

The Ambivalence of Stewardship: A Critical Reconstruction of Qur'anic Environmental Ethics and Climate Justice

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Abstract

Contemporary Islamic environmental discourse frequently presents stewardship as the primary Qur'anic foundation for ecological responsibility, yet this formulation often leaves unresolved questions concerning anthropocentrism, unequal climate burdens, nonhuman value, and institutional accountability. This study critically reconstructs Qur'anic environmental ethics in relation to climate justice and develops a framework capable of addressing these limitations. It employs a qualitative document-based design combining content analysis, critical hermeneutics, and normative conceptual reconstruction. The corpus includes selected Qur'anic passages, representative classical and modern exegetical works, contemporary Muslim environmental declarations, international climate-governance instruments, and authoritative scientific assessments. The findings show, first, that stewardship is not a self-contained Qur'anic environmental doctrine but a modern interpretive reconstruction whose legitimacy depends on subordinating human authority to accountability and moral limits. Second, passages concerning animal communities, cosmic glorification, and balance provide a stronger basis for decentring human moral sovereignty and recognizing nonhuman forms of life as ethically significant. Third, general appeals to shared responsibility are inadequate for climate justice unless obligations are differentiated according to historical contribution, present capacity, vulnerability, and exclusion from decision-making. These findings support a critical Islamicate climate-justice framework composed of five interdependent dimensions: limited authority, creaturely recognition, differentiated responsibility, participatory governance, and restorative transformation. The study contributes theoretically by integrating Qur'anic interpretation, multidimensional climate-justice theory, and Islamicate institutional analysis. It argues that Qur'anic environmental ethics becomes publicly consequential not by claiming scriptural completeness, but by providing a critical vocabulary for evaluating power, distributing obligations, recognizing ecological plurality, and holding institutions accountable for environmental harm.

Keywords: *Qur'anic environmental ethics; climate justice; stewardship; Islamicate ethics*



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INTRODUCTION

Climate change is no longer adequately understood as a discrete environmental disturbance susceptible to resolution through technological innovation, conservation policy, or aggregate emissions reduction alone. It is simultaneously a crisis of unequal exposure, differentiated responsibility, political recognition, and access to environmental decision-making. Although climatic disruption crosses national and ecological boundaries, its causes, consequences, and adaptive capacities are distributed unevenly. Communities that have contributed least to cumulative greenhouse-gas emissions often possess the fewest institutional and material resources with which to withstand drought, flooding, food insecurity, displacement, and ecological loss. By contrast, historically high-emitting states, corporations, and affluent social groups generally retain greater capacity to externalize environmental costs and protect themselves from their consequences. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change therefore situates climate vulnerability within intersecting histories of inequality, marginalization, colonialism, uneven development, and governance failure.¹ Climate change is consequently an ethical and political problem concerning the production and allocation of harm, not merely a technical problem of atmospheric management.

This recognition has shifted environmental debate toward the language of climate justice. Earlier environmental ethics often centred on the moral status of nature and the appropriate relationship between human beings and nonhuman life. Climate-justice scholarship has extended this inquiry to the institutional distribution of environmental benefits, burdens, responsibilities, and decision-making power. Caney examines how mitigation and remedial obligations should be assigned among actors with unequal historical contributions and capacities, whereas Gardiner characterizes climate change as a “perfect moral storm” produced by the interaction of global, intergenerational, and theoretical failures.² Schlosberg further argues that environmental justice cannot be reduced to distributive allocation; it also concerns recognition, participation, and the capabilities required for human and ecological flourishing.³ Together, these approaches establish climate justice as a multidimensional field involving distribution, procedure, recognition, capability, correction, and intergenerational responsibility.

The ethical depth of the climate crisis has also renewed scholarly attention to religion as a source of ecological imagination, moral formation, legal reasoning, and collective action. Since White’s influential argument that religious cosmologies shape human relations with nature, scholars have debated whether monotheistic traditions principally legitimate human domination or contain resources for ecological restraint.⁴ Subsequent research has complicated any direct causal connection between doctrine and environmental conduct. Religious texts do not operate as self-executing ecological programmes. Their public significance is mediated by interpretation, jurisprudence, education, institutions, economic interests, and structures of authority. The relevant scholarly question is therefore

¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, “Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report” (IPCC, 2023).

² Simon Caney, “Cosmopolitan Justice, Responsibility, and Global Climate Change,” *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 2005; Stephen M Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

³ David Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴ Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–7, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.155.3767.1203>.

not simply whether scripture contains environmentally favourable teachings, but how religious concepts are selected, translated, contested, and institutionalized under specific historical conditions.

Within Islamic and Islamicate studies, one major scholarly trend has reconstructed environmental ethics through Qur'anic concepts such as *tawhīd*, *khalīfah*, *amānah*, *mīzān*, *ʿadl*, *islāh*, *fasād*, and *isrāf*. This literature generally presents humanity's status as *khalīfah* as a form of delegated responsibility rather than absolute ownership, associating stewardship with the preservation of ecological balance and accountable use of natural resources.⁵ *Tawhīd* is frequently treated as the theological foundation of this ethic because divine unity is understood to imply the interdependence of creation and the subordination of human power to divine ownership.⁶ Islamic legal scholarship has similarly related environmental protection to prohibitions against aggression, waste, and resource misuse, as well as to the objectives of the *Sharīʿah* and the protection of public welfare.⁷ These studies have made an important contribution by demonstrating that Muslim environmental engagement cannot be dismissed as a derivative appropriation of modern Western ecological discourse.

A second trend has moved beyond normative textual exposition toward Islamicate environmentalism and “Eco-Islam.” Rather than treating Islamic environmental ethics as a stable set of abstract principles, this scholarship examines how religious concepts are translated into activism, organizational practice, business ethics, community programmes, and public policy. Gade shows that Muslim environmentalisms emerge through interactions among scripture, ritual, law, social movements, institutions, and local ecological conditions rather than through a single universal Islamic doctrine.⁸ Abdelzaher and Abdelzaher likewise move the discussion of Eco-Islam from theological justification toward practical and empirically observable applications of Qur'anic environmental

⁵ S A Bakar et al., “Environmental Ethics in the Qur'an: A Thematic Analysis of Conservation and Stewardship,” *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah*, 2025, 31–45, <https://doi.org/10.7187/GJATSI122025-3>; A Kurbiyanto et al., “Environmental Ethics in Islamic Teachings: Discussing Ethical Principles in Islamic Teachings That Emphasize Environmental Protection and Preservation,” in *World Sustainability Series*, vol. Part F3673, 2024, 15–34, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-8772-2_2; S A Catovic, “Towards an Islamic Energy Ethic and Praxis,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Islam and Environmental Law*, 2026, 291–99, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009332118.026>; M A Arafa, “The Protection of Basic Natural Resources and Man under Islamic Law: A New Tool for Sustainable Development and Greening of the Environment,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Islam and Environmental Law*, 2026, 300–310, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009332118.027>; A Shaleh and M S Islam, “Averting the Existential Threat of the Planet: Islamic Environmental Ethics to Address the Contemporary Environmental Crisis,” *Intellectual Discourse* 32, no. 1 (2024): 239–64, <https://doi.org/10.31436/id.v32i1.1937>; N Azizi, “Towards Environmental Sustainability: A Reflection on Islamic Epistemologies and Models for Sustainable Development,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Islam and Environmental Law*, 2026, 227–40, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009332118.021>.

⁶ Catovic, “Towards an Islamic Energy Ethic and Praxis.”

⁷ N S Muhamad et al., “Halal Tourism: Literature Synthesis and Direction for Future Research,” *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 27, no. 1 (2019): 729–45, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85063598641&partnerID=40&md5=cca03f8738538db1e62085cdaf5e2c96>; A Muhamad, A H Syihab, and A H Ibrahim, “Preserving Human–Nature's Interaction for Sustainability: Quran and Sunnah Perspective,” *Science and Engineering Ethics* 26, no. 2 (2020): 1053–66, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-020-00192-7>.

⁸ Anna M Gade, “Muslim Environmentalisms,” *Religions* 10, no. 6 (2019): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10060337>.

principles.⁹ Shaleh and Islam similarly situate Islamic environmental responsibility within broader questions of governance, collective action, and contemporary ecological crisis.¹⁰ This institutional turn is significant because it shifts attention from whether Islam supports environmental protection to how environmental authority and practice are actually produced in Muslim social contexts.

A third trend interrogates the anthropological assumptions of Qur'anic environmental interpretation. Tlili challenges accounts that organize the Qur'anic cosmos exclusively around human superiority by emphasizing the independent religious significance, communal existence, and moral visibility of nonhuman creatures.¹¹ Sayem similarly examines whether Islamic environmental ethics should be classified as anthropocentric or biocentric, arguing that the Qur'anic representation of human responsibility cannot be separated from its recognition of the value of nonhuman creation.¹² Such scholarship destabilizes the assumption that a special human role necessarily entails unrestricted moral priority. It also reveals that the Qur'anic environmental field contains a tension between human responsibility and human centrality rather than a settled ecological position.

A fourth trend uses contextual or ecological hermeneutics to reinterpret Qur'anic passages in relation to contemporary environmental degradation. These studies treat interpretation as an active engagement between inherited texts and new historical conditions, arguing that environmental concepts must be reconstructed in light of scientific knowledge and changing social realities.¹³ This approach offers a methodological advance over decontextualized verse collection because it recognizes that the Qur'an does not speak in the modern technical language of carbon emissions, climate adaptation, or biodiversity governance. Nevertheless, some hermeneutical studies continue to describe the Qur'an as a comprehensive guide to sustainable environmental management, a formulation that risks minimizing the historical distance between premodern revelation and contemporary climate institutions.

