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THE CHARTER OF MADINAH AS A MODEL OF INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE IN A PLURAL SOCIETY

Dr. Junaid Khan*

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Charter of Madinah as an early attempt to organise political order within a socially diverse and politically fragmented society. Madinah, before the Charter, was marked by tribal rivalry, shifting alliances, and the absence of a stable central authority. In this environment, maintaining cooperation and public order was difficult. The paper examines the Charter as a practical effort to organise governance and collective responsibility in Madinah. It examines the role of the Charter in regulating relations among different communities through shared responsibilities connected to security and cooperation. The study argues that the document represented an effort to organise political relations beyond narrow tribal arrangements. Different communities continued to retain their own identities within this broader framework. The paper approaches the Charter within the social and political conditions of seventh-century Madinah. It examines the governance features of the document within that historical setting. The paper also discusses the continuing relevance of the Charter in contemporary debates on governance in plural societies. Particular attention is given to coexistence, negotiated authority, and political stability.

Keywords: Charter of Madinah; governance; plural society; political order; conflict resolution; collective responsibility.

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INTRODUCTION

The questions of governance, authority, and public order have remained important in both historical and contemporary political thought.¹ Politically diverse societies have often faced difficulties in maintaining stability.² These challenges become more difficult when different communities and competing interests have to coexist within a shared political framework. In many such societies, governance relied not only on formal political institutions but also on agreements, alliances, and negotiated arrangements. As a result, governance in plural societies often involves questions of authority, cooperation, and shared responsibility.³ It also involves managing disputes among groups with competing loyalties.

The city of Madinah during the early Islamic period represented one such socially complex society. Before the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the city was characterised by tribal rivalries, shifting alliances, and the absence of a stable central political structure. The two major Arab tribes, Aws and Khazraj, had experienced a prolonged conflict.⁴ Also, several Jewish tribes maintained their own alliances and influence within the city. Authority remained dispersed among tribal groups instead of being organised through a broader system of governance.⁵ In such conditions, maintaining long-term stability remained a challenge.

The migration (Hijrah) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from Makkah to Madinah in 622 CE significantly changed the social and political landscape of the city. The emergence of the Muslim community introduced new forms of interaction and coordination among the communities in Madinah.⁶ It also created the need for a

¹ Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

² Lijphart, Arend. 1977. *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

³ North, Douglass C. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

⁴ Watt, W. Montgomery. 1956. *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Kennedy, Hugh. 2015. *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.

⁵ Watt, W. Montgomery. 1956. *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Donner, Fred M. 2010. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁶ Donner, Fred M. 2010. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.; Kennedy, Hugh. 2015. *The Prophet and*

broader arrangement capable of regulating relations among different groups. It was within this context that the document commonly referred to as the Charter of Madinah emerged. The Charter is commonly understood as an agreement aimed at organising relations among different communities in Madinah through shared obligations and cooperation.⁷ The Charter is often discussed for its religious and ethical significance, but it also dealt with practical matters connected to security, cooperation, and maintaining order.

The Charter has been widely discussed in academic scholarship. Some scholars approach the Charter as an early constitutional document. Others emphasise its importance for coexistence, citizenship, and Islamic political ideas.⁸ These interpretations have contributed significantly to understanding the historical importance of the Charter. Comparatively, less attention has been given to the document from the perspective of governance. Examining the Charter from this perspective places greater emphasis on authority, coordination, collective responsibility, and dispute resolution. These issues became important within a socially diverse environment marked by divided political structures.

This paper examines the Charter of Madinah as a model of institutional governance in a plural society. It argues that the Charter was an early attempt to establish a political order among the different communities in Madinah. It was based on negotiated principles of cooperation, collective responsibility, and administrative coordination.

The paper does not treat the Charter only as a symbolic or moral document. Instead, it examines its role in regulating relations among the communities and maintaining public order in Madinah.

The study does not claim that the Charter was a modern constitutional system in the contemporary sense. Instead, it approaches the document within its historical context while examining some of its features and institutional implications.

the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.

⁷ Hamidullah, Muhammad. 1981. *The First Written Constitution in the World*. 3rd ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf.

