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## **Trust, Society and Governance: An Islamic Perspective on Malaysian Institutions**

### **Keyakinan, Masyarakat dan Tadbir Urus: Perspektif Islam Terhadap Institusi di Malaysia**

Homam Altabaa \* & Syed Arabi Idid\*\*

#### **Abstract**

The significance of trust cannot be overestimated for an individual or a society. Its value may become more discernible when trust is not present and its opposites such as uncertainty, accusation and cynicism take over a person or a group. The major aim of this paper is to investigate the role of the Islamic worldview in building and explaining the trust levels discovered in the survey. This paper first explores the religious dimensions and sociological implications of the concept of trust in Islam. The elements of trust in a host of Malaysian institutions are then analysed based on a survey conducted among Muslim respondents. This survey was conducted across Malaysia with hundreds of Malay/Muslim respondents. It covered social, public and governmental institutions. These include parents, siblings, relatives, spiritual/religious leaders, community leaders, friends, neighbours, teachers, the military, the civil service, the legal and judiciary system, the police, local big companies, mass media, the parliament, the federal government, political leaders, and political parties. The study concluded that some levels of trust towards certain institutions among Malaysian Muslims reflect the Islamic ideals of a Muslim community. However, the Islamic standards demand better outcomes from some institutions that are not highly trusted by the Muslim respondents.

**Keywords:** Trust, *Amanah*, Islamic Society, Trust in Malaysia, Institutional Trust.

#### **Abstrak**

Elemen keyakinan dan kepercayaan individu mahupun masyarakat awam tidak boleh dipandang remeh. Jika tiada keyakinan atau terdapat percanggahan, maka wujudnya ketidakpastian, tuduhan dan curiga oleh individu atau kumpulan. Tujuan utama makalah adalah untuk mengkaji pandangan dari perspektif Islam dalam membangun dan menerangkan tahap kepercayaan terhadap institusi yang ditemui dalam tinjauan ini.

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## Trust, Society and Governance: An Islamic Perspective on Malaysian Institutions 204

Makalah ini meninjau konsep yakin dari sudut pandangan Islam dan implikasi sosiologi. Satu tinjauan dilakukan bagi mengkaji tahap keyakinan terhadap beberapa institusi di Malaysia. Tinjauan ini dilakukan di seluruh Malaysia melibatkan ramai responden Melayu yang merangkumi institusi sosial, awam dan kerajaan. Institusi di sini bermaksud ibu bapa, adik beradik, sanak-saudara, pemimpin agama, pemimpin masyarakat, rakan, jiran, guru, tentera, penjawat awam, sistem perundangan dan kehakiman, polis, syarikat-syarikat besar tempatan, media massa, parlimen, kerajaan persekutuan, pemimpin politik, dan parti politik.

**Kata Kunci:** Keyakinan, *Amanah*, Masyarakat Islam, Keyakinan di Malaysia, Keyakinan Institusi.

### Introduction

The significance of trust cannot be overestimated for the individual and the society. Its value may become more discernible when trust is not present and its opposites such as uncertainty, accusation and cynicism take over a person or a group. It is hard to imagine a field of human activity that does not rely on trust one way or another. This is true, for example, in politics where politicians need to gain the trust of the voters to win elections and govern effectively, in economics where commercial entities must earn the trust of customers to sell products and compete with competitors, and in domestic matters where family members need to trust each other in order to form the nucleus of a healthy society. This paper first explores the religious dimensions and sociological implications of the concept of trust in Islam. The elements of trust in a host of Malaysian institutions is analysed based on the survey conducted among Muslim respondents. There are numerous factors that could possibly explain the levels of trust such as the biological and psychological factors, one's socialization with their family, one's economic status or sense of national belonging, the history and dominance of one's social group, rule of law,<sup>1</sup> etc.; however, the major aim here is to investigate the role of the Islamic worldview in building and explaining these trust levels.