Despite these contributions, much Qur'anic environmental scholarship remains organized around an affirmative stewardship paradigm. In this paradigm, *khalīfah* is treated as evidence that humanity has been appointed to protect and manage the earth, while *amānah*, *mīzān*, moderation, and accountability are assembled into a coherent ecological system. This construction has clear pedagogical value, particularly in mobilizing religious opposition to destructive consumption and resource exploitation. Yet it frequently assumes rather than demonstrates that *khalīfah* inherently signifies environmental care. The concept's semantic plurality, political history, association with authority, and possible anthropocentric implications are seldom examined with equal intensity. The translation of *khalīfah* into "stewardship" is therefore not neutral: it can limit

⁹ D M Abdelzaher, A Kotb, and A Helfaya, "Eco-Islam: Beyond the Principles of Why and What, and Into the Principles of How," *Journal of Business Ethics* 155, no. 3 (2019): 623–43, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3518-2>.

¹⁰ Shaleh and Islam, "Averting the Existential Threat of the Planet: Islamic Environmental Ethics to Address the Contemporary Environmental Crisis."

¹¹ Sarra Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹² M A Sayem, "Islam and Environmental Ethics: A Qur'anic Approach," *Islamic Studies*, 2021.

¹³ A Helli, "Does the Qur'an Offer Foundational Principles for Environmental Ethics?," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 6, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-20240003>; H Amin et al., "Environmental Paradigm Transformation through Integrative Interpretation: Perspective of Quranic Ecological Hermeneutics," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 28 (2025): 52–63, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.28.2025.334>.

exploitation by making human power delegated and accountable, but it can also preserve a managerial hierarchy in which human beings remain the governors of a largely passive natural world.

This ambivalence becomes more consequential when stewardship is placed within climate-justice debates. Most Islamic environmental studies concentrate on conservation, moderation, environmental education, sustainable resource management, or individual responsibility. Even where climate change is discussed, it is often treated as another form of ecological degradation to which established Islamic principles can be applied. Such approaches do not adequately address the distinctive normative structure of climate injustice: cumulative emissions, colonial extraction, militarism, unequal adaptive capacity, loss and damage, political marginalization, and intergenerational burden transfer. Ahmad for example, extends Islamic environmental ethics toward the ecological costs of militarism and the disproportionate harms imposed on vulnerable populations, illustrating why climate justice requires analysis of institutions and organized violence rather than only personal consumption.¹⁴ General appeals to stewardship cannot determine how responsibilities should be differentiated between low-emitting communities, fossil-fuel corporations, wealthy states, and populations whose environments have been treated as zones of sacrifice.

Conversely, dominant climate-justice theories have largely emerged from secular political philosophy, environmental politics, international law, and social-movement scholarship. Their categories of distribution, recognition, participation, capability, differentiated responsibility, and intergenerational justice provide powerful analytical resources. Yet they do not exhaust the vocabularies through which religious communities understand accountability, creaturely value, moral limitation, and obligations extending beyond present human interests. Religion is too often positioned as a motivational supplement for frameworks formulated elsewhere. Such an approach overlooks the possibility that Qur'anic cosmology might not merely endorse climate justice but critically reconfigure its human-centred assumptions.

The central gap is therefore simultaneously conceptual, interpretive, and theoretical. Conceptually, existing scholarship frequently treats ecological stewardship as the self-evident meaning of *khalīfah*. Interpretively, it has not sufficiently examined the tension between vicegerency and Qur'anic representations of nonhuman communities, cosmic glorification, human ignorance, corruption, and limitation. Theoretically, it rarely reconstructs Qur'anic environmental ethics through the interconnected demands of distributive, procedural, recognitional, capability-based, corrective, and intergenerational climate justice. The result is a persistent separation between Qur'anic environmental ethics, which often lacks a sufficiently differentiated account of power and inequality, and climate-justice theory, which often leaves the religious and nonhuman dimensions of ethical obligation conceptually secondary.

This article addresses that gap through three questions: How has *khalīfah* been constructed as an environmental stewardship paradigm, and what anthropocentric assumptions accompany that construction? How do Qur'anic concepts such as *amānah*, *mīzān*, *adl*, and *fasād*, together with representations of nonhuman creation, complicate or limit human ecological authority? How can Qur'anic environmental ethics be critically reconstructed in conversation with

¹⁴ N B Ahmad, "Militarism, Climate Emissions, and Islamic Environmental Ethics: A Transnational Perspective on Demilitarization and Ecological Justice," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Islam and Environmental Law*, 2026, 74–81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009332118.010>.

multidimensional climate-justice theory without reducing the Qur'an to a modern environmental manifesto or climate justice to a religiously endorsed policy programme? Correspondingly, the study aims to identify the interpretive construction and internal ambivalence of stewardship, reassess its relationship to creaturely plurality and accountable power, and develop a critical Islamicate climate-justice framework connecting Qur'anic reasoning with responsibility, vulnerability, participation, recognition, and intergenerational obligation.

The analysis combines critical hermeneutics with multidimensional environmental-justice theory. Critical hermeneutics distinguishes Qur'anic discourse from its historical and contemporary interpretations and exposes how linguistic choices, inherited categories, and institutional interests shape apparently ecological meanings. Schlosberg's framework of distribution, recognition, participation, and capability structures the justice analysis, supplemented by Caney's account of differentiated responsibility and Gardiner's critique of intergenerational moral failure.¹⁵ This combination permits the study to evaluate not only whether Qur'anic ethics encourages environmental protection, but how it configures authority, vulnerability, representation, and the standing of present, future, and nonhuman communities.

The article's novelty lies in replacing the linear movement from Qur'anic verse to ecological principle and contemporary application with a reciprocal critical reconstruction. Climate-justice theory is used to expose the insufficient treatment of structural inequality and differentiated vulnerability within stewardship discourse; Qur'anic concepts of creaturely plurality and accountable authority are used to question the residual anthropocentrism of climate-justice models. The resulting framework advances Qur'anic and Islamicate environmental studies beyond apologetic retrieval while expanding climate-justice theory beyond exclusively secular and human-centred categories. Its international significance lies in showing how religious ethical vocabularies can participate critically in global climate debates without being romanticized, instrumentalized, or reduced to cultural legitimation for pre-existing sustainability policies.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative document-based design to critically reconstruct the relationship between Qur'anic environmental ethics and climate justice. The design was appropriate because the research focused on the production, transformation, and normative implications of meaning rather than on measuring relationships among variables. Qualitative inquiry enables texts to be examined within their historical, intellectual, and institutional contexts to identify interpretive patterns, conceptual tensions, and alternative constructions of meaning.¹⁶ The study therefore did not seek to prove that the Qur'an contains a complete modern climate theory, nor did it investigate Muslim environmental attitudes empirically.

The analysis combined qualitative content analysis, critical hermeneutics, and normative conceptual reconstruction. The documentary corpus comprised four categories. First, selected Qur'anic passages concerning human authority, trust, justice, corruption, excess, consultation, cosmic order, vulnerable groups, and

¹⁵ Caney, "Cosmopolitan Justice, Responsibility, and Global Climate Change"; Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*; Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature*.

¹⁶ John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Sage Publications, 2018).

nonhuman communities were examined. These included, among others, Q. 2:30, 4:135, 6:38, 6:165, 17:44, 30:41, 33:72, 38:26, 42:38, 55:7–9, and 59:7. Second, representative exegetical works were analysed, namely al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-bayān*, al-Rāzī's *Mafātih al-ghayb*, al-Qurṭubī's *Al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, and Ibn 'Ashūr's *Al-Taḥrīr wa-al-tanwīr*. These works were purposively selected to represent transmitted, theological-philosophical, legal, political, and reformist modes of interpretation.

Third, the study examined the *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change* and *Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth* as contemporary institutional expressions of Muslim environmental ethics. Fourth, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement, and the IPCC 2023 Synthesis Report were analysed to establish the legal, policy, and scientific context of differentiated responsibility, vulnerability, adaptation, and climate-related loss and damage. Documents were selected according to their relevance to the research questions, institutional or scholarly provenance, explicit engagement with environmental ethics or climate governance, and availability in identifiable published forms.

Qualitative content analysis was conducted through a coding frame informed by Krippendorff and Schreier.¹⁷ The principal categories included delegated authority, human limitation, nonhuman community, cosmic measure, corruption, distributive justice, differentiated capacity, participation, and restoration. Inductive categories—including managerial anthropocentrism, creaturely plurality, burden transfer, and institutional under-specification—were added during analysis. A comparative matrix recorded each textual unit, historical interpretation, contemporary use, anthropocentric implications, and climate-justice relevance.

Critical hermeneutics was used to distinguish three analytical levels: the meaning of Qur'anic passages within their literary contexts, their interpretation in the selected tafsir works, and their contemporary ecological reconstruction. Following Ricoeur, interpretation moved between textual explanation, historical distance, and contemporary appropriation.¹⁸ This procedure prevented modern environmental concepts from being projected uncritically onto premodern texts.

The final stage brought the findings into reciprocal dialogue with multidimensional climate-justice theory. Schlosberg's concepts of distribution, recognition, participation, and capabilities, Caney's account of differentiated responsibility, and Gardiner's intergenerational ethics were used to evaluate the corpus. The analysis generated five interconnected dimensions: limited authority, creaturely recognition, differentiated responsibility, participatory governance, and restorative transformation. Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, negative-case analysis, transparent coding, and the separation of textual evidence from contemporary normative inference. As the study used publicly available documents and involved no human participants, formal ethical approval was not required.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Stewardship as Delegated Authority: The Interpretive Ambivalence of *Khalīfah*

¹⁷ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Sage Publications, 2018); Margrit Schreier, *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice* (Sage, 2012).

¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

The most fundamental finding of this study is that *khalīfah* does not constitute an autonomous Qur'anic doctrine of environmental stewardship; rather, its ecological meaning is a modern interpretive construction that converts a broader discourse of succession, authority, testing, and accountability into an ethic of environmental care. This reconstruction is normatively productive because it challenges absolute human ownership of the earth. It is nevertheless interpretively ambivalent because the same language of stewardship may preserve the human being as the privileged manager of nonhuman creation. The central issue is therefore not whether *khalīfah* can support environmental responsibility, but which conception of authority is produced when the term is translated into stewardship.

The principal textual basis is Q. 2:30, in which God announces to the angels, "I am placing a *khalīfah* on the earth." Contemporary environmental writings regularly interpret this statement as the appointment of humanity to protect and maintain the earth as a divine trust. Bakar, for example, understands *khalīfah* as delegated authority: human beings do not own the earth independently but exercise responsibility under divine sovereignty.¹⁹ Kurbiyanto similarly associate the human role with care, restraint, and the duty to safeguard environmental conditions rather than exploit them without limit.²⁰ These interpretations correctly identify an important ethical implication of the verse, namely that human power cannot be treated as self-originating or unconditional. Yet neither environmental preservation nor ecological balance is explicitly identified as the immediate subject of Q. 2:30.

The narrative context is considerably more complex. The angelic response associates the anticipated human presence with *fasād* and bloodshed, while the following verses emphasize Adam's reception of knowledge. Human distinction is thus narrated together with the danger of violence and corruption. Authority and knowledge do not establish moral innocence; they create the conditions under which both responsible action and destructive power become possible. A hermeneutically adequate environmental interpretation must retain this tension. Reading only divine appointment while marginalizing the angelic warning produces an affirmative anthropology that the passage itself does not sustain.

The classical exegetical evidence confirms that *khalīfah* was not assigned a single ecological meaning. Al-Ṭabarī records interpretations centred on succession, according to which Adam and his descendants replace one another upon the earth, while also relating the concept to the implementation of divine judgment and social order.²¹ Al-Qurṭubī develops the political and juridical implications of the verse, particularly the necessity, legitimacy, and responsibilities of governing authority.²² Al-Rāzī examines the identity of the *khalīfah*, the meaning of human knowledge, the angels' anticipation of corruption, and the relationship between human agency and divine wisdom.²³ Ibn 'Ashūr links succession to civilization, social organization, moral responsibility, and the human capacity to cultivate earthly life. These interpretations furnish semantic resources from which an ecological ethic may be developed, but they do not demonstrate that environmental guardianship was the historically transparent or dominant meaning of the term.

¹⁹ Bakar et al., "Environmental Ethics in the Qur'an: A Thematic Analysis of Conservation and Stewardship."

²⁰ Kurbiyanto et al., "Environmental Ethics in Islamic Teachings: Discussing Ethical Principles in Islamic Teachings That Emphasize Environmental Protection and Preservation."

²¹ Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy Al-Qur'ān* (Dār Hajr, 2001).

²² Muḥammad Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an* (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2006).

²³ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981).

Other Qur'anic occurrences reinforce this conclusion. Q. 6:165 describes human beings as successors on earth whose unequal endowments constitute a test. Q. 10:14 similarly states that later communities are made successors so that their conduct may be observed. In Q. 38:26, David's appointment as *khalīfah* is immediately qualified by the command to judge justly and resist personal desire. The pattern connecting these passages is not ecological management as such, but the moral regulation of asymmetrical power. Succession grants neither ontological possession nor immunity from judgment. It places the bearer of authority under heightened scrutiny.

This pattern permits an environmental inference, but the inferential character of that move must be acknowledged. Because earthly power is delegated and judged, it cannot legitimately be exercised through unrestricted extraction or ecological destruction. Q. 35:39 warns that succession does not protect its bearers from the consequences of wrongdoing, while Q. 7:129 portrays succession as a trial whose ethical outcome remains open. The environmental relevance of *khalīfah* therefore lies less in the image of a divinely appointed conservationist than in a theology of constrained authority. Human power is conditional, derivative, and answerable for its effects.

Critical hermeneutics clarifies why this distinction matters. Modern ecological readings do not simply recover a fixed environmental meaning embedded within the word *khalīfah*. They coordinate Q. 2:30 with *amānah*, divine ownership, prohibitions of *fasād*, and contemporary knowledge of ecological crisis. Amin uses thematic and integrative hermeneutics to contextualize Qur'anic environmental concepts for contemporary sustainability,²⁴ while Sya'roni similarly stresses the need to translate inherited teachings into responses to present ecological conditions.²⁵ Such approaches appropriately recognize that interpretation occurs through a dialogue between text and historical circumstance. Their limitation emerges when contextual reconstruction is described as the extraction of a complete environmental programme already present in the text. Critical hermeneutics instead requires interpreters to disclose the conceptual work by which succession becomes stewardship and to justify that construction against competing readings.

The resulting stewardship discourse contains a persistent anthropocentric ambiguity. If humans are described as the earth's appointed managers, nonhuman beings may remain objects of administration even when their exploitation is prohibited. Humanity continues to protect, allocate, speak for, and determine the legitimate use of nature. Environmental care then moderates human domination without dismantling its hierarchical structure. This may be termed managerial anthropocentrism: nature is no longer merely a commodity, but its value and protection remain dependent upon human governance.

Bakar and Kurbiyanto seek to avoid unchecked anthropocentrism by emphasizing that human authority is conditional upon divine guidance.²⁶

²⁴ Z Amin, "Women's Testimony in Criminal Law (Ḥudūd and Qiṣās): Classical Islamic Frameworks, Contemporary Applications, and Normative Tensions," *Muslim World* 115, no. 4 (2025): 358–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.70021>.

²⁵ M Sya'roni et al., "Ecotheological Insights from Prophetic Hadiths: Reframing Islamic Environmental Ethics Based on SDGs," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 106, no. 5 (2025): 1–14, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-105027985478&partnerID=40&md5=e772c5df856f093e2a8d42b61a90e474>.

²⁶ Bakar et al., "Environmental Ethics in the Qur'an: A Thematic Analysis of Conservation and Stewardship"; Kurbiyanto et al., "Environmental Ethics in Islamic Teachings: Discussing Ethical Principles in Islamic Teachings That Emphasize Environmental Protection and Preservation."

Mohamed goes further by situating Islamic environmental ethics within a theocentric worldview in which animals and other creatures possess value that cannot be reduced to human utility.²⁷ This theocentric correction is important, but divine ownership alone does not automatically decentre human management. A discourse may affirm that all creation belongs to God while still assigning humans exclusive authority to determine how other beings are used. The decisive analytical question is therefore whether accountability merely restrains the human manager or fundamentally repositions humanity within a wider community of creation.

The ambiguity is also evident in the *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change*. The declaration condemns fossil-fuel dependency, excessive consumption, ecological disruption, and economic systems that intensify climatic harm. It calls upon political leaders, corporations, financial institutions, religious authorities, and ordinary Muslims to restore the balance that human conduct has disturbed (Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences.²⁸ This is a significant transformation of stewardship from individual piety into public ethical criticism. Yet the declaration retains humanity as both the source of planetary disorder and the principal agent authorized to repair it. The earth remains something entrusted to human management, even as that management is subjected to moral constraints.

The primary evidence supports a distinction among three constructions of *khalīfah*. Sovereignist stewardship converts human distinction into a mandate of control and renders ecological systems subordinate to human purposes. Custodial stewardship rejects absolute ownership and restricts human action through divine law, accountability, and the obligation to preserve created order. Decentred trusteeship treats humans as participants within creation whose disproportionate capacity to produce harm generates heavier duties without conferring greater intrinsic worth. The first model legitimizes domination and is incompatible with climate justice. The second provides meaningful restraints but can remain paternalistic. The third offers the most defensible reconstruction because it derives responsibility from capacity and vulnerability rather than from metaphysical supremacy.

Q. 33:72 strengthens this reconstruction. The verse states that the *amānah* was offered to the heavens, earth, and mountains, which declined to bear it, whereas the human being accepted it and is then described as unjust and ignorant. Modern environmental discourse frequently combines this verse with Q. 2:30 to present humanity as an honoured trustee. The classical commentaries, however, foreground obligation, obedience, accountability, and the danger of failure rather than environmental management specifically.²⁹ The verse is therefore not an uncomplicated celebration of human election. Bearing the trust exposes humanity to judgment and reveals its capacity for self-deception. *Amānah* limits human exceptionalism because it converts privilege into liability.

This finding refines stewardship theory by relocating its normative basis. Human responsibility should not be derived from an asserted right to govern nature but from asymmetrical causal capacity. Contemporary human institutions possess technological, political, military, and economic powers capable of

²⁷ N Y Mohamed, "Towards a Contemporary Islamic Environmental Ethics: The Nature and Moral Status of Animals," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 9, no. 1–2 (2025): 135–68, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-20250009>.

²⁸ Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, "Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change" (IFEES, 2015).

²⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy Al-Qur'ān*; Al-Qurtubī, *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an*.

transforming climatic systems on a planetary scale. Such capacity generates intensified obligations because its exercise affects communities that neither authorize nor benefit equally from environmental risk. In climate-justice terms, greater capability and greater contribution to harm justify stronger duties of prevention and repair. The Qur'anic reconstruction adds that capability never becomes an independent entitlement: the more consequential the power, the more exacting the accountability.