⁸ Hamidullah, Muhammad. 1981. *The First Written Constitution in the World*. 3rd ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf.; Ramadan, Tariq. 2007. *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

LITERATURE AND ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Scholarly Approaches to the Charter of Madinah

The Charter of Madinah has been widely studied within Islamic history, political thought, and constitutional studies. Scholars have largely focused on the historical significance of the Charter and its contribution to the formation of the early Muslim community in Madinah. Interpretations of the Charter have varied among scholars, especially regarding its nature, purpose, and significance. One common interpretation views the Charter as an early constitutional document meant to regulate relations among the different communities in Madinah.⁹ Muhammad Hamidullah is among the most frequently cited scholars in this regard. He described the Charter as one of the earliest written constitutional arrangements. He also emphasised its role in organising political authority and regulating relations among the different groups.¹⁰ This approach usually highlights provisions related to collective obligations, conflict resolution, and relations between the Muslims and Jewish tribes. Some scholars have viewed the Charter as an important stage in the development of an organised political authority within the early Islamic community.¹¹

Other interpretations have focused more strongly on the ethical and religious dimensions of the document. In this perspective, it is often discussed in relation to coexistence, religious tolerance, and social cooperation among the different communities. This perspective often emphasises the recognition of different communities in Madinah. They also highlight the attempt to establish peaceful relations among them.¹² These discussions generally view the Charter as reflecting the broader Islamic principles connected to justice, mutual responsibility, and communal harmony.

The Charter has also received attention in studies of Islamic political thought and the historical development of governance in

⁹ Hamidullah, Muhammad. 1981. *The First Written Constitution in the World*. 3rd ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf; Lecker, Michael. 2004. *The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad's First Legal Document*. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.

¹⁰ Hamidullah, Muhammad. 1981. *The First Written Constitution in the World*. 3rd ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf.

¹¹ Hamidullah, Muhammad. 1981. *The First Written Constitution in the World*. 3rd ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf; Donner, Fred M. 2010. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹² Ramadan, Tariq. 2007. *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Islam.¹³ Some scholars view the document as part of the transition from tribal organisation to more structured political arrangements in the early Islamic period.¹⁴ In such discussions, it is viewed not just as a religious agreement. It is also seen as an attempt to regulate authority and maintain order in a politically divided society. The Charter is frequently discussed in relation to legitimacy, leadership, collective security, and the emergence of political order in Madinah.

At the same time, interpretations of the Charter have varied among scholars. Some scholars believe the document should not be interpreted using modern political concepts. Modern political terms such as “constitution,” “citizenship,” and “state” differ significantly from the tribal and social conditions of seventh-century Arabia. Some historians argue that the Charter should be examined within the historical conditions in which it emerged rather than through direct comparison with modern constitutional systems. These arguments highlight the need to understand the Charter in relation to the conditions of its time.

Despite these differences, most scholarship agrees that it occupied an important place in the organisation of the early community in Madinah. Constitutional and political interpretations generally describe the document as an effort to bring stability and order to a dispersed political order.

Governance as an Analytical Perspective

The existing studies have contributed greatly to understanding the Charter. Yet its governance features have received relatively limited attention. Many studies discuss it either as a religious-ethical document or as an early constitutional arrangement. However, fewer studies examine its role in coordinating authority and regulating relations among diverse communities within a politically divided society. A governance perspective highlights coordination, public order, institutional responsibility, and conflict management.¹⁵ These concerns

¹³ Hallaq, Wael B. 2013. *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press; Moten, Abdul Rashid. 1996. *Political Science: An Islamic Perspective*. London: Macmillan.

¹⁴ Watt, W. Montgomery. 1956. *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Donner, Fred M. 2010. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹⁵ North, Douglass C. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

formed an important part of the political environment of Madinah. Such an approach does not treat the Charter as a modern state constitution. Instead, the paper focuses on its role in organising relations among communities through cooperation and shared obligations. Governance is not only about formal institutions but also about maintaining order and cooperation within society.¹⁶

A governance perspective is particularly useful in the case of Madinah because political authority before the Charter was largely divided among tribal groups. Society was organised mainly around kinship ties. Conflict resolution often depended on retaliation and changing tribal alliances. Such an environment required broader coordination to preserve stability beyond individual tribal interests.¹⁷ The Charter may be seen as an attempt to create a shared political structure. Within this framework, different communities could function through shared obligations and recognised authority.

This perspective also makes it possible to examine the practical dimensions of governance in the Charter. Questions relating to collective security, dispute settlement, mutual assistance, and the regulation of public responsibilities may all be understood in administrative terms.¹⁸ Governance in Madinah remained relatively simple compared with later state systems.

