-Post Supervision: The Mutual Relation between Consultation and Institutional Supervision

In principle, the practice of consultation is regarded as one of the defining characteristics of an ideal faith-based society and of desirable governance. This is evident where God commands His Prophet to consult with the representatives of the general supervisory culture (Quran 3:159), and in this atmosphere of criticism and oversight, the followers of this school advance their political affairs through collective deliberation and consultation (Quran 42:38). The Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him and his family) considered consultation one of the vital factors for the life of a society and its abandonment one of the causes of societal death (Ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī, 1965, p. 26). In Islamic governance, *shūrā* performs multiple functions that elevate it to an essential pillar of the supervisory system:

1) A forum for ex-ante criticism: *Shūrā* is, by its very nature, a platform for the clash of opinions and critical deliberation. Its purpose is not merely to rubber-stamp a predetermined view, but to evaluate diverse options and arrive at the best possible solution. Consequently, *shūrā* serves as one of the primary and legitimate sources of criticism of governmental policies. Every citizen may, in the arena of consultation—both as a right and as a religious duty—critique and evaluate the performance of the government.

2) A bridge between ruler and people: In the era of Occultation of the Infallible Imam, when the ruler is not infallible, consultation becomes a two-way obligation: it is incumbent upon the ruler to seek the opinions of the people and elites, and it is equally incumbent upon the people to offer their

views on matters of public concern (Mir-Ali, 2006, p. 96). This reciprocal relationship creates an interactive and accountable image of the political system.

3) Safeguarding the public interest: By involving the people and elites in the decision-making process, *shūrā* ensures that final decisions serve the common good of society and prevent deviation or negligence (Fadlallah, 1998, vol. 20, p. 192). God describes the ideal cultural—and especially political—community in these terms: "Those who listen to what is said and follow the best of it" (Quran 39:18), meaning a society that grants the general populace the opportunity to present (through the framework of *shūrā*) possible proposals and mechanisms for desirable governance, while the ruler selects and implements the best course in accordance with the views of the representatives of the general supervisory culture. As a result, the political system is protected from unilateral and destructive decisions, and society is shielded from ruin through dictatorship. As Imam ʿAlī (peace be upon him) stated: "Do not act arbitrarily according to your own opinion, for whoever follows only his own opinion perishes" (Amidī, 1987, p. 296).

Thus, *shūrā* not only optimizes decisions but, by making the decision-making process transparent, generates and supplies the data essential for the third layer—namely ex-post supervision and performance evaluation. Without consultative participation, institutional oversight would be deprived of access to the key information required for accurate assessment. In the Islamic supervisory system, *shūrā* serves as the intermediary link that transforms the cultural and universal supervision arising from enjoining good and forbidding evil into structured and effective participation. In reality, *shūrā* constitutes the institutional representation of that very supervisory culture which, through enjoining good and forbidding evil, constantly urges and encourages ruling authority to engage, at the macro level, in transparent decision-making that is grounded in trust toward that culture and oriented toward the public interest—just as Imam ʿAlī (peace be upon him) offered consultation to the caliphs (Wāqidī, 1982, p. 148). By creating a space for ex-ante criticism and participatory decision-making, this pillar strengthens the foundations of the third pillar—institutional ex-post supervision—and thereby completes a full cycle of accountability within the system of governance.

3.3. Continuity of the Practice of Consultation among the Imams and Its Relation to Criticism

The practice of consultation was not exclusive to Prophet Muḥammad (peace

be upon him and his household); rather, it continued as a strategic principle in the political conduct of the other Imams (peace be upon them). This continuity demonstrates that *shūrā* is an inseparable principle of the Islamic model of governance.

1) Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (peace be upon him), when faced with a threat from the Abbasid caliph, did not make a unilateral decision. Instead, he gathered his family and his trusted Shia followers and consulted with them on how to confront this political crisis (Barqī, 1951, p. 602). This act demonstrates that, even under conditions of security risk and acute crisis, involving elites in decision-making remains a fundamental principle.

