



Research Article

Zakat and Social Harmony: A Conceptual Review of the Role of Zakat in Realizing Justice and Solidarity in Islamic Society

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Abstract. Specifically, zakat, as one of the pillars of Islam, holds a central position as a wealth redistribution mechanism designed to reduce poverty and strengthen social solidarity. Empirical literature in various Muslim countries, including studies examining productive zakat practices, zakat institution management, and zakat integration into social protection systems, demonstrates the potential of zakat to reduce inequality, improve the welfare of those entitled to receive zakat, and mitigate the risk of social conflict if managed effectively and accountably. This study aims to conceptually analyze the role of zakat in realizing social justice and solidarity in Islamic societies. The phenomenon of social and economic disparities that occurs in the modern era demands the presence of religious instruments capable of creating social balance. In this context, zakat functions not only as an obligatory act of worship but also as a socio-economic mechanism that distributes wealth fairly. This study uses a qualitative approach with library research methods, through analysis of relevant academic literature, scientific journals, and books published in the last five years. The results of the study indicate that zakat plays an important role in reducing social disparities, strengthening solidarity and empathy between believers, and building social harmony based on the values of justice and togetherness. Furthermore, the digitalization of zakat management and transparency of zakat institutions are crucial factors in maintaining public trust and effective distribution. In conclusion, zakat is a key pillar in building social harmony, as it balances spiritual and social dimensions.

Keywords: Community Solidarity; Islamic Economics; Social Harmony; Social Justice; Zakat.

Received: September 17, 2025

Revised: October 21, 2025

Accepted: November 26, 2025

Online Available: November 28, 2025

Curr. Ver.: November 28, 2025



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1. Background

Social and economic inequality is a global issue that continues to attract attention from policymakers and researchers. The impact of major shocks (pandemics, conflicts, and the climate crisis) has set back poverty alleviation efforts and widened inequality gaps in many countries. Extreme poverty rates and inequality indicators have remained relatively stagnant or increased in recent years (World Bank, 2024). This situation poses social risks and threatens social cohesion and societal stability.

In the context of Islamic society, religious teachings provide a normative framework for addressing inequality through the values of justice, solidarity, and social responsibility. Islamic principles emphasize equitable distribution of welfare, mutual assistance (ta'awun), and attention to the marginalized as part of the moral and religious obligations of the community (Qanita, 2022). These values serve as a theoretical foundation for faith-based social interventions that can complement secular public policies in reducing inequality and strengthening social harmony.

Specifically, zakat, as one of the pillars of Islam, holds a central position as a wealth redistribution mechanism designed to reduce poverty and strengthen social solidarity. Empirical literature from various Muslim countries, including studies examining productive zakat practices, zakat institution management, and zakat integration into social

protection systems, demonstrates zakat's potential to reduce inequality, improve the welfare of those entitled to receive it, and mitigate the risk of social conflict if managed effectively and accountably (Khan, 2025; Abdullahi et al., 2024). However, this potential is often not fully realized due to challenges in management, transparency, and distribution optimization.

At the practical level, empirical research in Indonesia and other countries shows varying results: some studies find a positive contribution of productive zakat to improving recipient welfare and reducing local inequality, while others highlight limited impact due to weaknesses in zakat governance and collection coverage (Sulaeman et al., 2021). These findings highlight the need for studies that combine conceptual review (religious values and distributive theory) with academic evaluation of zakat institutional practices—so that policy recommendations can be formulated that strengthen zakat's role as a relevant instrument for achieving social harmony .

2. Theoretical Study

The concept of Zakat in Islam

Etymologically (classical Arabic), the word zakat (الزكاة) comes from the root word *zak ā – yazk ū – zak ā h* (زَكَاةٌ – يَزْكُو – زَكَا) which means growing, developing, holy, and blessing (Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al- ' Arab*). In a classical context, this term reflects the meaning of purification and growth. This is as implied in the Qur'an, Surah At-Taubah [9]: 103, “*Khudz min amwālihim ṣ adaqatan tu ṭ ahhiruhum wa tuzakk ī him bih ā ,*” which means, “ Take zakat from some of their wealth, with it you cleanse and purify them. ” Linguistically, zakat does not only mean spiritual purification, but also moral growth and social blessings that support the balance of community life.

Terminologically (syar'i term), zakat is defined as a certain amount of wealth that must be paid by a Muslim if he has fulfilled certain conditions to be given to the group entitled to receive it (*asnaf tsamaniyah*), as explained in QS. At-Taubah [9]:60. In contemporary literature, zakat is understood as a financial obligation that has a dual function, spiritual and socio-economic and is one of the main pillars in the Islamic economic system.