The paper examines the Charter as a governance arrangement that emerged within a plural and politically divided society. The paper does not treat it simply as an ideal document. Instead, it examines the role of the Charter in maintaining coordination and political stability among the communities. This approach allows the Charter to be examined both as part of Islamic history and as a governance arrangement within a socially diverse society.

¹⁶ Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press; North, Douglass C. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁷ Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

¹⁸ Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MADINAH BEFORE THE CHARTER: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Tribal Fragmentation and Political Instability

Before the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Madinah, the city was organised largely around tribal structures. Tribal affiliations formed the main basis of authority, identity, and social relations. At the same time, centralised political organisation was limited. In the absence of a unified authority, stability often relied on temporary alliances among competing tribal groups.¹⁹ There was no permanent institutional structure capable of maintaining a wider political order.

Among the most influential Arab tribes in Madinah were Aws and Khazraj. The two tribes had a long history of rivalry and periodic conflict, which contributed to political instability within Madinah.²⁰ Historical accounts frequently refer to the Battle of Bu'āth, fought shortly before the Hijrah, as an example of destructive tribal conflict. The conflict had weakened both tribes and intensified instability within the city. These conflicts show more than temporary disputes among tribes. They revealed broader patterns of divided authority and political instability within Madinah.²¹ In such an environment, conflict resolution remained closely linked to kinship ties and retaliation. Tribal loyalties often influenced responses to disputes and made broader political coordination difficult to maintain. Alliances often shifted according to circumstances, while collective responsibility was usually confined within tribal boundaries. The lack of a broader political structure weakened social stability in Madinah. As a result, the city remained vulnerable to recurring conflict.

Political authority within Madinah was therefore dispersed rather than centralised, limiting the emergence of coordinated governance across the city.²² Individual tribes exercised influence over their own members and allies. However, no single authority possessed enough legitimacy to regulate relations across the city as a whole.

¹⁹ Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

²⁰ Watt, W. Montgomery. 1956. *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

²¹ Watt, W. Montgomery. 1956. *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Kennedy, Hugh. 2015. *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.

²² Donner, Fred M. 2010. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

This fragmentation created practical difficulties in matters connected to security, justice, and collective decision-making. The social structure of Madinah before the Charter was largely decentralised. Governance depended mainly on tribal alliances rather than broader institutional arrangements. The significance of these conditions becomes clearer when examining the emergence of the Charter of Madinah. It developed in a society marked by divided authority and competing loyalties. These conditions created continuing challenges to the political order. The Charter addressed the political instability created by divided authority and competing loyalties.²³

Religious Diversity and Social Complexity

Alongside tribal divisions, Madinah was also marked by religious and social diversity. Several Jewish tribes, including Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadir, and Banu Qurayzah, occupied an important place within the economic and political life of the city.²⁴ These tribes maintained their own alliances, internal structures, and spheres of influence, contributing further to the complexity of social relations within Madinah.²⁵

Relations among these groups were shaped not just by religious differences but also by tribal and political factors. Alliances between Jewish tribes and Arab tribes frequently influenced the balance of power within the city. As a result, political competition in Madinah cannot be understood purely in religious terms. Tribal interests, economic influence, and questions of security also played important roles in shaping relations among the communities.

The presence of different groups in Madinah created both cooperation and conflict within a socially diverse political environment.²⁶ Different communities in Madinah often cooperated through alliances and social interaction. However, without a common political order, conflicts between groups could quickly create instability. Maintaining order therefore required more than simply

²³ Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

²⁴ Hamidullah, Muhammad. 1981. *The First Written Constitution in the World*. 3rd ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf; Lecker, Michael. 2004. *The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad's First Legal Document*. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.

²⁵ Hamidullah, Muhammad. 1981. *The First Written Constitution in the World*. 3rd ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf.

²⁶ Donner, Fred M. 2010. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Lijphart, Arend. 1977. *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

managing relations within individual tribes. It increasingly involved regulating interaction among communities possessing different loyalties, interests, and identities.²⁷

This social complexity formed an important background to the emergence of the Charter. The document recognised the continued existence of different communities. It sought to regulate relations among these communities within a broader political arrangement. The Charter accepted social diversity and attempted to regulate relations within it.²⁸ The diverse character of Madinah also meant that governance required negotiation and coordination rather than only coercive authority. Maintaining order required cooperation among different groups within a shared political framework. The Charter addressed not only tribal conflict but also the challenges of governing a socially diverse society.