2) Imam al-Riḍā (peace be upon him), responding to one of his companions who expressed astonishment at seeing the Imam consult others, firmly declared: "The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his household), who was superior to me, continually consulted his companions" (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, 1990, vol. 8, p. 428). This reply establishes consultation not as an optional practice but as a Prophetic tradition and a binding duty upon the leader of the Islamic community.

3) Imam al-Jawād (peace be upon him), in a political matter, advised ʿAlī ibn Mahziyār to consult another individual, to seek his opinion on how best to deal with the ruling authorities at the time, and emphasized: "Consultation is a blessed matter" (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, 1990, vol. 8, p. 428). This practice underscores the importance of drawing upon the wisdom of others—even indirectly—in order to arrive at the soundest possible decision.

3.4. The Relationship between Consultation and Criticism: From Seeking Consultation to Accepting Critique

This historical practice demonstrates that consultation and criticism are two sides of the same coin. A political system that considers itself bound by the obligation of consultation inevitably must also create a space for hearing dissenting opinions and criticisms. Whereas seeking consultation is a proactive initiative by the ruler to solicit views (and the very act of consulting an advisor is often intended to examine—and, if necessary, to offer—criticism) (Najafi, Mofatteh, & Movahedi Savoji, 2017, p. 109), criticism is frequently an independent act by society to express candid, unvarnished opinions. The consultative environment, though valuable, may sometimes be constrained by considerations such as deference to the status of the person being consulted, leading to guarded or selective speech. An open critical space, however bitter, closes this gap and places a clearer, more honest mirror of societal realities

before the ruler. Therefore, a political system grounded in *shūrā* must not only actively seek consultation but must also be open to criticism in order to gain a genuine understanding of the people's views and to utilize them effectively in the decision-making process. Within the Islamic supervisory system, *shūrā*—by institutionalizing a culture of dialogue and participation—practically creates the conditions for accepting criticism as a constructive element, thereby paving the way for the continued evolution of governance toward greater transparency and accountability.

The first level of ex-post supervision is popular or general supervision, which is rooted in the fundamental position accorded to the people in Islamic political thought, in order to ensure that affairs proceed properly (Amid Zanjani, 2005, voi. 5, p. 53). The ultimate objective of governance—the establishment of justice ("so that mankind may uphold justice," Quran 57:25)—is a collective public project for which primary responsibility rests upon the shoulders of the people themselves. The Noble Quran addresses "the people at large" in numerous major social, political, and judicial duties. This clearly indicates that the populace must not be passive actors on the political stage; rather, they are required to consciously and actively oversee both their own destiny and the performance of the government. This right of supervision extends to such a degree that even in relation to the highest divine authority (the Prophet, peace be upon him and his household), "the affair" and "the command" are attributed to the people (Quran 33:36), and their right to pursue and demand accountability for matters is explicitly recognized. This principle lays the cornerstone for the people's right to question and the rulers' obligation to render account.

The conduct of the Infallibles (peace be upon them) illustrates this reciprocal relationship in the most exemplary manner:

1) The obligation to supervise the ruler: Imam al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him) calls upon the people to "look carefully" and "reflect deeply" on who is ruling over them and into whose hands they are entrusting their affairs (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, 1990, vol. 11, p. 35). This is a general summons for the ongoing evaluation of rulers' competence and eligibility. In Islamic culture, should a ruler lose the necessary qualifications, he becomes a "ṭāghūt" (false deity/tyrant), and obedience to him is no longer permissible. Detecting this transformation requires continuous supervision over the ruler's conduct and the continued fulfillment of the required conditions (Varaei, 1999, p. 286).