### Conceptual Framework

Trust essentially revolves around the dependability of persons, objects and systems. It can be defined as “the confidence that a person or group of people has in the reliability of another person or group; specifically, it is the degree to which each party feels that they can depend on

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Eric M. Uslaner ed., *Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust* (Oxford University Press: New York), 2018.

the other party to do what they say they will do.”<sup>2</sup> In psychological scholarship, basic trust develops in infancy as a first stage of human psychological development.<sup>3</sup> Particularized trust is one’s confidence or faith in people who are like them. Generalized trust, on the other hand, is not directed at a particular person or institution for any particular objective. It can also mean trust in people whom one does not know. Additionally, political trust is one’s confidence and reliance on state institutions such as executive branch, the legislative branch, the court system, etc. These types of trust have been seen by researchers both to affect and influence each other or to have lesser relationships of this kind where generalized trust is the foundation that may or may not be affected by the other types.<sup>4</sup> Trust can also be seen as an “expectation” rather than a behaviour first and as a “cooperating behaviour” or “behaviourally exhibited trust second.”<sup>5</sup>

In Islamic literature, trust is part of the pure innate nature of humans known as “*fitrah*”<sup>6</sup> and it is strongly equated with faith as in the hadith “... there is not faith for the one who has no trust...” (Mishkat al-Masabih hadith no. 35) and “... the believer is the one people trust with their lives and wealth” (*Al-Nasa’i*, hadith no. 4995). The morphological roots of *iman* faith and *amanah* trust are one in the Arabic language. Accordingly, trust is one of the foundational values of the Islamic worldview. The relevant terms in Islamic literature that relate to this concept are *amanah* and *thiqah*, and the opposite term, *khiyanah*. Trust in Islam can thus be seen to exceed the bifocal division of “expectation” or “cooperating behaviour” to be an obligation in one sense where one has to be trustworthy not merely to meet social expectations but rather divine demands.

<sup>2</sup> *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, Gary R. VandenBos ed. (APA: Washington, 2015). p1110.

<sup>3</sup> According to Erikson’s theory of eight stages of psychosocial development. *Theories of Development: Concepts and Applications*. William Crain. Essex: Pearson Education. 2014. p291-293.

<sup>4</sup> Eric M. Uslaner, “The Study of Trust,” in Eric M. Uslaner ed. *Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2018), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Paul C. Bauer and Markus Freitag, “Measuring Trust,” in Eric M. Uslaner ed. *Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2018), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Baihaqi narrated that Sa’d bin Abi Waqqas said that “a believer is naturally disposed to all traits except betrayal and lying” (no. 4/1735) and Muslim narrated that the Prophet said that “...trust descended in the root of men's hearts (from Allah)....” (hadith no. 143 a).

### An Overview of Trust in Islam

In the Islamic tradition, one of the major objectives of Islam is to achieve the well-being of the mankind in both worlds; on earth and in heavens.<sup>7</sup> This can be understood through the concepts of *khilafah* (vicegerency) and *'imarah* (settlement/prosperity). These concepts stem from the essential role of a human as a servant of Allah, as in the verse about the purpose of creation “And I (Allah) created not the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me (Alone).”<sup>8</sup> This is the grand Trust understood from this verse, Truly, We did offer *al-Amanah* (the trust or moral responsibility or honesty and all the duties which Allah has ordained) to the heavens and the earth, and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and were afraid of it (i.e. afraid of Allah's Torment). But man bore it.”<sup>9</sup>

The social or interpersonal aspect of this servitude or Trust is fulfilling the role of *khilafah*<sup>10</sup> to achieve *'imarah*<sup>11</sup> as humans establish the rule of justice and develop earth. Islam has enjoined believers to realize happiness in both worlds, and achieve their success and wellbeing by dedication and work. Achieving success on earth entails fulfilling the role of servitude as *khalifah* to establish the *'imarah* of peace, justice and prosperity. The happiness of the Hereafter is a fruit of the success in this world in fulfilling the responsibilities and roles of servitude. However, achieving prosperity cannot be done without a functioning society built of active parts united by a common goal and shared vision. The Islamic vision thus gives a direction to the efforts of the society And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah (i.e. this Qur'an), and be not divided among yourselves.<sup>11</sup> and remember Allah's Favour on you, for you were enemies one to another but He joined your hearts together, so that, by His Grace, you became brethren (in Islamic Faith)<sup>12</sup>. To enable these efforts to be united and harmonious Trust is needed. This is one important meaning of the famous tenet of Islamic brotherhood “The believers are