Hijrah and the Search for Political Coordination

The migration (Hijrah) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the early Muslim community from Makkah to Madinah marked an important turning point in the political development of the city.²⁹

The arrival of the Muhajirun introduced a new social and political element into an already fragmented environment. The emerging Muslim community now included both the Muhajirun and the Ansar. At the same time, relations with other communities in Madinah also required regulation and coordination. The position of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) within Madinah gradually extended beyond religious leadership alone. Historical accounts indicate that he (PBUH) increasingly occupied the role of a mediator and arbitrator among groups that had long experienced political rivalry and instability.³⁰ This role had important governance implications. It

²⁷ Lijphart, Arend. 1977. *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

²⁸ Lecker, Michael. 2004. *The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad's First Legal Document*. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.

²⁹ Donner, Fred M. 2010. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Kennedy, Hugh. 2015. *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.

³⁰ Watt, W. Montgomery. 1956. *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press.

introduced a recognised authority that could address disputes affecting the whole community rather than only individual tribes.

The need for a more organised political arrangement became increasingly significant in these conditions. The tribal order continued to exist within Madinah. However, managing relations among different communities required cooperation beyond tribal loyalties. Maintaining order could no longer rely only on tribal arrangements, as relations among communities became more complex. Some form of coordinated governance therefore became necessary for preserving stability in Madinah.

The Charter of Madinah emerged in this context. The document sought to establish recognised principles governing relations among the communities in Madinah.³¹ The Charter addressed cooperation, shared responsibilities, and the management of disputes among different groups. Rather than eliminating tribal identities, it linked these obligations to broader collective responsibilities.³²

The historical conditions surrounding the emergence of the Charter are important for understanding its features. The document developed within a socially diverse and politically divided environment. In such conditions, stability depended on coordination among multiple communities. The Charter was significant because it attempted to maintain public order within a diverse and politically divided society.

INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE IN THE CHARTER OF MADINAH

Political Authority and Administrative Coordination

Relations among the communities of Madinah increasingly required cooperation beyond tribal loyalties. The document did not abolish the existing tribal structures or identities, nor did it seek to create a fully centralised political order.³³ Tribal affiliations continued to remain important in matters connected to social organisation and local

³¹ Hamidullah, Muhammad. 1981. *The First Written Constitution in the World*. 3rd ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf; Lecker, Michael. 2004. *The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad's First Legal Document*. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.

³² North, Douglass C. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³³ Watt, W. Montgomery. 1956. *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Lecker, Michael. 2004. *The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad's First Legal Document*. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.

responsibility. It also introduced obligations extending beyond tribal loyalties. These provisions tried to connect different groups through shared political cooperation.³⁴

The Charter provided a framework through which political authority could operate across different communities. It established shared responsibilities concerning security, conflict resolution, and cooperation among the signatory groups. The document recognised Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a central authority in matters affecting the wider community.³⁵ This arrangement contributed to greater political coordination within Madinah while allowing individual groups to retain their identities and internal affairs.

The Charter therefore represented an attempt to organise political relations beyond the limitations of tribal fragmentation. Administrative coordination remained relatively simple compared with later state systems. Nevertheless, the Charter established principles through which cooperation could be maintained among different communities. It linked political authority with agreed obligations and recognised responsibilities. Such arrangements helped reduce uncertainty and improve coordination among groups operating within a shared political environment.³⁶

The authority recognised in the Charter did not depend solely on coercive power. Rather, it relied upon accepted obligations and collective agreements among the participating communities. This feature is important because governance in divided societies often depends upon legitimacy and cooperation in addition to formal authority.³⁷ The Charter therefore contributed to the emergence of a broader political framework within Madinah.

Collective Responsibility and Mutual Obligations

One of the significant governance features of the Charter was its emphasis on collective responsibility. The document outlined

³⁴ Hamidullah, Muhammad. 1981. *The First Written Constitution in the World*. 3rd ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf; North, Douglass C. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³⁵ Hamidullah, Muhammad. 1981. *The First Written Constitution in the World*. 3rd ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf; Lecker, Michael. 2004. *The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad's First Legal Document*. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.

³⁶ North, Douglass C. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³⁷ Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press; Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

obligations connected to mutual assistance, protection, and support among the participating groups.³⁸ Different communities remained responsible for their own internal affairs, but they also shared responsibilities affecting the wider political order.