2) The ruler's obligation to render account: In turn, Imam ʿAlī (peace be upon him) declares in Letter 50 of Nahj al-Balāgha that he considers himself

duty-bound to keep the people informed of affairs, to report all matters to them (except military secrets), and only then to expect obedience from them. Likewise, in his famous letter to Mālik al-Ashtar, he instructs him to "respond to the questions and objections of the people" and to act with transparency toward them. This approach elevates transparency and accountability to two fundamental conditions for the operational legitimacy of governance.

Therefore, popular supervision is a reciprocal right and duty that obliges citizens to hold rulers to account through questioning, while compelling rulers to provide reports. This form of supervision serves as a powerful, albeit informal, mechanism for controlling political power.

Nevertheless, popular supervision alone is not sufficient. Evaluating the complex issues of governance, analyzing performance at the macro level, and examining the specialized qualifications of leadership require knowledge and expertise that the general public typically lacks (Shafiei, 2023, p. 212). For this reason, general supervision must be complemented by the second layer—institutional and specialized supervision—so that the Islamic supervisory system may attain its full effectiveness. The people fill this gap by electing qualified and expert individuals to supervisory institutions, thereby lending depth and precision to their own oversight. The final and completing layer of the Islamic supervisory system is institutional (or specialized) supervision. This type of supervision, carried out by dedicated institutions and specialist personnel, directly addresses the limitations of popular (general) supervision. While popular supervision promotes a culture of accountability-seeking, institutional supervision renders that accountability-seeking legal, specialized, and structurally organized. Imam ʿAlī (peace be upon him) reminds Mālik al-Ashtar: just as you reflect upon the conduct of previous rulers, the people will likewise reflect upon your conduct (Nahj al-Balāgha, Letter 53). Such public reflection only yields the desired outcome when it is deepened and refined by expert institutions.

The need for institutional supervision arises from its fundamental distinctions from general supervision:

1) Legal status: Institutional supervision possesses a formal legal and statutory dimension, with clearly defined responsibility assigned to specific supervisory bodies, whereas general supervision is primarily ethical and social in nature.

2) Depth and scope: Institutional supervision, through mechanisms such as investigation and inquiry, can penetrate the hidden aspects of performance, whereas general supervision is confined to public matters.

3) Specialization: Supervisory institutions are able to demand and evaluate technical and expert responses from officials—an capability that is not available to the general public (Soroush Mahallati, 1999, p. 125).

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that expert institutions (Layer 3) acquire public legitimacy and acceptance only when they are grounded in transparent and fully participatory decisions (Layer 2). In other words: whenever consultative decisions are taken in a truly transparent and unambiguously participatory manner, the ex-post consequence is that the work of expert institutions (Layer 3) gains public legitimacy and acceptance. This is because transparency in *shūrā*—free from ambiguity—allows the people to clearly observe the core elements of their own supervisory culture in action. The natural outcome of this process is public trust in the practical performance of expert supervisory institutions.

3.5. Feedback Loop: How Does Effective Oversight Reproduce a Supervisory Culture?

Supervising a non-infallible ruler is both a rational and religious necessity. In Shiite thought, infallibility (*ʿiṣma*) is the sole absolute guarantee against error. In the absence of an infallible leader, justice and jurisprudential competence serve as the two primary substitutes for infallibility, yet both conditions must be verified at the outset and continuously sustained. This verification and continuity are possible only through ongoing supervision. Such supervision does not constitute a denial of the office of *wilāya* (guardianship or authority) nor an illegitimate restriction of the ruler's lawful powers; rather, it is the means of guaranteeing the integrity and effectiveness of the entire system of governance and of filling the void created by the absence of infallibility (Soroush Mahallati, 1999, p. 115). Jurists have likewise affirmed that examining a ruler's performance neither nullifies his rulings nor amounts to his rejection (Ansārī, 1998, vol. 1, p. 214). Concrete examples from the practical conduct of the Supreme Leader illustrate the acceptance of criticism and accountability: the acknowledgment of error in the former population-control policy (Khamenei, 2012, October 10), and the encouragement of students to maintain a critical perspective (Khamenei, 2024, April 8). These instances demonstrate the practical compatibility of supervision and openness to criticism with the station of leadership in an Islamic system. This approach confirms that the Islamic order recognizes criticism as a constructive element for correcting mistakes and improving governance.