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<sup>7</sup> This can be discerned from numerous quranic verses including “...Our Lord, give us in this world [that which is] good and in the Hereafter [that which is] good...” (2:201). The good in this verse is not restricted; it refers to material and spiritual good, on the personal and group levels.

<sup>8</sup> Quran 51:56

<sup>9</sup> Quran 33:72

<sup>10</sup> Refer to verses 10:14, 6:165, 35:39 and 2:30

<sup>11</sup> Refer to verses 11:61, 62:10, 67:15

<sup>12</sup> Quran 33:103

nothing else than brothers (in Islamic religion)...”<sup>13</sup> for it means that members of the Muslim society trust each other as individuals and groups to facilitate achieving their collective vision.

For this purpose, Muslim unity is one of the main goals<sup>14</sup> of Islam, as is well-known in the parable of the body, “The parable of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever.” (*Muslim*, hadith no. 2586 a) and the famous verse “And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah (i.e. this Qur'an), and be not divided among yourselves. And remember Allah's Favour on you, for you were enemies one to another but He joined your hearts together, so that, by His Grace, you became brethren (in Islamic Faith)”<sup>15</sup>. This unity ensures that Islam remains strong and can prosper in the face of any external or internal challenges. Hence, trust is essential in Islam for without it, a strong Muslim community/nation cannot be built. Disunity and disintegration are a major internal challenge facing any community/nation, especially a one based on central authority. Thus, promoting trust as key value is the answer to such challenges.

Such trust has various dimensions and implications. One must be trustworthy first in their abilities, morals, attitude and discipline as a basic step towards mutual societal trust. Hence, Islam has ordained Muslims to seek and have knowledge, excellence, honesty and patience under various names such as *ilm*, *ihsan*, *sidq*, *sabr*, *tawkkul*, *husn zhan*, etc. With such ethical values, one presumably becomes able to shoulder the trust placed in them by the society. In a nutshell, this is the primary meaning of trust in the sense of ‘*amanah*’ as being accountable to the Lord in every aspect of personal and interpersonal life.<sup>16</sup> Essentially, this trust or *amanah* grants one the vision and mission to be pursued in life. It also requires one to have the abilities and attitudes to be worthy of receiving the trust or *thiqah* of other people in order to enable the purposeful interaction of society members. In this sense, one can understand the

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<sup>13</sup> Quran 49:10

<sup>14</sup> It is a means towards the ultimate goal of establishing meaningful servitude in a just and healthy society.

<sup>15</sup> Quran 3:103

<sup>16</sup> This is reinforced by “The son of Adam will not pass away from Allah until he is asked about five things: how he lived his life, and how he utilized his youth, with what means did he earn his wealth, how did he spend his wealth, and what did he do with his knowledge.” (*Al-Tirmizi*, hadith no. 2416)

overwhelming stress by Islam on honesty and forbidding dishonesty, deceit, duplicity and lies.<sup>17</sup>

The realm of trust expands first from the personal to the family level where Islam stresses that “a man is the guardian of his family and he is responsible for them. A woman is the guardian of her husband’s home and his children and she is responsible for them.” (*Al-Bukhari* hadith no. 2558). Islamic law and moral teachings specify the roles and virtues of family members to ensure that families serve their role as pillars of the larger society, where trust is also a defining feature.

