

# *Zakat* Restrictions: Religious, Social, Institutional, and Political. Case Study: Qatar

Ola Mahmood Alkahlout<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Visiting Research Fellow, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, United Kingdom

Correspondence: Ola Mahmood Alkahlout, Visiting Research Fellow, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, United Kingdom.

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## Abstract

Since the early of Islam, *zakat* - compulsory Islamic almsgiving - has received widespread interest in religious, social, institutional as well as political fields. *Zakat* distribution, theoretically, comes in the form of providing eight beneficiaries through projects of religious, educational, and medical foundations, provision of military weapons, and so on. However, the annual estimates of *zakat* indicate that *zakat* is exposed to factors that restrict its mechanism (collections and distributions). A combination of the theoretical frameworks of the sociology of religion/Islam and political sociology helps to discover and understand these factors. The quantitative method in this research through the interviews conducted with Muslim scholars, charitable organisations' staff, and Qatari Muslims (citizens and residents), show that *zakat* distribution is affected by Muslim scholars' interpretations of 'for the cause of Allah' *zakat* beneficiary, the behaviour of *zakat* payers in paying individually and conditional *zakat* projects, Qatar's tribal culture (citizens), family bonding (residents), the behaviour of charitable organisations in promoting specific projects, and interests of the Qatari state. Furthermore, most participants agreed that the purpose of *zakat* is to support the less fortunate, rather than personal interests, conflicts, or wars. Any defect in *zakat* applications is considered a significant loss, especially since the world witnessed a rise in *zakat* beneficiaries such as the poor and refugees, whether they result from natural or war disasters.

**Keywords:** charitable organisations, for the cause of *Allah*, Muslim scholars, restrictions, Qatari cultures, *zakat*

## 1. Introduction

*Zakat* – compulsory Islamic almsgiving – gave a wide attention to helping the eight *zakat* beneficiaries, such as the 'poor', and 'for the cause of *Allah*'. The Qur'an and *Hadith* are the official sources which refer to the obligation of paying *zakat*. The Qur'an says:

Keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, and bow your heads [in worship] with those who bow theirs ('The Cow' *Al-Baqara*, 2:43)

Prophet Muhammad also stressed that *zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam in his *Hadith*:

Verily, al-Islam is founded on five (pillars): testifying the fact that there is no god but *Allah*, establishment of prayer, payment of *zakat*, fast of Ramadan, and Pilgrimage to the House [Mecca] (*Sahih Muslim* Book 1: *Hadith* 21).

The instructions from both Quran and *Hadith* are observed by the majority of Muslims (individuals and groups, such as families) who believe in *zakat* and are keen to pay *zakat* every Islamic year. However, it is not easy to generalise people's behaviour because they are different in their feelings and emotions (Babbie, 2015). Additionally, (Alkahlout, 2021) maintains that religious influences, social behaviour, and personal convictions also have an influence on *zakat* mechanism (collections and distributions). The bodies which are responsible for dealing with *zakat* in the twenty-first century are: individuals; faith centres, such as mosques and charitable organisations (government and non-government); independent collection and delivery agencies; and government-collected *zakat* in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, Pakistan, Malaysia and Libya (Stirk, 2015). Interests of the stakeholders may have led to restricting *zakat*'s application be it religious, social, institutional or political related. Dr Ali Al-Qaradaghi, Secretary-General of the International Union of Muslim Scholars confirms that the expected annual revenues of *zakat* in 2018 were 400 billion dollars in the world, but what is collected from *zakat* through charitable organisations and some businessmen is much less than this number (Al-Araby,

2018). Furthermore, World Bank and the Islamic Research and Training Institute (IRTI) of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) estimated global *zakat* funds reached \$550 billion to \$600 billion per year, but *zakat* institutions only managed \$10 billion to \$15 billion per year (Widadio, 2019). Qatar, on the same line, is difficult to calculate *zakat* funds. Dawam (2013) says the expectation of *zakat* in Qatar is billions but what was collected was millions. Furthermore, *zakat* statistics became more difficult after the blockade of Qatar, especially following its accusation of financing terrorism (Chughtai, 2020). Qatar is a wealthy, multicultural country (citizens and residents) with an Islamic identity (Fromherz, 2017; Hukoomi, 2023). Therefore, wealth, following the teachings of Islam, demographic diversity, in addition to unstable political situation in the region, all contribute to provide the perfect opportunity to discuss the factors that affect the mechanism of *zakat* in Qatar society.