Several provisions addressed matters connected to compensation, security, and assistance during times of conflict. These arrangements reflected an effort to distribute responsibilities among communities rather than concentrating them within a single authority. Collective responsibility therefore became an important mechanism for maintaining cooperation and stability.³⁹

The Charter also linked rights with obligations. Participation within the broader political arrangement required communities to contribute to collective security and public order. Such provisions encouraged cooperation while recognising the continued existence of different social groups. The arrangement therefore balanced communal autonomy with wider political responsibilities.

This feature is important from a governance perspective because stable political orders often depend upon shared responsibilities among participants.⁴⁰ The Charter attempted to create conditions in which cooperation could be maintained despite differences in identity and affiliation. It therefore represented an effort to organise collective action within a socially diverse environment.

Conflict Resolution and the Maintenance of Order

Conflict resolution occupied an important place within the Charter. The social and political environment of Madinah before the Charter had been marked by recurring disputes, tribal rivalries, and competing alliances.⁴¹ Maintaining stability therefore required mechanisms capable of managing disagreements among communities.

The Charter introduced procedures through which disputes affecting the wider community could be addressed. Matters involving serious conflict were referred to recognised authority rather than being

³⁸ Hamidullah, Muhammad. 1981. *The First Written Constitution in the World*. 3rd ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf.

³⁹ Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁰ North, Douglass C. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴¹ Watt, W. Montgomery. 1956. *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

left entirely to tribal retaliation.⁴² This arrangement represented an important step towards more organised conflict management within Madinah.

The document also emphasised cooperation in maintaining public order. Communities were expected to assist one another in matters affecting collective security. These provisions attempted to reduce the likelihood of conflict spreading across the city. They also encouraged a degree of political coordination that extended beyond tribal boundaries.

From a governance perspective, conflict management is closely connected to political stability.⁴³ Societies characterised by divided authority often face difficulties in regulating disputes. The Charter addressed this challenge by providing recognised procedures through which conflicts could be managed. Although relatively simple in institutional terms, these arrangements contributed to greater stability within Madinah.

Diversity within a Shared Political Framework

An important feature of the Charter was its recognition of social diversity. The document did not seek to eliminate differences among the communities of Madinah. Instead, it accepted the continued existence of multiple groups while establishing principles governing their relations.⁴⁴

The Charter recognised different communities as participants within a broader political arrangement. Muslim and Jewish groups retained their own identities, internal affairs, and religious practices. At the same time, they were connected through obligations related to security and cooperation. This arrangement reflected an attempt to balance diversity with political coordination.

The recognition of diversity is significant because governance in plural societies often requires mechanisms capable of accommodating differences while maintaining public order.⁴⁵ The

⁴² Hamidullah, Muhammad. 1981. *The First Written Constitution in the World*. 3rd ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf; Lecker, Michael. 2004. *The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad's First Legal Document*. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.

⁴³ Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

⁴⁴ Lecker, Michael. 2004. *The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad's First Legal Document*. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press; Ramadan, Tariq. 2007. *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁵ Lijphart, Arend. 1977. *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Charter did not require complete social uniformity. Rather, it attempted to organise relations among communities through agreed responsibilities and shared commitments.

This aspect of the Charter continues to attract scholarly attention because it illustrates how political cooperation may be achieved among groups possessing different identities and interests. The document therefore provides an important historical example of governance within a socially diverse environment.

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF THE CHARTER

Governance in Plural Societies

The Charter of Madinah continues to attract attention in discussions concerning governance within plural societies. Contemporary societies often face challenges connected to diversity, competing identities, and political fragmentation.⁴⁶ These challenges have encouraged scholars to revisit historical examples of political cooperation and conflict management.

The Charter is frequently discussed because it attempted to establish a framework through which different communities could cooperate while retaining their separate identities. It illustrates an approach to governance that recognised diversity without requiring complete social uniformity. It also highlights the connection between governance and cooperation achieved through mutual agreement. Political order in Madinah did not depend solely upon coercive power or centralised control. Various communities participated in maintaining collective security while operating within a wider political arrangement. It suggests that order in divided societies cannot depend entirely upon authority or force alone.