A human society can be represented by three key domains; plough, sword and book<sup>18</sup> and in these domains, Islam has ardently underscored trust. At the highest level a ruler is responsible for the welfare of the people as a critical trust, “any ruler over the affairs of the Muslims who does not sincerely and keenly work for their welfare will not enter Paradise with them” (*Muslim*, hadith no. 142 g). The same goes for all public offices as clearly indicated by this narration by the Abu Dharr, “I said to Messenger of Allah: ‘Why do you not appoint me to an (official) position?’ He patted me on the shoulder with his hand and said, ‘O Abu Dharr, you are a weak man and it is a trust and it will be a cause of disgrace and remorse on the Day of Resurrection except for the one who takes it up with a full sense of responsibility and fulfils what is entrusted to him’” (*Muslim* as narrated in *Riyad as-Salihin*, no. 675).<sup>19</sup> Betrayal of trust is thus a cardinal sin that has been strongly condemned by Islam and any material benefits out of such betrayal will be soon turned into loss.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “He who cheats is not one of us” is a famous hadith. And also “There are four signs that make someone a pure hypocrite and whoever has them has a characteristic of hypocrisy until he abandons it: when he speaks he lies, when he makes a covenant he is treacherous, when he makes a promise he breaks it, and when he argues he is wicked” is a famous hadith.

<sup>18</sup> Plough, Sword, and Book: The Structure of Human History is the title of a book by Ernest Gellner.

<sup>19</sup> Another hadith (*Riyad As-Salihin*, no. 1837) stresses this point, "When trust is lost, then wait for the Last Day." It was asked, "How will trust be lost, O Allah's Messenger?" He said, "When authority is given to those who do not deserve it, then wait for the Last Day."

<sup>20</sup> Muslim also narrated that The Prophet (ﷺ) appointed a man from the tribe of Al-Azd, called Ibn 'Utbiyya for collecting the Zakat. When he returned he said, "This (i.e. the Zakat) is for you and this has been given to my as a present." The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Why hadn't he stayed in his father's or mother's house to see whether he would be given presents or not? By Him in Whose Hands my life is, whoever takes something from the resources of the Zakat (unlawfully) will be carrying it on his neck on the Day



In the economic realm, betrayal of trust is similarly condemned as when the Prophet “passed by a man who was selling food. He put his hand in it and saw that there was something wrong with it. The Messenger of Allah said, 'He is not one of us who cheats.’” (*Ibn Majah*, hadith no. 12/88). In fact, the whole Islamic economic and financial system is based on the prohibition of cheating, corruption and unlawful gains.<sup>21</sup> In the realm of the ‘book’ which can cover nowadays the roles of scientists and scholars, in addition to public intellectuals and the media, the same concept of public trust applies. Any Muslim, as mentioned above, is responsible for their knowledge and its consequences. On the positive side, having influential knowledge and the ability to inform public opinion is of such critical importance as indicated by the hadith “...Scholars are the inheritors of the prophets.” (at-Tirmidhi, hadith no. 2682). On the negative side, every word one utters is a grave responsibility as indicated by “and follow not (0 man i.e., say not, or do not or witness not) that of which you have no knowledge. Verily! The hearing, and the sight, and the heart, of each of those one will be questioned (by Allah).”<sup>22</sup> And “not a word does he (or she) utter but there is a watcher by him ready (to record it).”<sup>23</sup> Involvement in the public realm is also governed by the hadith, “If anyone calls others to follow right guidance, his reward will be equivalent to those who follow him (in righteousness) without their reward being diminished in any respect, and if anyone invites others to follow error, his sin will be equivalent to that of the people who follow him (in sinfulness) without their sins being diminished in any respect” (Riyad al-Salihin, hadith no. 174). The trust of public good is taken very seriously in Islam and its consequences can be dire.

In brief, the moral imperative placed on trust by Islam towards all its followers individually or in various social hierarchies is definitive and unavoidable. This should lead, in theory at least, members in a Muslim society to be trusting of each other, not to mention the effect of their

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of Resurrection; if it be a camel, it will be grunting; if a cow, it will be mooing; and if a sheep, it will be bleating." The Prophet then raised his hands till we saw the whiteness of his armpits, and he said thrice, "O Allah! Haven't I conveyed Your Message (to them)?" (*al-Bukhari*, hadith no. 2597)

<sup>21</sup> “May Allah curse one who gives a bribe, one who accepts it and one who acts as an agent between them” and “every piece of flesh that grows by consuming Harām is most deserving of being burnt in hell-fire” and “the honest and trustworthy merchant will be with the prophets, the truthful, and the martyrs” are some of the numerous teachings in this regard.