This article aims to investigate the restrictions of *zakat* in the Qatari society in two dimensions:

- (i) Religious *zakat* within Muslim scholars' interpretations of the 'for the cause of *Allah*' beneficiary, and
- (ii) Social *zakat* in the Qatari society through: (a) individual *zakat* payment and conditional *zakat* projects; (b) the impact Qatari cultures (tribal culture for citizens and family bonding for residents); (c) charitable organisations' behaviour (governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGO)) in promoting specific projects; (d) political influence through the interests of the Qatari state.

The data shared in this paper is derived from semi-structured interviews that I conducted with 32 Qatari participants ranging between Muslim scholars, staff members from different charitable organisations, and Qatari Muslim citizens and residents.

## 2. The Third Pillar of Islam: *Zakat* in the Qatari Society

*Zakat* in *Shari'ah* (Islamic religious law) refers to a certain share of wealth prescribed by *Allah* to be given to specific beneficiaries (Al-Mawardi, 1994). *Zakat* has two parties: the 'payer' who pays the *zakat*, and the 'beneficiary', who receives the *zakat* fund. The 'beneficiary' receives *zakat* funds either in cash, in kind, or through projects implemented by charitable organisations (Al-Ghufaili, 2008). *Zakat* is equivalent to 2.5 % of one's wealth, and it is obligatory on every Muslim (men and women), when the person's wealth reaches quorum (Al-Qaradawi, 2006). The eight of beneficiaries are mentioned in the Quran in 'Repentance', *At-Tauba*, 9:60, and they are clarified by Al Qaradawi (2006) as follows:

The poor	The emancipation of slaves
The needy	People in debt
Workers in <i>zakat</i> administration	For the cause of <i>Allah</i>
Reconciliation of hearts (to Islam)	Stranded travellers

There are many charitable projects supported by the interpretations of the eight beneficiaries of *zakat*, such as: orphans, prisoners and their families, unemployed and homeless people, students who cannot afford to marry, disaster victims, establish factories, real-estate, commercial enterprises for the poor, people living in countries disrupted by high levels of national debt, building mosques, religious foundations, schools, charitable trusts, hospitals, and social projects, emergency relief programmes worldwide, workshops, refugees, and defending Muslims and Islamic conquests through *jihad* (a holy war waged on behalf of Islam as a religious duty), (Ibn Qudamah, 1968; Al-Qaradawi, 2006). Nowadays, charitable organisations (governmental and non-governmental) are among the most important bodies that implement these projects (Stirk, 2015). For example, *Zakat* Fund, Qatari government organisation distributes seasonal aid for the "Basket of Good" project, with an amount of (10,617,700) Qatari riyals (Al-Arab, 2020). Eid Charity, for example, care for widows and orphans, building schools, hospitals, mosques, and centres for memorising the Qur'an, which contribute to alleviating the suffering of some poor Qatari families.

However, *zakat* cannot be resolved in a cohesive pattern or framework of interpretations, despite Islam's four sources of jurisprudence: al-Qur'an, al-*Hadith*, *Ijma'* (consensus), and *Qiyas Ulama* (analogical deduction) (Qasim, 1995). The reasons go back to several factors including: (i) the different interpretations of the Qur'an between *Sunnah* and *Shi'ah* scholars; (ii) the difference between the branches of Islam and various schools of religious thought such as *Hanafi* and *Hanbali*; (iii) the differences between traditional and modern opinions of jurisprudence concerning *zakat*'s mechanism according to the changing times; (iv) individual interpretations; and (v) diversity of Islamic societies (Alkahlout, 2021). The beneficiary 'for the cause of *Allah*' (*Fi Sabilillah*), for instance, is subject to different readings and various interpretations, as it is not only used to refer to finance legitimate causes, but also wars and conflicts. According to Muslim scholars Ibn Qudamah (1968) and

Al-Qaradawi (2006), 'for the cause of *Allah*' beneficiary interpretations include: *hajj* (pilgrimage), and the *umrah* (a shorter version of the annual *hajj*). Modern interpretations, on the other hand, extend the application of this beneficiary to building mosques, religious foundations of education, schools, hospitals, and raising awareness of Islam through *zakat* funds. Furthermore, interpretations of "for the cause of *Allah*" beneficiary allow conflicts, as well as the provision of military weapons and combatants.