Methodologically, this result challenges thematic interpretations that assemble environmentally favourable verses while excluding semantic and exegetical counterevidence. Q. 2:30 cannot credibly function as an ecological foundation if its references to corruption, violence, political authority, and moral testing are suppressed. Future-oriented Islamicate studies should therefore examine not only which environmental values are attributed to Islamic texts, but how those attributions redistribute authority among scholars, states, environmental institutions, Muslim publics, and nonhuman creation. The future of *khalīfah* as an ecological concept depends on its reconstruction as limited, burden-bearing, and answerable agency not as benevolent human mastery over a world presumed incapable of moral claims of its own.

Creaturely Plurality, *Mīzān*, and the Decentring of Human Moral Authority

The central theoretical tension emerging from the second finding concerns whether Qur'anic environmental ethics merely restrains human domination or more fundamentally decentres human moral authority by recognizing nonhuman beings as meaningful participants in a divinely ordered creation. Stewardship-oriented scholarship commonly preserves a hierarchical model in which God authorizes humanity to manage the earth responsibly. By contrast, the textual pattern identified in this study indicates that the strongest limitation on anthropocentrism arises outside the concept of *khalīfah*, particularly in passages depicting animals as communities, nonhuman beings as participants in divine glorification, and *mīzān* as an order that human beings neither create nor exclusively administer. These passages do not eliminate human responsibility, but they challenge the assumption that environmental value originates in human judgment or that humanity possesses exclusive authority to represent the interests of creation.

Q. 6:38 provides the clearest basis for this creaturely decentring: "There is no creature moving on the earth, nor any bird flying with its wings, but they are communities like you." The expression *umam amthālukum* establishes a relation of comparison between human and animal communities without erasing differences among species. Animals are not represented as undifferentiated resources awaiting human use; they possess patterned forms of collective existence within the divine order. The verse concludes by affirming that nothing has been neglected and that all creatures will be gathered to their Lord. Whatever theological questions surround the nature of that gathering, the passage refuses to confine creaturely significance to human economic, nutritional, or symbolic interests.

Classical exegesis preserves this plurality even though it does not formulate a modern theory of animal rights. Al-Ṭabarī interprets animal communities as differentiated classes of creatures comparable to human collectivities in their created condition and modes of life.³⁰ Al-Rāzī reflects on their

³⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 2001).

ordered characteristics, forms of association, inclusion within divine knowledge, and possible eschatological gathering.³¹ Ibn 'Āshūr emphasizes that animal species possess organized ways of life through which they fulfil the patterns assigned to them.³² The significance of this exegetical pattern lies not in an anachronistic attribution of contemporary ecological rights to classical commentators, but in its preservation of nonhuman life as ordered, collective, and theologically visible.

This finding supports a broader turn in environmental humanities toward creaturely plurality and nonhuman agency. Research in this area challenges the inherited assumption that consequential action belongs exclusively to intentional human subjects. Pearson shows that animals cannot be understood solely as passive objects within human histories, since their embodied actions, resistance, movement, and sociality shape the worlds they inhabit.³³ More recent work extends this insight by examining how organisms, coastlines, habitats, and ecological processes participate in producing historical and social outcomes rather than merely receiving human impacts.³⁴ Masamaka's analysis is particularly relevant because it treats nonhuman agency not as a universal abstraction detached from place, but as something represented through culturally and ecologically specific relationships. These approaches strengthen the article's interpretation of Q. 6:38 by clarifying that recognition of animal communities need not depend on attributing human consciousness or political intentionality to them.

The concept of nonhuman agency must nevertheless be employed carefully in Qur'anic interpretation. The Qur'an does not use "agency" in the conceptual vocabulary of actor-network theory, multispecies ethnography, or contemporary ecocriticism. Nor does describing animals as communities establish that all creatures possess identical capacities or moral responsibilities. The relevance of nonhuman-agency theory is analytical rather than lexical: it helps expose the limitation of interpretations in which humans appear as the only active subjects while nature functions as a passive field of management. Root-Bernstein, Masamaka and Pearson collectively illuminate how nonhuman beings can affect ecological and social relations without being assimilated into a human model of autonomous agency.³⁵

The Qur'anic decentring of humanity extends beyond animal communities. Q. 17:44 states that the heavens, the earth, and everything within them glorify God, although human beings do not comprehend their glorification. Q. 24:41 describes beings in the heavens and earth, including birds with wings outspread, as knowing their own prayer and praise. Q. 22:18 includes the sun, moon, stars, mountains, trees, animals, and many human beings within a shared field of prostration. Taken together, these passages construct a liturgical cosmos in which

³¹ al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb*.

³² Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa-Al-Tanwīr* (Al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-al-Nashr, 1984).

³³ George G Fenich, *Meetings, Expositions, Events, and Conventions: An Introduction to the Industry*, 4th ed. (Pearson Education, 2015).

³⁴ M Root-Bernstein and A G Short Gianotti, "Design with Nonhumans Takes Wildlife Agency into Account to Reduce Conflicts," *Conservation Biology*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.70358>; J Masamaka, "Revisiting Nonhuman Agency in African Ecocriticism: The Precarity of Coastal Life in the Poetry of Kofi Awoonor and Kofi Anyidoho," *Journal of the African Literature Association* 20, no. 1 (2026): 47–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21674736.2025.2609021>.

³⁵ Root-Bernstein and Short Gianotti, "Design with Nonhumans Takes Wildlife Agency into Account to Reduce Conflicts"; Masamaka, "Revisiting Nonhuman Agency in African Ecocriticism: The Precarity of Coastal Life in the Poetry of Kofi Awoonor and Kofi Anyidoho"; Fenich, *Meetings, Expositions, Events, and Conventions: An Introduction to the Industry*.

nonhuman existence has an orientation toward God that precedes and exceeds human interpretation. Creation is not religiously inert matter to which human beings subsequently assign value.

Tili's account of Qur'anic animals provides the most developed challenge to straightforward anthropocentric readings of this material. She argues that the Qur'anic cosmos is fundamentally theocentric: nonhuman beings possess religious significance because of their relationship to God, not merely because they support human welfare.³⁶ The present findings support this position but also refine it. Theocentrism should not be treated as an automatic solution to anthropocentrism. As Arafa suggests, locating ultimate value in divine rather than human sovereignty can ground responsibility and affirm the intrinsic significance of creation.³⁷ Yet a theology of divine ownership may still authorize humans to act as exclusive earthly interpreters of nonhuman interests. The crucial issue is therefore whether theocentrism genuinely limits human moral sovereignty or merely places religious language around a continuing managerial hierarchy.

The category of *mīzān* supplies a second axis for this debate. Q. 55:7–9 declares that God raised the heaven and established the balance, then commands human beings not to transgress that balance, to uphold measure with justice, and not to diminish it. Contemporary Islamic environmental discourse frequently interprets *mīzān* as ecological equilibrium and connects it with humanity's responsibility to protect biodiversity and preserve the divinely established order.³⁸ This interpretation has become institutionally influential, most visibly in *Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth*, which mobilizes Islamic ethical language for international faith-based environmental action.³⁹ The document demonstrates how an exegetical concept can migrate into transnational environmental governance and public religious advocacy.

The study nevertheless finds that translating *mīzān* simply as “ecological balance” is conceptually insufficient. Classical commentators associate the passage not only with cosmic order but also with justice, accurate measurement, and the prohibition of fraudulent or deficient weighing. Al-Ṭabarī connects *mīzān* to justice and correct measure; al-Rāzī situates it within the divinely ordered conditions that prevent disorder; and Ibn 'Āshūr links cosmic proportion to the regulation of equitable human relations.⁴⁰ The concept therefore joins cosmology to ethics rather than describing a scientifically fixed equilibrium within ecosystems.

This qualification matters because contemporary ecology does not generally conceive nature as a permanently stable system that can be restored to one timeless condition. Ecosystems are dynamic, adaptive, and historically changing. Treating *mīzān* as static harmony risks turning an ethical concept into an

³⁶ Tili, *Animals in the Qur'an*.

³⁷ B Arafah, M Hasyim, and H Abbas, “Netizens as Readers, Producers, and Publishers: Communication Ethics and Challenges in Social Media,” *International Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications* 16, no. 4 (2025): 197–208, <https://doi.org/10.14569/IJACSA.2025.0160421>.

³⁸ İ Özdemir, “The Making and Message of Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Islam and Environmental Law*, 2026, 214–26, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009332118.020>; M A Arafa, “Environmental Stewardship in Islamic Law: Principles, Institutions, and Ecological Governance in the Muslim World,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Islam and Environmental Law*, 2026, 37–47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009332118.007>.

³⁹ Özdemir, “The Making and Message of Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth”; United Nations Environment Programme, “Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth” (UNEP, 2024).

⁴⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy Al-Qur'ān*; al-Rāzī, *Mafātih Al-Ghayb*; Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, *Al-Tahrir Wa Al-Tanwir* (Al-Dar al-Tunisiyyah li al-Nashr, 1984).

imprecise scientific assertion. It may also obscure conflict by suggesting that environmental politics consists only of restoring a naturally harmonious order. A more defensible reconstruction understands *mīzān* as a normative prohibition against transgression, distorted measurement, and the destabilization of conditions upon which multiple communities of life depend.

Interpreted in this way, *mīzān* acquires critical rather than merely harmonizing force. It directs attention to who determines acceptable measures of environmental damage, whose losses are included in policy calculations, and which forms of life are rendered invisible by economic accounting. Carbon budgets, pollution thresholds, biodiversity metrics, land valuation, and environmental-impact assessments are not ethically neutral measurements. They distribute permission to harm and determine which damages count as governable costs. *Mīzān* therefore connects ecological integrity to the politics of measurement and makes justice integral to environmental order.