<sup>22</sup> Quran 17:36

<sup>23</sup> Quran 50:18

shared vision and sense of brotherhood. It is the aim of this paper to examine this thesis by analysing the levels of trust placed by Muslims in Malaysia in various social institutions and to seek to interpret these trust levels through a religious point of view.

**Method**

A study was carried out with the participation of 1544 respondents across Malaysia starting from March 8<sup>th</sup> until April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019. These participants were interviewed face-to-face based on quota sampling, resulting in 789 Bumiputra/Malays, 601 Chinese and 154 Indians. For this study, only answers from the Bumiputra/Malay Muslims are analysed.

*Respondents' Profile*

Some questions of the study revolved around the respondents' demographic profile and below is a summary table of the answers with regard to gender, education and income (Table 1).

Category	Sub Categories	Total (N=1.544) %
Gender	Male	51
	Female	49
Education	Standard 1 to 6	4
	Form 1 to 5	48
	Form Six/Diploma	33
	Degree	124
	DK	
Income	Below RM2000	26
	RM2001 – RM4000	41
	RM4001 – RM6000	24
	Exceeding RM6000	8
	DK	2

(Table 1): Demographic Profile

To ensure a better understanding of the results, the institutions in question were grouped as particularised institutions, general institutions, neutral institutions and political institutions. Particularized institutions include parents, siblings and relatives within one's family. General institutions include religious leaders, community leaders, friends and neighbours. Neutral institutions include teachers, the military, the police, civil service, Malaysian big companies and the judiciary. Political institutions include mass media, parliament, political leaders, Malaysian government and political parties.

The respondents gave their answers with reference to the eighteen institutions on six-point scale: 1. *No Trust at All*; 2. *No Trust*; 3. *Slightly No Trust*; 4. *Low Trust*, 5 *Trust*; or 6. *High Trust*. To grasp the results more clearly, answers on the scale for points 1 to 3 are considered to represent No Trust in the institution, while answers on the scale for points 4-7 are taken to indicate Trust in the institution.<sup>24</sup>

### Findings

It is important to note that the findings of the survey are examined below against the traditional Islamic literature on trust and social relations. This is important because any religion or worldview, religious or otherwise, permeates the perception, values and behaviour of individuals. One can examine the principle of "Inattentional Blindness",<sup>25</sup> as demonstrated by the 'Invisible Gorilla Test' that was devised by Christopher Chabris of Harvard University and Daniel Simons of the University of Illinois to find clear evidence that values influence everything in one's life. Additionally, the realm of religion is wide and deep as can be gleaned from the studies of Ninian Smart who has identified various fields of life that are directly covered by religion such as the doctrinal, ethical, ritual, experiential, institutional, and material dimensions.<sup>26</sup> Religions answer questions such as 'What is? Where does it all come from? Where are we going?' But also covers more plausible aspects such as 'what is good and what is evil? How should we act? What is true and what is false?' These questions and their answers cover wide aspects if

<sup>24</sup> Syed Arabi Idid, Nerawi Sedu & Shafizan Mohamed, *Trusting the Institutions in Malaysia*. Manuscript submitted for publication in the 27th AMIC Annual Conference Theme.