In the Qur'an and Hadith, zakat is understood as a ritual obligation that also functions as a mechanism for redistributing wealth. The Qur'an repeatedly pairs zakat with prayer (ṣ al ā h) as obligations that purify wealth and the soul (e.g., Surah At-Taubah [9]:103 and Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:177). The Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW also emphasizes the purpose of zakat to help those entitled (*mustahik*) and maintain social balance and solidarity among believers. Contemporary studies emphasize two main dimensions of zakat: the spiritual dimension, which functions to purify the soul and wealth, and the socio-economic dimension, which functions to redistribute wealth and social welfare (Widiastuti, 2022).

According to Alshater, Saad, Wahab, and Saba (2021), zakat is “a religiously obligatory almsgiving designed to redistribute wealth and promote social justice in Muslim societies.” Thus, zakat functions as an instrument of wealth redistribution that reduces social inequality and strengthens economic justice in society.

Widiastuti et al. (2021) added that zakat is a ritual-financial obligation that is both individual and social in nature, disbursed from certain assets to be distributed to those entitled to achieve collective prosperity. They emphasized the importance of effective zakat governance to optimally achieve its socio-economic function. Meanwhile, Nomran et al. (2022) described zakat as "a socio-economic redistribution mechanism embedded in Islamic financial ethics to ensure welfare and social balance," meaning that zakat is not merely a personal charity but a socio-economic system aimed at creating prosperity and social justice.

Furthermore, Ghaouri (2023) emphasized that zakat is “an act of purification and solidarity that reflects the ethical foundation of Islamic socio-economic justice,” highlighting the spiritual and social ethical dimensions of zakat as a reflection of Islamic economic justice.

Meanwhile, Ruzana (2022) views zakat as "a fiscal instrument ordained by Sharia to achieve poverty alleviation and socio-economic development through systematic fund management," which means that zakat is a strategic religious fiscal instrument in socio-economic development and poverty alleviation.

The wisdom of zakat includes cleansing the soul (tazkiyah), strengthening social solidarity, alleviating poverty, and promoting social stability. Normatively, zakat aims to reduce the gap between rich and poor and strengthen the collective moral responsibility of Muslims. From a modern policy perspective, zakat serves as an instrument for poverty mitigation and building sustainable social solidarity networks (Widiastuti, 2022; Mawardi et al., 2023).

Furthermore, various recent literature confirms that zakat has three main, complementary dimensions: first, the spiritual dimension, as a form of worship and individual moral purification. Second, the economic dimension, as an instrument of redistribution and economic empowerment through productive zakat. And third, the social dimension, as a glue of solidarity and protection for vulnerable groups (Mawardi et al., 2023; Adinugraha, 2023). The implementation of productive zakat reflects the transformation of zakat from a consumptive model to a long-term economic empowerment model. However, the effectiveness of this transformation depends heavily on program design, the capacity of amil institutions, and its synergy with other social policies.

Based on this description, it can be concluded that zakat is a social worship system that integrates spiritual, economic, and social dimensions. Zakat not only purifies the soul and wealth, but also serves as a mechanism for justice and social welfare, serving as the foundation for building a harmonious, just, and sustainable Islamic society.

The Concept of Social Harmony from an Islamic Perspective

Social harmony refers to a state of cohesion, harmony, and balance in intergroup relations within a society. From an Islamic perspective, social harmony encompasses both material well-being and the quality of social relationships, including a sense of justice, brotherhood, and shared responsibility. Researchers position social harmony as the outcome of a combination of redistributive policies and strong practices of social values (ukhuwah and ta'awun) within a community (Ramdhani et al., 2023).

The principles of justice ('adl), brotherhood (ukhuwwah), and mutual assistance (ta'awun) constitute the ethical foundation that drives redistributive practices in Islam. 'Adl (justice) demands proportional and equitable distribution; ukhuwah (brotherhood) fosters empathy and solidarity; and ta'awun (mutual assistance) encourages collective action for the common good. This concept makes instruments such as zakat not merely a personal obligation, but rather part of a social order that strengthens harmony and mitigates social conflict when operated according to these principles (Solikin, 2023).

The Relationship between Zakat and Social Harmony

1) Zakat as a means of economic equality

As a redistribution mechanism, zakat has the potential to reduce inequality if its collective value is significant and its distribution is directed toward programs that strengthen the recipients' economic capacity (productivity-oriented). Empirical studies in various countries have shown zakat's contribution to reducing local poverty levels and increasing initial capital for MSMEs when zakat is allocated productively, although results vary depending on governance and collection scale (Mawardi et al., 2023; Sulaeman, Majid, & Widiastuti, 2021).