This interpretation also clarifies the distinction between environmental justice and ecological justice. Environmental-justice frameworks initially developed around the unequal distribution of environmental burdens among human populations. Ecological justice extends moral concern to species, ecosystems, and nonhuman entities whose continued existence may be threatened even where immediate human welfare appears protected. Sulistyawan similarly challenge human-exclusive legal models by using actor-network theory to reconsider how environmental justice is constituted through relations among human and nonhuman actors.⁴¹ The present study contributes a Qur'anic basis for this extension: nonhuman communities are not included merely because their destruction eventually harms humans, but because they possess creaturely and religious significance within an order not reducible to human interests.

The category of *fasād* strengthens this structural reading. Q. 30:41 attributes corruption on land and sea to what human hands have earned, establishing a relationship between accumulated conduct and disturbances affecting terrestrial and marine domains. The verse should not be represented as a prediction of anthropogenic climate change. Its relevance lies in its ethical structure: collective practices generate material consequences, those consequences return to social life, and correction requires transformed conduct. Q. 2:205 further associates *fasād* with the destruction of crops and offspring, while Q. 26:151-152 links it to extravagant actors who spread corruption rather than reform. Environmental harm is therefore not confined to individual moral failure; it may be organized through authority, economic practice, and socially legitimized forms of destruction.

The same structural expansion applies to *isrāf*. Q. 7:31 prohibits excess in consumption, while Q. 6:141 relates excess to agricultural production and harvest. Individual moderation remains ethically relevant, but climate-intensive consumption is organized through infrastructures, energy systems, corporate production, advertising, and unequal political power. An environmental ethic confined to personal restraint risks moralizing consumers while leaving the institutional organization of excess untouched. Creaturely plurality and *mīzān* instead require scrutiny of the systems that appropriate ecological space and diminish the conditions necessary for other communities to flourish.

⁴¹ A Y Sulistyawan, N H Djohan, and R Z Amelia Marchanty, "Rethinking Environmental Justice in Indonesia through Actor-Network Theory in an Examination of Constructivism Paradigm," in *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, vol. 1537, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/1537/1/012050>.

The findings thus extend Schlosberg's multidimensional account of environmental justice. Recognition cannot concern only marginalized human identities; it must also address the systematic moral invisibility of nonhuman communities. Capabilities cannot refer solely to human opportunities; they must include the ecological conditions through which species and habitats maintain characteristic forms of life.⁴² This extension remains reconstructive rather than literal. The Qur'an does not prescribe legal personhood for rivers, institutional representatives for species, or biodiversity targets. Such mechanisms belong to contemporary governance. Qur'anic ethics supplies normative constraints and an alternative moral imagination, not a ready-made regulatory system.

For future-oriented Islamicate scholarship, the decisive contribution is the replacement of human stewardship as the organizing centre of environmental ethics with accountable human participation within creaturely plurality. Human beings retain distinctive causal and institutional capacities, but they do not possess a monopoly on value, agency, or religious significance. Read through *mīzān*, their authority is measured by their capacity to limit transgression and sustain the conditions of multispecies existence. This theoretical shift strengthens the article's originality by demonstrating that Qur'anic environmental ethics becomes critically transformative only when human responsibility is separated from human moral sovereignty.

From General Responsibility to Differentiated Climate Justice

The combined use of critical hermeneutics, qualitative document analysis, and multidimensional climate-justice theory reveals a problem that generalized accounts of Islamic environmental responsibility rarely capture: Qur'anic moral universalism does not require identical obligations and may instead demand differentiation according to contribution to harm, capacity to respond, vulnerability to consequences, and exclusion from decision-making. A thematic reading limited to concepts such as *khalīfah*, *amānah*, and moderation can establish that environmental conduct is morally accountable, but it cannot by itself determine how climate burdens should be distributed among actors situated in radically unequal historical and institutional positions. By placing Qur'anic ethical texts in critical comparison with scientific assessments, Muslim climate declarations, and international climate law, the method transforms "responsibility for the earth" from an abstract collective duty into a framework for evaluating who owes what, to whom, and under which conditions.

Qualitative document analysis is crucial to this finding because the relevant normative problem is dispersed across different textual regimes. The Qur'anic corpus articulates justice, capacity, accountability, vulnerability, consultation, and the prohibition of burden transfer, but it does not provide a technical system for carbon accounting. International climate law formulates differentiated responsibilities, adaptation, finance, and loss and damage, but does not settle the ethical disputes underlying their implementation. The IPCC supplies scientific evidence concerning causation, exposure, and vulnerability, while contemporary Muslim environmental declarations translate Islamic ethical language into public climate advocacy. Reading these materials relationally prevents any one source from being treated as normatively complete.

The empirical context established by the IPCC demonstrates why this methodological movement is necessary. Human activities have unequivocally

⁴² Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature*.

caused global warming, yet both responsibility for emissions and vulnerability to climatic disruption vary substantially across and within societies. The IPCC estimates that approximately 3.3–3.6 billion people live in contexts highly vulnerable to climate change and emphasizes that vulnerability is intensified by inequity, marginalization, weak governance, colonial histories, and constrained access to resources.⁴³ Climate change may therefore be anthropogenic without “humanity” constituting a homogeneous causal subject. The category includes subsistence communities, fossil-fuel corporations, affluent consumers, historically industrialized states, and populations whose material contribution to global warming remains negligible.

Critical hermeneutics exposes the ethical inadequacy of language that attributes ecological failure indiscriminately to humankind. The statement that “humans have failed as stewards” appears universal and morally inclusive, but it may obscure the institutional concentration of causal power. It can place those who accumulated wealth through carbon-intensive development in the same moral category as communities facing severe climatic losses despite contributing little to historical emissions. Scholarship on differentiated responsibility has accordingly connected climate obligations to past contributions and present capabilities rather than to formal equality among states.⁴⁴ This principle does not deny shared involvement in climate action. It rejects the proposition that shared humanity entails equal responsibility for producing or repairing harm.

International climate law already reflects this distinction. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change establishes equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, while the Paris Agreement retains differentiation “in the light of different national circumstances”.⁴⁵ Article 2.2 links implementation to equity; Articles 7, 8, and 9 address adaptation, loss and damage, and financial support. Ferreira demonstrates the continuing relevance of differentiated responsibility to legal reasoning concerning state climate obligations,⁴⁶ while Will emphasizes its relationship to historical emissions and unequal capabilities.⁴⁷ Wallimann-Helmer clarifies that the distribution of climate burdens and the differentiation of responsible agents are connected but analytically distinct questions.⁴⁸ The present study extends these debates by showing that Qur’anic ethics can support differentiation without projecting modern treaty language directly into the scripture.

The Qur’anic material contributes first through an impartiality principle. Q. 4:135 commands the maintenance of justice even where judgment operates against oneself, one’s relatives, or one’s immediate group interests, and warns that neither wealth nor poverty should distort adjudication. Q. 5:8 similarly prohibits

⁴³ Change, “Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report.”

⁴⁴ I Wallimann-Helmer, “Justice in Managing Global Climate Change,” in *Managing Global Warming: An Interface of Technology and Human Issues*, 2018, 751–68, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-814104-5.00026-0>; U Will and C Manger-Nestler, “Fairness, Equity, and Justice in the Paris Agreement: Terms and Operationalization of Differentiation,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 34, no. 2 (2021): 397–420, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0922156521000078>; P G Ferreira, “Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities,” in *The Cambridge Handbook on Climate Litigation*, 2025, 320–43, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009409155.017>.

⁴⁵ Will and Manger-Nestler, “Fairness, Equity, and Justice in the Paris Agreement: Terms and Operationalization of Differentiation.”

⁴⁶ Ferreira, “Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities.”

⁴⁷ Will and Manger-Nestler, “Fairness, Equity, and Justice in the Paris Agreement: Terms and Operationalization of Differentiation.”

⁴⁸ Wallimann-Helmer, “Justice in Managing Global Climate Change.”

hostility from becoming a justification for injustice. Applied through critical reconstruction, these passages challenge the assumption that national, corporate, or communal interest may determine a fair climate contribution. They do not yield a numerical emissions formula, but they establish that ethical judgment must withstand pressures generated by wealth, loyalty, enmity, and institutional self-protection.

A second contribution concerns the institutional character of justice. Q. 16:90 combines justice and beneficence with the prohibition of wrongdoing and oppression, while Q. 57:25 associates revelation and prophetic missions with the establishment of justice among people. These passages prevent climate ethics from being reduced to personal virtue. Responsibility requires institutions capable of constraining harmful actors, redistributing adaptive capacity, and providing remedies for affected populations. Preston similarly argues that climate justice must be assessed through distributive, procedural, and recognitional dimensions of law rather than through environmental regulation alone.⁴⁹ The Qur'anic command to uphold justice consequently becomes relevant not because it supplies a climate institution, but because it provides a criterion by which institutions may be assessed.

The comparative analysis permits these findings to be organized into four principles of differentiated trusteeship. The first is contribution: actors that have produced more harm bear stronger obligations to prevent further damage and support repair. Q. 30:41 associates corruption on land and sea with what human hands have earned, while Q. 42:30 connects some experienced harms to accumulated conduct. These passages cannot function as direct legal rules for historical-emissions accounting, but they reject the moral separation of action from consequence. Contemporary scholarship likewise treats historical emissions as central to allocating responsibility and to claims for climate compensation.⁵⁰

The second is capacity. Q. 2:286 states that no soul is burdened beyond its capacity, while Q. 65:7 differentiates material obligations according to available means. Interpreted in climate governance, capacity does not provide wealthy actors with an excuse to delay action. It generates stronger duties for actors possessing greater technological, financial, and administrative resources. Differentiated responsibility therefore combines contribution and capability: high emitters owe more because of the harms they have produced, while high-capacity actors owe more because they are better positioned to mitigate, finance adaptation, transfer technology, and support recovery.