Muslim scholars explain the concept of *jihad* as a believer's internal struggle to live out the Muslim faith as best as possible; the struggle to build a good Muslim society; and a holy war to defend Islam, with force if necessary (Ibn Qudamah, 1968; Al-Qaradawi, 2006). The Qur'an says:

So go out, no matter whether you are lightly or heavily armed, and struggle in God's way with your possessions and your persons: this is better for you, if you only knew ('Repentance', *At-Tauba*, 9:41)

This understanding of *jihad* which allows the financing of military operations also opened the door to the restriction of *zakat* through its politicisation by both individuals and governments. The role of Muslim scholars and jurists becomes important here in terms of educating Muslims about the interpretations of the meaning of *jihad*. The primary mission of Muslim scholars and jurists is to raise awareness of the tenets of Islam, including encouraging Muslims to pay *zakat*. However, scholars and jurists also have their personal preferences: each Muslim scholar and jurist has his or her own background and different affiliations. Ibn Al-Baz, for instance, one of Saudi's Muslim scholars, urged *jihad* against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in 1979-1989. He called for support to fight against the invasion of the Soviet's Red Army, whether through physical engagement, money, or both (BinBaz, 1989), considering that Afghanistan is a Muslim-majority society compared to the non-Muslim Soviet Union (Bell, 2002). Some Muslim scholars, nowadays, have also encouraged *jihad* in Syria. For instance, Al-Qaradawi, on his official website, endorsed the *jihad* in Syria and Iran through both financial and physical means against the ruling regime and its supporters (Al-Qaradawi, 2013). In this sense, *zakat* has moved away from the religious and spiritual purpose of serving the community and has become an incentive to fight among some Muslims. This does not mean that by using the term fighting 'for the cause of *Allah*' beneficiary Muslims support the use of *zakat* for wars between Muslims and non-Muslims. The essence and religious purpose of *zakat* is to help needy Muslims, rather than encouraging them to engage in conflicts against each other in the name of religion.

Historically, *zakat* has been restricted since the inception of Islam. The first caliph, Abu Bakr (573-634 A.D.), a senior companion, who ruled the Rashidun Caliphate following the death of the Prophet, declared war on Muslims who rejected to pay *zakat*, which is known as the 'Ridda Wars' (Hossain, 2012). Therefore, governments (Islamic states) remained responsible for the *zakat's* mechanism until the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1922 (Al-Ghufaili, 2008). The state was therefore responsible for the collection of *zakat* and its distribution to beneficiaries according to the eight categories. *Zakat* subsequently became individually practised after the fall of the Empire, not only in Qatar, but in most Muslim-majority countries, except Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, Pakistan, Malaysia and Libya, where *zakat* is collected through people's bank accounts (Jalali & Alami, 1990).

Reda (1947) explains that Muslim scholars have agreed that the state has the right to collect and distribute *zakat*, as long as it is spent in the interest of society such as on the poor and needy or protecting their citizens from external threats. *Zakat*, therefore, becomes politicised as soon as its management comes under government jurisdiction, which may not always be in accordance with religious paths.

Social factors also have a role in the *zakat* payer's behaviour: on the biological, psychological, socio-cultural, and environmental behaviour of human beings (Kangai, 2012). Strombach et al. (2014) add that individual decisions almost always have some kind of connection to a social environment. This means that the structure of a society, including tribal community and civil society, may have an effect on *zakat's* mechanism. Qatar, as the case study in this research, embraces a variety of cultures, such as the tribal culture<sup>1</sup> of its citizens and the diverse culture of its residents which extends from their home countries such as Egypt, India and so on (Fromherz, 2017).