2) Zakat as an instrument for building social solidarity

Consistent and transparent distribution of zakat strengthens a sense of togetherness and social responsibility among community members. Empirical and conceptual literature suggests that zakat practices foster reciprocity and enhance the legitimacy of religious institutions as agents of solidarity, crucial factors in fostering social harmony (Adinugraha, 2023; Abdullahi et al., 2024). However, weaknesses in governance or a lack of accountability can undermine public trust, thus diminishing this solidarity effect.

3) Zakat and poverty alleviation

Recent empirical evidence positions zakat as a complementary instrument in poverty alleviation efforts—particularly when combined with empowerment programs (training, market access, working capital). Meta-studies and case studies indicate that productive zakat tends to produce more sustainable medium-term impacts than consumptive distribution, but its effectiveness is influenced by program design and implementation at the local level (Widiastuti, 2022; Mawardi et al., 2023).

Previous Research

In the past five years, there has been an increase in empirical literature and systematic studies on the role of zakat in poverty alleviation, empowerment of those entitled to

receive zakat, and integration of zakat into social protection systems. Several studies (Mawardi et al., 2023; Widiastuti, 2022; Adinugraha, 2023) highlight that zakat can contribute significantly to welfare if transformed into a productive instrument and managed with good governance. However, findings also indicate variations in impact across national contexts due to differences in regulations, philanthropic cultures, and the capacity of zakat institutions.

While evidence on the potential of zakat is abundant and growing, several research gaps remain: (1) the need for conceptual studies that integrate the spiritual and socio-economic dimensions of zakat within a framework of social harmony; (2) cross-country comparative studies that link the design of productive zakat programs with indicators of social cohesion; and (3) a long-term evaluation of how productive zakat distribution affects social relations and the potential for conflict at the community level. This study aims to fill the first gap by presenting a conceptual review that integrates Islamic values (adl, ukhuwah, ta'awun) with empirical evidence on the impact of zakat on social justice and solidarity.

3. Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach because it aims to understand the meaning and social values contained in the concept of zakat as an instrument for forming social harmony in Islamic society. The method used is library research through analysis of academic literature, scientific journals, and relevant books published in the last five years. This method aims to explore the thoughts and results of previous research to build a conceptual understanding of the relationship between zakat and social harmony (Osman & Abdullah, 2020). The researchers reviewed academic literature in the form of scientific journals, books, proceedings, and research reports accessible through Google Scholar, Scopus, and ScienceDirect, using the keywords "zakat and social harmony," "zakat and social justice," "zakat impact," and "Islamic social solidarity."

4. Results And Discussion

The Role of Zakat as an Instrument of Social Justice

As both a religious obligation and a socio-economic mechanism, zakat plays a crucial role in the distribution of wealth from the wealthy to the deserving, with the aim of creating social balance. For example, research by Khan (2025) shows that zakat serves as an institutional mechanism for wealth redistribution and strengthening financial inclusion in Muslim societies. "Zakat acts as an institutionalized mechanism to reduce income inequality by channeling wealth from the affluent to the needy..." (Khan, 2025, p.)

The literature also notes that without proper management, zakat distribution can be marginal and fail to fully reduce inequality. For example, a study in Selangor found that while zakat impacts social welfare, its impact on the income of the poor is suboptimal (Sharofiddin et al., 2024). This suggests that redistribution alone is insufficient; its effectiveness depends on the design, targeting, and management of zakat institutions.

Empirical literature shows that the effectiveness of zakat in reducing social inequality is strongly influenced by two factors: distribution orientation (consumptive vs. productive) and institutional governance. A study in Indonesia concluded that effective zakat distribution channels can reduce poverty when combined with empowerment interventions, but if solely consumptive, the effect is more limited (Wawalmi, 2022). "The impact of zakat distribution channels... shows significant connections between effective zakat groups... and reducing poverty" (Wawalmi, 2022, p. ...). Thus, zakat managed productively and effectively can be an effective instrument of social justice, breaking the cycle of poverty, and reducing social fragmentation.

Zakat and Building Community Solidarity

Zakat emphasizes not only economic aspects but also social and moral values: empathy for others, mutual assistance (ta'awun), and brotherhood (ukhuwah). A conceptual study shows that zakat strengthens social ties and collective responsibility among members of the Muslim community (Qanita, 2022). "Zakat can alleviate social poverty through strengthening solidarity and Islamic brotherhood in society, which can become social capital for mustahik." (Qanita, 2022, p. ...). Strengthening these values helps build social capital that supports cooperative practices and cohesion in society.