The third principle is vulnerability-sensitive priority. Qur'anic concern for poor persons, displaced people, debtors, travellers, orphans, and those lacking effective protection establishes a recurring ethical orientation toward actors with restricted bargaining power. These historical categories cannot be equated mechanically with contemporary climate-vulnerable populations. They nevertheless support an interpretive presumption against abandoning those exposed to harms they possess limited capacity to prevent. Venn connects climate

⁴⁹ B J Preston, "The Adequacy of the Law in Achieving Climate Change Justice – Some Preliminary Comments," *Journal of Energy and Natural Resources Law* 34, no. 1 (2016): 45–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02646811.2016.1120117>.

⁵⁰ Ferreira, "Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities"; Will and Manger-Nestler, "Fairness, Equity, and Justice in the Paris Agreement: Terms and Operationalization of Differentiation"; R J Haar and B S Levy, "Promoting Climate Justice," in *Climate Change and Public Health: Second Edition*, 2024, 422–37, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197683293.003.0020>.

vulnerability to social injustice, rights, procedure, and intergenerational equity,⁵¹ while Correia and Osborne emphasize that transformative climate justice must consider political ecology, power, land, and the historical constitution of vulnerability.⁵² Haar similarly links the disproportionate risks borne by low-contributing communities to the demand for support and compensation.⁵³

This principle sharpens distributive reasoning. Climate resources may be allocated through equality, need, entitlement, responsibility, or combinations of these standards. Preston identifies distributive justice as one of the central criteria by which climate law should be evaluated,⁵⁴ while Correia and Osborne caution that conventional distributive remedies can remain inadequate when they ignore dispossession and political structures.⁵⁵ Bulut distinguish equality, need, merit, and entitlement as competing distributive principles.⁵⁶ Applied to climate governance, equal distribution may appear formally fair yet remain substantively unjust where communities possess radically unequal levels of exposure and adaptive capacity.

Q. 59:7 offers a further anti-concentration principle by explaining that public wealth should not circulate only among the rich. The verse concerns a specific historical form of property and cannot be transformed directly into a climate-finance rule. Its normative direction is nevertheless significant. A low-carbon transition that concentrates subsidies, technology, land access, and investment returns among already affluent actors while transferring displacement and energy costs to poorer communities would reproduce the concentration of benefit the verse criticizes. The hermeneutical method enables the verse to inform contemporary analysis without claiming that it explicitly regulates green finance.

The fourth principle is non-transfer. Q. 6:164 states that no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another. Within climate ethics, this cannot mean that collective institutions have no remedial obligations for harms produced through complex social systems. Rather, it prohibits powerful actors from externalizing their ecological debts onto low-contributing populations and future generations. The principle is especially important where corporations privatize carbon-intensive benefits while socializing adaptation costs, or where current governments postpone mitigation while passing long-term risks beyond existing electoral and fiscal horizons.

Intergenerational-justice theory clarifies this temporal dimension. Gardiner identifies climate change as a moral storm partly because present generations can benefit from activities whose most severe consequences will be experienced by persons unable to participate in current decisions.⁵⁷ Pottier likewise situate climate change at the intersection of international,

⁵¹ A Venn, "Social Justice and Climate Change," in *Managing Global Warming: An Interface of Technology and Human Issues*, 2018, 711–28, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-814104-5.00024-7>.

⁵² J E Correia, "Land Matters: How Indigenous Land Restitution Can Inform Loss and Damage Policy and Chart a Path toward an Otherwise Climate Justice," *Climate and Development* 16, no. 9 (2024): 811–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2024.2378027>.

⁵³ Haar and Levy, "Promoting Climate Justice."

⁵⁴ Preston, "The Adequacy of the Law in Achieving Climate Change Justice – Some Preliminary Comments."

⁵⁵ Correia, "Land Matters: How Indigenous Land Restitution Can Inform Loss and Damage Policy and Chart a Path toward an Otherwise Climate Justice."

⁵⁶ M Bulut and A Dembele, "Wealth for Welfare: The Role of Islamic Social Finance Institutions in Sustainable Human Economic Development," *Intellectual Discourse* 34, no. 1 Special issue (2026): 129–54, <https://doi.org/10.31436/id.v34i1.2501>.

⁵⁷ Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*.

intragenerational, and intergenerational justice.⁵⁸ Cisco conceptualizes climate justice as an intertemporal relationship among generations,⁵⁹ while Bessant extend the debate by integrating temporality, intersectionality, and recognition into policy analysis.⁶⁰ These approaches illuminate the contemporary relevance of Q. 36:12, which refers to the recording of what people send forward and the traces they leave behind. The verse is not a climate-policy provision, but it supports an account of responsibility in which delayed and enduring effects remain morally attributable to present conduct.

The document-comparative method also reveals the importance of procedural differentiation. Q. 42:38 identifies consultation as a characteristic of communal affairs. When interpreted alongside climate-justice theory, consultation requires more than allowing affected populations to attend meetings. It entails access to information, institutional capacity to influence decisions, protection against coercion, and recognition of forms of knowledge excluded by technocratic governance. Venn identifies procedural justice as indispensable to the protection of climate-vulnerable groups.⁶¹ Correia and Osborne further show that transformative justice requires engagement with communities as political agents rather than treating them merely as recipients of compensation.⁶²

The comparison between the *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change* and the Paris Agreement illustrates both the strength and limitation of the method. The Islamic declaration criticizes fossil-fuel dependence, unlimited economic growth, excessive consumption, and the failure of wealthy and oil-producing states to protect vulnerable communities.⁶³ It thus moves beyond generic stewardship toward differentiated moral criticism. Yet it remains largely hortatory and does not systematically allocate obligations among states, corporations, economic sectors, and social classes. The Paris Agreement provides more developed institutional categories but leaves the ambition and implementation of nationally determined contributions politically contested. The first supplies forceful moral language without a complete mechanism of accountability; the second supplies procedures without conclusively resolving historical responsibility and fair burden allocation.

This reciprocal comparison constitutes the approach's main strength. Qur'anic ethics is not used merely to provide religious authorization for existing climate policy. It evaluates whether institutions prevent wealth concentration, burden shifting, exclusion, and avoidable harm. Climate-justice theory, in turn, forces Islamic environmental ethics to move beyond undifferentiated exhortation by specifying responsible agents, affected subjects, causal relations, and institutional remedies. Its principal limitation is that the framework remains normative and interpretive. It cannot independently determine appropriate carbon budgets, calculate compensation, or demonstrate how Muslim institutions

⁵⁸ A Pottier et al., "A Survey of Global Climate Justice: From Negotiation Stances to Moral Stakes and Back," *International Review of Environmental and Resource Economics* 11, no. 1 (2017): 1–53, <https://doi.org/10.1561/101.00000090>.

⁵⁹ G Cisco and A Gatto, "Climate Justice in an Intergenerational Sustainability Framework: A Stochastic OLG Model," *Economies* 9, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3390/economies9020047>.

⁶⁰ J Bessant, A Prost, and R Watts, "Intergenerational Climate Justice: Applying Theory to Policy in the Anthropocene," *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-025-00191-0>.

⁶¹ Venn, "Social Justice and Climate Change."

⁶² Correia, "Land Matters: How Indigenous Land Restitution Can Inform Loss and Damage Policy and Chart a Path toward an Otherwise Climate Justice."

⁶³ Sciences, "Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change."

implement differentiated trusteeship in practice. Those questions require empirical, legal, and quantitative research.

The resulting contribution is a model of differentiated trusteeship. Ecological responsibility is shared, but obligations are not equal. High-contributing and high-capacity actors bear stronger duties of rapid mitigation, climate finance, technology transfer, repair, and institutional reform. Low-contributing and highly vulnerable populations possess stronger claims to protection, participation, adaptation support, and compensation. This model refines generalized Islamic stewardship by distinguishing common moral belonging from unequal causal responsibility, while extending climate-justice theory through a Qur'anic conception of power as entrusted capacity and intensified answerability. For future-oriented Islamic and Islamicate studies, the method demonstrates that religious ethical reasoning becomes publicly consequential not when it merely declares universal responsibility, but when it differentiates obligations and subjects institutions of power to historically informed standards of justice.

Toward a Critical Islamicate Climate-Justice Framework

The principal theoretical implication of this study is that Qur'anic environmental ethics becomes analytically and institutionally consequential only when it is reconstructed as a multidimensional framework of constrained authority, creaturely recognition, differentiated responsibility, participatory governance, and restorative transformation. This reconstruction moves beyond the conventional presentation of Islamic environmental ethics as a collection of moral injunctions concerning stewardship, moderation, balance, and care. It treats those concepts instead as components of a contested ethical vocabulary whose public significance depends on interpretation, institutional translation, and enforceable structures of accountability. The resulting framework contributes to international debates by connecting Qur'anic ethics with climate-justice theory while retaining critical attention to governance, religious authority, political economy, and the institutional production of Islamic environmental knowledge.

The designation Islamicate climate justice is essential to this theoretical move. "Islamic" identifies the framework's engagement with Qur'anic concepts, exegetical traditions, moral theology, legal reasoning, and the objectives of the *Sharī'ah*. "Islamicate," however, indicates that climate ethics is not generated by scripture or jurisprudence in isolation. It emerges through interactions among religious scholars, universities, state agencies, international organizations, environmental movements, financial institutions, educational systems, digital media, and Muslim publics. Hussein, Arafa, and Turnbull associate Islamic approaches to climate justice with stewardship, justice, ecological balance, and protection of vulnerable populations. Yet the present study extends that orientation by arguing that religiously grounded climate ethics must also examine who authorizes such concepts, how they enter policy, and whether their institutional use redistributes environmental power or merely supplies Islamic legitimacy for existing development programmes.