<sup>25</sup> Arien Mack, & Irvin Rock, *Inattentional Blindness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

not all aspects of life epistemologically and axiologically. Furthermore, religion was historically the only, or at least the dominant, source to answer these practical and existential questions for all of mankind. However, religion received strong competition from other worldview such as that of science that slowly displaced it as the ultimate source of reference and value. Yet, in various countries including those in Southeast Asia religion plays an important role in the life of millions of citizens, regardless of their denomination. Looking at the findings of the study from a religious perspective, Islam in the case of this paper, can provide readers and researchers with a better understanding of the concept of trust and its dimensions in a Malaysian context. However, these interpretations and comments offered below are not meant as exclusive explanations for the levels of trust uncovered by the survey for every category of respondents. It is not feasible to categorically prove such correlations, but rather this study offers a possible factor that can play a role when holistically examining all the factors that can influence trust in a society where religion still plays a prominent role or wields considerable influence. The paper also provides a prism to look at the ideal case of trust in a Muslim society and compares that to the levels presented by the survey at hand where in this case one can appreciate the role of 'performance' versus that of 'expectation,' in other words, if the expectations are high and the standards are lofty, then the unfavourable performance can be seen very favourably.

The findings of the survey indicate varying levels of trust that encompass particularised institutions, general institutions, neutral institutions and political institutions. The institutions that have earned the highest levels of trust are the particularized institutions, which are followed in this by the general institutions. Neutral institutions have the third lowest levels of trust overall and are only trailed by political institutions that occupy the bottom rank. Within the particularized institutions, parents enjoy the highest level of trust along with siblings at 92% of respondents. Relatives score a relatively high level at 87% compared to other groups. As for the general institutions, religious leaders hold the highest rank with a level equal to that scored by relatives at 87%. These leaders are followed by friends and neighbours at 78%, while community leaders come last within this group with a 76% score among respondents. Within the third group, neutral institutions, the findings of the study indicate that teachers gain the highest level of trust at 78% followed closely by the military at 77%. The police rank third with an equal trust level to that of

the civil service at 67%. The last three scores within this group belong to local big companies together with mass media at 65% and the judiciary at 63%. Finally, scoring lower than all other groups are political institutions beginning with the parliament at 58%, political leaders at 56%, the federal government at 55% and political parties behind them all at 51%. The results are shown in Table 2 below.

<i>Particularised Institutions:</i>	
Parents	92%
Siblings	92%
Relatives	87%
<i>General Institutions:</i>	
Religious leaders	87%
Community leaders	76%
Friends	78%
Neighbours	78%
<i>Neutral Institutions:</i>	
Teachers	78%
Military	77%
Police	67%
Civil service	67%
Malaysian big companies	65%
Legal and judiciary	63%
Mass media	65%
<i>Political Institutions:</i>	
Parliament	58%
Political leaders	56%
Malaysian government	55%
Political parties	51%

(Table 2): Trust in Malaysian Institutions

The findings of the study indicate that families enjoy the highest level of trust among respondents. As discussed above, the realm of trust in Islam begins with the *amanah* of the individual and expands to reach that of the family as in the famous hadith “a man is the guardian of his family and he is responsible for them. A woman is the guardian of her husband’s home and his children and she is responsible for them.” (*al-Bukhari*, hadith no. 2558). The teachings of the Quran and the example set by the Prophet through his words and actions identify the roles to be played by each member of the family. The roles are well-defined, and the ethical environment prescribed by Islam for the family is based on values and virtues that are overtly moral and righteous.

However, the stance of Islam on family relations is deeper than that, which might offer a partial explanation of the high score of families in the measurement of trust in this study. The relationships among family members in Islam are firstly governed by *fitrah* before being directed by moral enjoinders. *Fitrah* in Islamic literature, according to Leaman and Ali, is “the immutable natural predisposition for good, innate in every human being from birth... The term *fitrah* designates the human being’s essential nature, moral constitution, and original disposition. *Fitrah*, as the primordial nature of the individual, aims at perfection. Islam is held to be *din al-fitrah*... *Fitrah* is in tune with the nature of creation itself, and the role of humanity within creation.”<sup>27</sup> Being caring and concerned about one’s family is part of the *fitrah* that God has created within people. Thus Aisha reported that “a bedouin came to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and said, ‘You kiss the children? We do not kiss them.’ The Prophet said, ‘I cannot put mercy into your heart if Allah has removed it from you.’” Accordingly, the love one feels for one’s family can be seen as part of the mercy primordially imprinted in the hearts of humans. Also, Islamic texts repeatedly describe the strong bond among Muslims to be similar to the bonds of familiar brotherhood. The trust, *amanah* and responsibility in Muslim families begin with the strong affective bonds between family members and build on them. This trust, in its essence, is not transactional but rather part of human nature and God’s creation. The high scores of families in the survey indicate that these bonds and affective relations are strong and are close to the Islamic ideals practiced over generations.