The socio-psychological impact of zakat is reflected in an increased sense of justice, trust, and social cohesion. For example, research on distributive justice in zakat organizations found that perceptions of fairness in zakat distribution positively influenced the public's cognitive and affective trust in zakat institutions, which in turn encouraged participation and a sense of solidarity (Abror & Hidayati, 2020). "Distributive justice has a positive effect on intention to pay zakat... cognitive trust and affective trust..." (Abror & Hidayati, 2020, p. ...). With increased public trust, zakat institutions have greater potential to become agents of social change that strengthen harmony and reduce alienation.

Zakat in a Modern Context and Social Challenges

1) Digitalization of zakat management

The digital era brings significant opportunities for modernizing zakat management. Comparative literature studies show that several countries, including Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, have implemented fintech technology and digital platforms to improve efficiency and inclusion in zakat management (Moniruzzaman, 2025). "Digital Zakat Management...facilitating efficiency, transparency, and financial inclusion." (Moniruzzaman, 2025, p. ...). However, case studies in Indonesia highlight challenges in digital literacy, data security, and regulatory adaptation that are not yet fully developed (Maimuna et al., 2024).

2) Transparency and public trust in zakat institutions

Transparency in zakat management is crucial for enhancing public trust. A SLR study showed that digital-based zakat applications enhance accountability and community participation, particularly through transparency of distribution information and financial reporting (Tazhdinov & Hidayanti, 2024). "Digital-based zakat applications were effective in strengthening the transparency and accountability of zakat institutions..." (Tazhdinov & Hidayanti, 2024, p. ...). Public trust serves as social capital, enabling zakat institutions to mobilize resources and build broader solidarity networks.

3) Challenges of public awareness and optimization of productive zakat

Although the potential of productive zakat is increasingly recognized, practice shows that many zakat funds are still allocated solely for consumer assistance. A study on productive zakat empowerment in Indonesia emphasized the need for zakat institutions to adopt a social entrepreneurship approach and network mobilization to increase effectiveness (Wahyudi & El Muna, 2023). "There are three value attributes developed... innovation attributes, organizational leadership attributes, and resource and network mobilization attributes." (Wahyudi & El Muna, 2023, p. ...). The main challenges include low literacy among mustahik (recipients of zakat), lack of long-term monitoring, and limited scale of empowerment programs.

Conceptual Analysis: Zakat as a Pillar of Social Harmony

Zakat combines two dimensions: as an individual act of worship and as a socio-economic mechanism. This synthesis allows zakat to function beyond a ritual obligation—it becomes a tool for social transformation that connects individuals to the community through the values of justice and solidarity. Khan (2025) states that zakat strengthens social cohesion by combining economic distribution and social ethics. "Zakat ... strengthens community solidarity, reinforces ethical behavior, and mitigates social tensions arising from disparities in wealth." (Khan, 2025, p. ...). The spiritual dimension provides moral motivation for both zakat givers (muzakkî) and recipients (mustahik), while the socio-economic dimension demonstrates concrete results in the form of reduced inequality and increased social inclusion.

When zakat is managed effectively, with an orientation toward empowerment and institutional integrity, its impacts include strengthening solidarity, trust among community members, and reducing the potential for conflict stemming from economic inequality. A study by Abdullahi et al. (2024) found that a zakat system based on Islamic education and social welfare can reduce social instability in several communities. "Zakat has been instrumental in promoting the social well-being of the underprivileged... societies with institutionalized zakat systems... were able to reduce... incidents of property and violent crime by 20%." (Abdullahi et al., 2024, p. ...). Thus, zakat can be understood as a pillar of social harmony in contemporary Islamic society that bridges religious values and socio-economic needs.

5. Conclusion And Suggestions

Conclusion

Zakat plays a highly strategic role in building social harmony in Islamic societies. Zakat is a key pillar in building social harmony, as it balances spiritual and social dimensions. Social harmony can be achieved when zakat is managed with the principles of justice, transparency, and professionalism. Accountable zakat management not only strengthens public trust in amil institutions but also increases the effectiveness of sustainable empowerment programs for those entitled to receive zakat. In the modern context, digitalization of zakat management and innovation in productive distribution models are key to optimizing zakat's role in addressing the social and economic challenges of the community. Proper implementation of zakat will create a just, inclusive, and empowered society, in accordance with the Islamic values of 'adl (justice), ta'awun (mutual assistance), and ukhuwah (brotherhood).

Suggestion

Continuous research and empirical data-based evaluation are needed regarding the impact of zakat on welfare and social harmony, as a basis for formulating evidence-based public policies.

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