Ultimately, institutional supervision, as the apex of the supervisory

pyramid, relies on expertise and structural organization to ensure that power—at all levels, including the highest—remains accountable. It thereby completes the supervisory cycle that began with general cultural cultivation and culminates in effective, efficient control. This final layer closes the loop. Ex-post supervision, which itself comprises two arms—popular/general supervision and institutional/specialized supervision—focuses on the performance of rulers and institutions after policies have been implemented. Popular supervision generates social pressure for accountability through an informed and free public opinion, while institutional supervision (such as the Assembly of Experts and other oversight bodies) deepens and strengthens this control through legal and specialized instruments. The strength of this model lies in the mutual interaction and reinforcement among its three layers. A robust culture of enjoining good and forbidding evil (Layer 1) leads to the selection of more competent representatives in consultative councils (Layer 2) and to the strengthening of supervisory institutions (Layer 3). An effective consultative council (Layer 2), by rendering decision-making transparent, supplies the tools and information required for both popular and institutional oversight (Layer 3). Finally, a powerful ex-post supervision mechanism (Layer 3) compels rulers to greater acceptance of consultation (Layer 2) and deeper respect for societal values (Layer 1). In reality, the third layer (institutional supervision) functions as the specialized and operative arm of the two preceding layers. It receives the culture of accountability generated by enjoining good and forbidding evil (Layer 1) and the transparent data produced through the consultative process (Layer 2), then transforms them into a legal, precise, and expert evaluation. Taken together, these three layers form a complete supervisory cycle, which begins with the general populace, is processed through elites in consultative bodies, and is ultimately brought to a binding conclusion by specialized institutions.

4. Conclusion

This research set out to design a systemic conceptual model for supervision and accountability in Islamic governance by systematically analyzing the interplay of three foundational mechanisms in Islamic thought. The findings demonstrate that enjoining good and forbidding evil, consultation, and institutional supervision are not isolated elements, but rather complementary layers of a unified supervisory system. Their synergy creates an effective mechanism for restraining political power and realizing justice. In response to the central research question, the findings demonstrate that the model operates

through a cyclical and evolutionary process:

Cultural-social layer (based on enjoining good and forbidding evil): as the foundation of the system, it generates and continually reproduces a culture of responsibility and a public demand for accountability. Participatory ex-ante layer (based on *shūrā*): it transforms this culture into an institutionalized mechanism and, by making the decision-making process transparent, shifts supervision to the stage prior to action. Structural ex-post layer (based on institutional supervision): it completes the cycle through specialized and legal control of rulers' performance, thereby guaranteeing accountability. The contribution of this research extends beyond the isolated description of these pillars to the explication of the mutual and synergistic mechanisms among the three layers. The analysis revealed that a strong supervisory culture leads to more effective consultative councils; transparent councils provide the necessary tools for institutional oversight; and effective institutional supervision, by fostering a sense of efficacy, reinforces the general supervisory culture—thus generating a "virtuous cycle" of transparency and accountability.

This three-layered model constitutes a comprehensive framework that encompasses both horizontal supervision (people-centered) and vertical supervision (institution-centered). By integrating individual responsibility, collective wisdom, and structured control, it vividly demonstrates the remarkable capacity of Islamic thought to offer practical solutions to the fundamental challenge of good governance. Given the considerable potential of this model to realize ideal governance in the contemporary world, future research is recommended in two primary directions: first, investigating the obstacles and prerequisites for the practical implementation of this model within existing political structures; and second, conducting comparative studies of the model with supervisory frameworks in other intellectual and political traditions.

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