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<sup>27</sup> Oliver Leaman and Kecia Ali, *Islam the Key Concepts* (Routledge: New York, 2008), p. 40.

As for the second category, the scores for community leaders at 76% and for friends and neighbours at 78% are relatively high; however, given the religious stress on these sets of societal bonds, the scores are not as high as the expectations of the Islamic ideals. As for neighbours, this is highlighted by the context and text of this hadith, narrated by Anas ibn Malik that “the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “The believer is one who is trusted by people... By the one in whose hand is my soul, a servant will not enter Paradise if his neighbour is not secure from his harm” (*Ibn Hibban*, hadith no. 515). In a context stressing trust and safety, neighbours are expected to be a source of security and reliance to each other. Proactive care and assistance for one’s neighbours are evident in the hadith, “he does not have faith in me who spends the night satiated while he knows that the neighbour to his side is hungry” (*al-Tabarani*, hadith no. 751). Here, it seems faith is negated if one is not actively caring for their neighbours, and the negation of faith is never a simple matter in Islam, and the importance of such relations is further underscored. This is in line with the Islamic teachings about friends as Abu Huraira has reported that “the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, ‘A man is upon the religion of his best friend, so let one of you look at whom he befriends’” (*Abu Dawud*, hadith no. 4833) and ‘Amr ibn ‘Abasah reported that “the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, ‘Allah Almighty said: My love is a right upon those who befriend each other for my sake. My love is a right upon those who defend each other for my sake’” (*al-Tabarani*, hadith no. 1092). Islam encourages friends to be a source of security and trust for each other and it also acknowledges the strong impact and effects of friendship and urges these to be for the good. Similarly, the Islamic guidance for community leaders and social influencers is exemplary and emphatic. The hadith in this regard is well-known, “whoever calls others to guidance will have a reward similar to those who follow him, without detracting from their reward at all. Whoever calls people to misguidance will have the burden of sin similar to those who follow him, without detracting from their burden at all” (*Muslim*, hadith no. 2674). Religious leaders are forcefully reminded of the gravity of their role in the society to guide people and to work to improve their conditions in whatever capacity that may be possible. Yet, the relatively lower scores given to some of these groups (neighbours, friends, and community leaders) compared to that, for example, of religious leaders at 87% can be explained by at least two factors; first is that people are not reliant or in frequent interaction with these groups and thus they are not confident as to whether to trust them

or not, and second is that the performance of these groups in their roles as leaders, neighbours or friends is not actually up to the expectations or ideals of the society. On the other hand, religious leaders fare better in the survey and that can indicate that their role has not receded in the society although the overall trend around the world is that of secularization, leading to the gradual decline of the role of religion in public and domestic lives.<sup>28</sup> Another point to make is that the performance of these religious leaders can be satisfactory to their followers. Islamic literature has indicated that scholars should be worthy of respect as in the Qur'anic verse, "Allah will exalt in degree those of you who believe, and those who have been granted knowledge."<sup>29</sup> And in the hadith, "if Allah intends goodness for someone, He gives him understanding of the religion" (*al-Bukhari, hadith no. 71*). It seems that religious leaders remain influential and trusted according to this perspective based on the results of the survey.