Such comparisons, however, require historical caution. The Charter developed in a tribal social order that differed considerably from contemporary constitutional systems.⁴⁷ The concepts of citizenship, sovereignty, and administration were understood differently from the way they are interpreted in modern governance systems. Direct comparisons between the Charter and modern

⁴⁶ Lijphart, Arend. 1977. *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

⁴⁷ Hallaq, Wael B. 2013. *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press; Feldman, Noah. 2008. *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

governance systems can oversimplify the nature of the document. Its importance lies more in addressing questions of stability, cooperation, and collective responsibility within a fragmented society.⁴⁸ It demonstrates how stability in socially diverse societies can rely on cooperation and recognised responsibilities among different groups.

Institutional Governance and Political Stability

The Charter of Madinah also remains relevant in discussions concerning the relationship between institutional governance and political stability.⁴⁹ The lack of a common framework made it difficult to manage conflict and maintain stability across the city. The competing centres of authority made coordinated governance difficult to achieve within the divided political environment of Madinah.⁵⁰ It introduced shared principles to regulate relations among different communities. This suggested that political order depended on structured relations among communities. Stability depended on recognised authority and shared responsibility.⁵¹ It also required mechanisms through which disputes, cooperation, and security concerns could be managed. It represented an early attempt to organise collective responsibility beyond narrow tribal loyalties alone.

This aspect remains important because contemporary governance debates often emphasise the role of institutions in maintaining stability within diverse societies. Matters concerning legitimacy, coordination, conflict resolution, and collective responsibility remain significant within diverse governance systems.⁵² The arrangement demonstrated an early attempt to manage collective concerns through a shared political framework. The document

⁴⁸ Hallaq, Wael B. 2013. *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press; Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

⁴⁹ Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

⁵⁰ Watt, W. Montgomery. 1956. *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

⁵¹ North, Douglass C. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁵² Lijphart, Arend. 1977. *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

demonstrated the importance of wider political coordination in maintaining order within a socially divided society. Before the Charter, political instability in Madinah highlighted the challenges of maintaining order within a fragmented tribal structure. It linked communities through shared obligations related to security and public order. This helped reduce fragmentation within the city.⁵³ As such, it was a movement toward a broader conception of political coordination within society.

The governance framework established through the Charter was also shaped by the historical conditions of its time. Administrative institutions remained relatively simple, and tribal affiliations continued to shape social and political life. The importance of the Charter lies in its effort to promote stability through coordination and shared political obligations among different groups.⁵⁴ These broader governance concerns help explain the continuing scholarly interest in the Charter. Apart from its religious and historical significance, the document highlights questions concerning the establishment of political order in diverse societies. As such, it remains relevant to wider academic discussions concerning governance, collective responsibility, and political coordination in diverse societies.

CONCLUSION

The Charter of Madinah emerged within a politically unstable environment marked by tribal rivalry, fragmented authority, and competing communal interests. It sought to establish broader cooperation among communities through shared duties and shared political arrangements. It also represented an effort to address governance challenges within a fragmented society.

This paper examined the Charter primarily from a governance perspective. While much of the existing scholarship has focused on constitutionalism, religious coexistence, or Islamic political thought, the present study emphasised its institutional features and broader governance implications. From this perspective, the Charter attempted

⁵³ Hamidullah, Muhammad. 1981. *The First Written Constitution in the World*. 3rd ed. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf; Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁴ North, Douglass C. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

to regulate relations among communities, manage conflict, and maintain political order within a diverse society.

The Charter did not establish a governance system comparable to a modern constitutional or bureaucratic state. The social and political conditions of Madinah differed considerably from those associated with modern constitutional and administrative systems. The document attempted to organise relations among different tribal and social groups through shared duties and recognised responsibilities. It attempted to encourage cooperation without removing separate community identities. Political coordination in Madinah depended on balancing diversity with shared obligations. Different communities retained their identities while participating in the shared political arrangements.

The Charter highlighted the role of recognised authority and organised arrangements in managing relations among different communities. Negotiation between communities formed an important part of the political arrangement in Madinah. Collective responsibility also formed an important part of this arrangement. Security and public stability were increasingly treated as collective concerns affecting the wider community rather than individual tribes alone. The Charter sought to organise these responsibilities through agreed principles and coordinated obligations. This contributed to greater political order within the city.

Its historical limitations should nevertheless be recognised. The document should be understood within its historical setting rather than as a direct model of contemporary administrative systems. The Charter of Madinah therefore remains important not only within Islamic historical discourse but also in discussions concerning governance in plural societies. The Charter remains significant because it sought to maintain political stability through cooperation and shared responsibilities among communities. The Charter offers insight into efforts to establish political order within the fragmented conditions of early Islamic society.

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