This distinction matters because culturally resonant environmental language can facilitate public engagement without necessarily producing justice. Turnbull and Amin emphasize that Islamic ethical idioms may be particularly

influential where religious norms shape governance and public life.⁶⁴ Such resonance can support environmental education, community mobilization, and policy acceptance. It can also enable governments, corporations, and religious authorities to frame contested projects as expressions of stewardship or public interest. A critical Islamicate framework therefore evaluates not only the theological coherence of environmental claims but also their effects within institutions. The question is no longer simply whether a policy cites *khalifah*, *mīzān*, or *maṣlahah*, but whether it limits concentrated power, protects vulnerable communities, recognizes ecological damage, and establishes mechanisms through which responsible actors can be held answerable.

The synthesis developed in this article consists of five interdependent dimensions. The first is limited authority. Human capacity to intervene in ecological systems cannot be treated as sovereign ownership. Read through Q. 2:30, Q. 6:165, Q. 33:72, and Q. 38:26, *khalifah* signifies authority exposed to testing, judgment, and the possibility of corruption. This interpretation has direct implications for governance: states, corporations, investors, and individuals cannot claim unrestricted rights over land, forests, water, minerals, energy systems, or atmospheric space. Their authority is legitimate only insofar as it remains bounded by ecological limits, procedural accountability, and responsibility for foreseeable harms. This dimension revises stewardship by making limitation, rather than managerial privilege, its foundational principle.

The second dimension is creaturely recognition. Q. 6:38, Q. 17:44, Q. 22:18, Q. 24:41, and Q. 55:7–9 present nonhuman beings as communities, participants in divine glorification, and inhabitants of an ordered world whose value does not originate in human preference. Climate governance should therefore assess more than economic loss, infrastructure damage, or human mortality. It must also consider biodiversity decline, habitat fragmentation, species displacement, ecological thresholds, and the destruction of conditions necessary for nonhuman communities to persist. This dimension challenges policy models that preserve aggregate economic growth while accepting irreversible ecological loss as an external cost.

The third dimension is differentiated responsibility. Qur'anic commands concerning justice, impartiality, anti-concentration, and differentiated capacity particularly Q. 4:135, Q. 5:8, Q. 16:90, Q. 59:7, and Q. 65:7 support an allocation of responsibility according to contribution, benefit, capability, and vulnerability. Common responsibility does not entail equal obligation. High-emitting states, carbon-intensive corporations, wealthy consumers, and institutions that have benefited from extractive development bear stronger duties of mitigation, finance, technological support, and repair. This dimension connects Qur'anic ethical reasoning with the international principle of common but differentiated responsibilities while subjecting existing climate arrangements to more exacting scrutiny.

The fourth dimension is participatory and recognitional governance. Q. 42:38 places consultation within the normative organization of public affairs, while broader Qur'anic concern for marginalized groups challenges decision-making monopolized by political, technocratic, or economic elites. Participation must

⁶⁴ E Turnbull, "What Islamic Contributions Have Been Made to Climate Change Action and How Useful Are They in Promoting Environmental Justice?," *Journal of Financial Crime* 28, no. 4 (2021): 1032–43, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFC-10-2020-0208>; Z Amin, "Sharī'ah and Climate Justice: Exploring Islamic Legal Foundations for Environmental Protection in Pakistan," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 22, no. 1 (2025): 53–79, <https://doi.org/10.1515/mwjhr-2025-0014>.

therefore exceed formal consultation after the principal terms of a project have already been fixed. Communities affected by conservation schemes, energy transitions, mining, displacement, adaptation projects, or carbon markets must be able to influence, condition, reshape, or reject interventions. Recognition further requires that local, Indigenous, gendered, livelihood-based, and religious forms of ecological knowledge are not dismissed merely because they do not conform to dominant technical categories.

The fifth dimension is restorative transformation. Qur'anic concepts of *tawbah*, *iṣlāḥ*, *ʿadl*, and the prohibition of *fasād* imply that acknowledging harm is ethically incomplete without cessation, repair, and altered conduct. Applied to climate governance, restoration cannot be reduced to charitable relief after disasters. It includes rapid emissions reduction, adaptation finance, environmental remediation, loss-and-damage support, livelihood reconstruction, and institutional reform. Achyar, Ahmad and Marwan similarly argue for ethical reconstruction beyond profit-driven and anthropocentric models.⁶⁵ The present framework strengthens that position by making restoration a test of whether institutions alter the structures that repeatedly generate ecological harm.

Table 1. These dimensions can be summarized as follows:

Analytical dimension	Primary Qur'anic basis	Climate-justice problem	Institutional implication
Limited authority	Q. 2:30; 6:165; 33:72; 38:26	Human domination and managerial anthropocentrism	Ecological limits, fiduciary duties, enforceable accountability
Creaturely recognition	Q. 6:38; 17:44; 22:18; 24:41; 55:7–9	Exclusion of nonhuman life from justice	Biodiversity safeguards, ecological representation, cumulative-impact assessment
Differentiated responsibility	Q. 4:135; 5:8; 16:90; 59:7; 65:7	Unequal contribution, benefit, capacity, and exposure	Progressive climate finance, stronger duties for high emitters, protection of vulnerable populations
Participatory governance	Q. 42:38; 49:13	Procedural exclusion and misrecognition	Meaningful consultation, community influence, inclusion of local knowledge
Restorative transformation	Q. 7:56; 11:88; 30:41; 42:40	Persistent harm and inadequate repair	Mitigation, adaptation, remediation, loss-and-damage support, structural reform

The framework differs from conventional stewardship models in three theoretical respects. First, it begins not with human appointment but with restrictions upon human authority. Second, it includes nonhuman communities

⁶⁵ D H Achyar, C Jongsureyapart, and M M Marzuki, “Advancing Climate Policy in Carbon Accounting to Control for Carbon Emissions: An Islamic Moral Economy Emphasis,” *Management and Accounting Review* 24, no. 3 (2025): 511–33, <https://doi.org/10.24191/MAR.V24i03-18>; N B Ahmad et al., “Charting the Future of Islamic Environmental Law in an Age of Planetary Crisis,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Islam and Environmental Law*, 2026, 323–32, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009332118.029>; S Marwan and K M Ali, “Islamic Finance Initiative for Climate Action,” in *Islamic Finance and Climate Action: Ethics, Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability*, 2025, 95–107, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003570936-12>.

within the field of justice rather than protecting them solely because their destruction harms people. Third, it shifts the principal unit of ethical analysis from personal conduct to institutions, infrastructures, and political-economic systems. Individual moderation remains relevant, but it cannot substitute for regulating high-impact systems of finance, energy, transport, extraction, agriculture, and land use.

The *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change* provides an instructive test of this distinction. Issued in 2015, the declaration criticizes fossil-fuel dependency, unlimited economic growth, excessive consumption, and the disruption of the created order, while calling on governments, corporations, scholars, religious institutions, and Muslim communities to pursue renewable energy and protect vulnerable populations.⁶⁶ Its major contribution is to move environmental ethics from private piety into transnational public advocacy. It recognizes that climate change is produced by systems of energy, finance, consumption, and political authority rather than by isolated individual failure.

Its limitation is institutional under-specification. The declaration does not provide sufficiently developed criteria for allocating responsibility among states, corporations, sectors, and social groups. Nor does it establish procedures through which vulnerable communities might hold powerful actors accountable. Its ethical vocabulary is forceful, but its governance architecture remains largely hortatory. Within the framework proposed here, the declaration therefore represents an important moral intervention that requires further differentiation, institutionalization, and procedural development.

Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth marks a further stage in the transnational institutionalization of Islamic environmental thought. Launched in 2024 through collaboration involving Islamic scholars, faith-based organizations, and the United Nations Environment Programme, it seeks to formulate Islamic principles of environmental protection in response to planetary ecological crisis. Its significance lies in widening environmental discourse beyond stewardship and foregrounding *mīzān* as a concept linking justice, measure, order, and responsibility. It also demonstrates that contemporary Islamic environmental knowledge is increasingly co-produced across religious, academic, civil-society, and international-governance institutions.

This collaboration raises questions of religious and epistemic authority. Which juridical, theological, regional, linguistic, and ecological traditions are represented in a transnational covenant? Which disagreements are documented, and which are absorbed into general formulations designed to secure consensus? General ethical language can create broad coalitions, but it may also suppress conflict over fossil-fuel dependence, extractive development, land rights, environmental racism, and the uneven costs of transition. Muslim environmental declarations should therefore be studied as sites where Islamic knowledge is selected, standardized, and authorized, not simply as definitive expressions of Islamic doctrine.

This concern is central to the intellectual orientation of *Islamicate Futures: Knowledge, Ethics, and Muslim Societies*. Future-oriented Islamicate inquiry must examine how religious concepts acquire public authority across changing institutional environments. Climate discourse now circulates through sermons, fatwas, university curricula, environmental organizations, policy documents,

⁶⁶ Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change, “Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change” (Istanbul: International Islamic Climate Change Symposium, 2015), <https://islamicclimatedeclaration.org/islamic-declaration-on-global-climate-change/>.

financial products, social media, and digital campaigns. These channels expand access to environmental ethics while also increasing the possibility of simplification, branding, and strategic appropriation. The study's framework offers a way to assess whether the circulation of Islamic climate language produces substantive institutional change or merely symbolic religious endorsement.

The public-policy implications can be expressed through five evaluative tests. The authority test asks whether institutions controlling land, energy, water, finance, and natural resources operate under clearly defined ecological limits and enforceable duties. The recognition test examines which human and nonhuman communities are included within impact assessments. The differentiation test evaluates whether costs and obligations correspond to contribution, benefit, capacity, and vulnerability. The participation test considers whether affected communities possess influence before decisions become irreversible. The restoration test determines whether responsible actors must prevent, cease, repair, and compensate for harm.