As for the third category, neutral institutions, that includes the all-important branches of the government such as the police, the judiciary and the civil service, its constituents have fared quite badly with long established institutions scoring relatively low such as the judiciary at 63% and the police and civil servants at 67%. The Islamic teachings in this regard clearly warns people with executive authority to be aware of the dire consequences of mishandling or neglecting their trust, as all these trusts fall under the general hadith, "all of you are guardians and are responsible for your wards" (*al-Bukhari, hadith no. 2558*). Thus, people in charge of financial affairs are reminded that "the unjust tax collector will not enter Paradise" (*Abu Dawud, hadith no. 2937*) and the judiciary is reminded that "judges are of three types, one of whom will go to Paradise and two to Hell. The one who will go to Paradise is a man who knows what is right and gives judgment accordingly; but a man who knows what is right and acts tyrannically in his judgment will go to Hell; and a man who gives judgment for people when he is ignorant will go to Hell" (*Abu Dawud, hadith no. 3573*). There are many Prophetic sayings about good governance in Islam that address the tendency to undertake public responsibilities lightly. Thus, the hadith counsels that "you people will be keen to have the authority of ruling which will be a thing of regret for you on the Day of Resurrection." (*al-Bukhari, hadith no. 7148*). The re-

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<sup>28</sup> Pippa Norris, Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), P3-32.

<sup>29</sup> Quran 58:11.



spondents in this survey have high expectations of this group, and Islamic traditions do have the same expectations. Thus, any uncertainty about the performance of any of its institutions can be reflected in the reduction of trust level towards these institutions. The importance of this group for modern governance and for the effective functioning of the contemporary society and state can only serve to highlight this.

With the final category, political institutions, the survey presented the lowest levels of trust as the Parliament achieved 58%, political leaders received 56%, and the Malaysian government overall got 55% and political parties obtained 51%. These are the lowest levels of trust uncovered by the survey, with almost half the respondents stating their lack of trust in the government and in political institutions. In Islam, rulers and leaders are guardians who are expected to exert every effort for the welfare of their people, “the Imam (ruler) of the people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects” and “any man whom Allah has given the authority of ruling some people and he does not look after them in an honest manner, will never feel even the smell of Paradise” (*al-Bukhari*, hadith no. 7150). Yet, the temptations and difficulties that come with offices of leadership are recognized by Islam as the Prophet said, “Allah never sends a prophet or gives the caliphate to a caliph but that he (the prophet or the caliph) has two groups of advisors: A group advising him to do good and exhorts him to do it, and the other group advising him to do evil and exhorts him to do it. But the protected person (against such evil advisors) is the one protected by Allah” (*al-Bukhari*, hadith no. 7198). These perils, responsibilities and expectations that come with positions of authority necessitate the highest levels of performance in carrying these political roles. Any deviation will potentially lead to a drop in the trust levels of voters and citizens. If levels of trust are low, the Islamic literature advises leaders to properly fulfil their obligations<sup>30</sup> and people to sincerely assist in reform as the Prophet said, “‘religion is sincere advice.’ They said; ‘To whom, O Messenger of Allah?’ He said: ‘To Allah, to His Book, to His Messenger, to the imams of the Muslims and to their common folk’” (no. 7 in the *Forty Hadith Nawawi*).

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<sup>30</sup> Abu Dharr said: I said to the Prophet (ﷺ): Messenger of Allah, will you not appoint me to a public office? He stroked my shoulder with his hand and said: ‘Abu Dharr, thou art weak and authority is a trust. and on the Day of judgment it is a cause of humiliation and repentance except for one who fulfils its obligations and (properly) discharges the duties attendant thereon’ (*Riyad as-Salihin*, no. 675).

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated the levels of trust towards numerous social, public and governmental institutions in Malaysia. These levels were examined from an Islamic perspective against the well-established literature (Qur'anic verses and Prophetic hadiths) in this regard. The study showed that the moral imperative on trust in Islam is definitive and unavoidable towards all Muslims in their individual capacity as servants of God or in their various social hierarchies as vicegerents on earth. Based on this, some levels of trust towards certain institutions among Malaysian Muslims reflect the Islamic ideals of a Muslim community. However, the Islamic standards demand better outcomes from some institutions that are not highly trusted by the Muslim respondents.

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