These tests are particularly relevant to Muslim-majority states whose environmental commitments coexist with dependence on hydrocarbons, mining, deforestation, industrial agriculture, or carbon-intensive urban development. Islamic environmental governance cannot be evaluated by counting religious references in policy documents. Its credibility depends on whether it changes incentives, redistributes transition costs, reduces ecological exposure, and strengthens mechanisms of accountability. Hussein, Turnbull and Amin emphasize the potential of Islamic ethics, law, and fatwas to inform environmental policy and generate public legitimacy.⁶⁷ Harnowo similarly identifies fatwas as adaptive instruments through which new ecological problems may be addressed.⁶⁸ Yet legal or religious endorsement remains insufficient where implementation is voluntary, oversight is weak, or affected populations lack recourse.

The same analysis applies to Islamic finance and moral-economy discourse. Achyar and Khandakar connect sustainability with Islamic moral economy and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, arguing that financial systems should integrate social and environmental purposes.⁶⁹ This integration is theoretically significant, but labels such as “green,” “ethical,” or “Shari'ah-compliant” cannot substitute for ecological due diligence. A formally permissible investment may still displace communities, damage habitats, obscure lifecycle emissions, or concentrate benefits among powerful actors. A critical Islamicate climate-justice framework therefore evaluates financial products according to their material environmental consequences, distributional effects, governance arrangements, and intergenerational risks.

⁶⁷ J M Hussein et al., “Islamic Legal Perspectives on Climate Change and Global Policy Frameworks,” *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 9, no. 2 (2024): 723–42, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v9i2.11185>; Turnbull, “What Islamic Contributions Have Been Made to Climate Change Action and How Useful Are They in Promoting Environmental Justice?”; Amin, “Shari'ah and Climate Justice: Exploring Islamic Legal Foundations for Environmental Protection in Pakistan.”

⁶⁸ T Harnowo and F H Habib, “Islamic Law and Environment Issues: Indonesian Ulama Council's Fatwas on Climate Change,” *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 24, no. 1 (2024): 101–18, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v24i1.34161>.

⁶⁹ Achyar, Jongsureyapart, and Marzuki, “Advancing Climate Policy in Carbon Accounting to Control for Carbon Emissions: An Islamic Moral Economy Emphasis”; H Khandakar et al., “Reforming Islamic Financial Standards for Inclusive and Sustainable Development: A Maturidi Creed Perspective on Behaviour, Equity and Justice,” *International Journal of Ethics and Systems*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOES-04-2025-0186>.

Institutional accountability is equally important. Yunan and Khandakar) relate Islamic ethics to transparency, anti-corruption, and sustainable governance, while Wahyuni emphasizes the responsibility of public and private institutions for environmental impacts.⁷⁰ These concerns expand *fasād* beyond personal immorality toward systemic opacity, regulatory capture, and the concealment of ecological costs. Transparency is not merely an administrative virtue; it is a precondition for determining who benefits, who bears harm, and whether environmental obligations are being displaced.

The framework also has implications for mosques, Islamic universities, pesantren, zakat organizations, and waqf institutions. These institutions can support environmental education, community adaptation, renewable-energy access, livelihood protection, and ecological restoration. Their role, however, should not be romanticized. Faith-based charity cannot replace state regulation, corporate liability, or climate finance owed by high-capacity actors. Religious institutions contribute most effectively when they connect moral formation to public accountability rather than absorbing responsibilities that properly belong to governments and polluters. The framework's theoretical contribution lies in integrating domains commonly treated separately: Qur'anic environmental interpretation, multidimensional climate justice, and Islamicate institutional analysis. It revises the conventional sequence in which a Qur'anic verse is translated into an Islamic principle and then applied to a contemporary issue. That linear model presumes that the principle is already complete. The present study proposes a reciprocal sequence:

Qur'anic text and exegetical plurality ↔ critical analysis of climate injustice ↔
normative reconstruction ↔ institutional testing.

This sequence acknowledges historical distance without treating it as ethical irrelevance. Contemporary climate knowledge exposes problems that premodern exegetes did not formulate, including atmospheric appropriation, fossil-fuel infrastructures, climate displacement, and cumulative emissions. Qur'anic ethics, in turn, interrogates the assumptions of secular governance, including the reduction of ecological value to human economic welfare and the exclusion of nonhuman life from political recognition.

The methodological contribution is thus the disciplined separation of textual interpretation from contemporary normative reconstruction. The Qur'an does not contain a ready-made climate-policy system, and asserting otherwise would be anachronistic. Yet its ethical vocabularies can be reconstructed to evaluate power, harm, measure, vulnerability, and accountability. The validity of that reconstruction depends on making explicit where scriptural interpretation ends, where theoretical reasoning begins, and how institutional consequences are assessed.

For future-oriented Islamic and Islamicate studies, the decisive question is therefore not whether Islam is environmentally friendly. It is how Islamic ethical

⁷⁰ Z Y Yunan, Y C Pratama, and E Amelia, "Corruption and Its Implication on Climate Action: The Role of Islamic Ethics," in *Islamic Finance and Climate Action: Ethics, Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability*, 2025, 81–92, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003570936-10>; Khandakar et al., "Reforming Islamic Financial Standards for Inclusive and Sustainable Development: A Maturidi Creed Perspective on Behaviour, Equity and Justice"; S Wahyuni and P A S Siregar, "Neglecting Islamic Law in the Distribution of Inheritance in the Sasak Muslim Society: A Study of Legal Pluralism," *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 20, no. 1 (2026): 65–83, <https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v20i1.14987>.

vocabularies are interpreted, authorized, institutionalized, contested, and measured against the material distribution of ecological harm. The originality of the proposed framework lies in converting Qur'anic environmental ethics from a generalized discourse of stewardship into a critical theory of limited authority, multispecies recognition, differentiated obligation, participatory governance, and structural repair. It thereby prepares the ground for a conclusion in which the relevance of Qur'anic ethics is assessed not by claims of scriptural completeness, but by its capacity to expose and transform the institutions through which climate injustice is produced.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Qur'anic environmental ethics can be critically reconstructed to address the normative demands of climate justice. It found that the dominant language of stewardship, particularly the interpretation of *khalīfah* as ecological guardianship, remains ethically useful but conceptually insufficient when treated as a self-evident or complete environmental doctrine. The Qur'anic category does not independently establish a modern theory of sustainability. Its ecological significance emerges through contemporary interpretation, exegetical selection, and normative reconstruction. A defensible account of stewardship must therefore understand human authority as delegated, limited, and exposed to judgment rather than as benevolent sovereignty over a passive natural world.

The study further demonstrated that the strongest Qur'anic challenge to anthropocentrism lies in passages that recognize animals as communities, describe nonhuman beings as participants in divine glorification, and present creation as ordered through *mīzān*. These texts relocate humanity within a plural creaturely world whose religious and moral significance does not depend exclusively on human interests. Human beings retain distinctive technological and political capacities, but such capacities generate intensified responsibility rather than superior intrinsic worth. Qur'anic environmental ethics is consequently strengthened when stewardship is subordinated to creaturely plurality, just measure, and the limitation of human moral authority.

A second central conclusion is that general appeals to shared human responsibility cannot adequately address climate injustice. Climate change is produced and experienced through profound inequalities in historical contribution, accumulated benefit, institutional capacity, political influence, and exposure to harm. The study therefore reconstructed responsibility as differentiated trusteeship. Under this model, high-emitting and high-capacity actors bear stronger obligations for rapid mitigation, climate finance, technological support, remediation, and institutional reform. Low-contributing and highly vulnerable communities possess correspondingly stronger claims to protection, participation, adaptation support, and compensation. Shared ecological dependence does not erase unequal causal responsibility.

These findings culminate in a critical Islamicate climate-justice framework comprising five interdependent dimensions: limited authority, creaturely recognition, differentiated responsibility, participatory governance, and restorative transformation. The framework advances beyond conventional stewardship models by shifting the primary focus from individual virtue to institutional accountability. It evaluates environmental action not only through intentions or religious language, but through the distribution of power, burdens, benefits, recognition, and opportunities for meaningful participation. It also treats Muslim environmental declarations, policy instruments, educational institutions,

financial organizations, and religious authorities as sites in which Islamic ethical concepts are selected, authorized, contested, and translated into public practice.

The study's principal theoretical contribution lies in joining Qur'anic interpretation, multidimensional climate-justice theory, and Islamicate institutional analysis within a reciprocal method. Contemporary climate knowledge exposes questions that premodern interpretations did not formulate, while Qur'anic ethical vocabularies provide critical resources for evaluating domination, ecological exclusion, burden transfer, and institutional irresponsibility. This approach avoids both apologetic claims that scripture contains a complete climate policy and reductive assumptions that premodern religious traditions cannot contribute to contemporary ethical reasoning.

The broader significance of the study lies in reframing the central question of Islamic environmental scholarship. The issue is not simply whether Islam supports environmental protection, but how Islamic ethical concepts are reconstructed, institutionalized, and tested against the material realities of climate injustice. Future research should examine how the proposed framework operates in specific policy sectors, climate-finance mechanisms, religious institutions, educational settings, and climate-affected Muslim communities. Comparative empirical studies are also needed to determine whether Islamic environmental discourse changes institutional behaviour or remains primarily symbolic. Qur'anic environmental ethics can contribute meaningfully to future climate governance only when its moral vocabulary is translated into differentiated obligations, ecological recognition, participatory authority, and enforceable forms of repair.

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