Qatar is located in the Middle East, and its population reached 2,985,029 in 2022 with residents in the majority (Planning and Statistics Authority, 2022). Qatar's gas, oil, and political activity gave it the strength to be one of

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<sup>1</sup> The tribal culture is widespread in the Persian Gulf, including Qatar. Each tribe has a leader who rules it and manages its affairs in consultation with the members of the tribe. The tribe has a designated place for meetings called the Majlis- the council. In the council, the tribe's affair is discussed, including *zakat*. Tribe members must give loyalty and obedience to the leader (Fromherz, 2017).

the highest-income (GDP) countries in the world (Tok et al., 2016). Wealth, high income, being a religious society, and government laws that follow Islamic law, all of which contribute to creating a dynamic environment for *zakat* in the Qatari society. This was evident from the activity of humanitarian campaigns such as China in 2008, Haiti and Chile in 2010, Aleppo in 2016, and the campaign 'for the Human' in 2019. The Aleppo campaign alone reached USD 67 million in 2016 (Al-Araby, 2016). This explains the active state of charitable organisations in Qatari society, where the offices of these organisations are found in malls, streets, and mosques.

Kareem (2017) mentions that Qatari Muslims (citizens and residents) deal with their *zakat* individually, through *Zakat Fund* (government organisation), or through NGO. Interviews conducted for this research confirmed Kareem's statement and revealed a further fourth method of fulfilling *zakat*, which is through family. The methods used by the Qataris for the distribution of their *zakat* have restrictions that may be acceptable but should not be overlooked because it affects the mechanism of *zakat*.

### 3. Data, Methods, and Theoretical Framework

This research followed qualitative methods, which is widely used to understand and explore social phenomena and generates theories in which human beings are one of the targets (Ansari et al., 2016). Morgan (2014: 49) mentions that, 'in Qualitative Research, the subjective purposes aimed at meaning and interpretation also involves close, personal contacts that use the researcher as the "instrument" for recording observations'. I adopted one-to-one semi-structured interviews due to the sensitivity of some questions relating to politics or freedom of opinion in the practice of religion. I carefully considered ethical issues in this research and followed established guidelines by Coventry University. The research was guided by ethical considerations such as a participant information sheet, informed consent, and awareness of potential risks to the researcher and respondents. To respect the confidentiality of participants, they were given pseudonyms.

The data collection was drawn from 32 interviews with consenting participants in Qatar: three Muslim scholars, four staff members from different charitable organisations, 25 Qatari Muslims (9 citizens, and 16 Qatari residents).

The focus of this article is twofold: the dynamics between *zakat*, power, and influence, underpinned by political sociology; and sociology of religion, particularly of Islam according to the behaviour of Qatari Muslim citizens and residents who believe in Islamic teachings, and how they deal with *zakat* within their societies. Coser (1967, p. 2-3) explains the relationship between politics and society as 'while political science had concentrated mainly on the specifically political sphere, political sociology claimed that to understand the political process fully one had to relate politics to the entire social structure'. Sociology of Islam within Islamic society is defined as 'consisting of a number of people in every place and at every time who are united by Islamic belief and Divine Law, which regulate their relationships and their activities for the continuity and improvement of the society' (Saleh & Baqutayan, 2012, p. 114). A combination of the theoretical frameworks of sociology of Islam, and political sociology helps to discover and understand the relationship of the behaviour of Qatari individuals, charitable organisations, Muslims scholars, Qatari government towards the mechanism of *zakat*.

### 4. First Dimension: *Zakat* Restrictions through Muslim Scholars' interpretations of 'For the cause of *Allah*' Beneficiary

Islamic teachings and jurisprudence are important factors in Qatari society. Kareema, a charity staff member, said, 'Qatari society is highly influenced by its religious scholars'. The *Mufti* or jurisprudence scholar's roles are not limited to issuing *fatwa* or religious rulings about *zakat*, but also extend to participation in encouraging Muslims to pay *zakat*. *Fatwas* and religious discourse occupy television, radio, and social networking sites. Therefore, opinions of participants were influenced by Muslim scholars' interpretations, whether scholars are in Qatar or overseas.

Muslim scholars in Qatar confirmed that *zakat* from Qatar is not used to facilitate warfare. Moustafa, Qatari Muslim scholar, said:

I do not encourage paying *zakat* in order to finance wars. But this does not preclude that some Muslim scholars have their own policy in this regard.

Rabee, Qatari Muslim scholar, added:

The State of Qatar prohibits any scholar or mufti in Qatar with a permit to pay *zakat* in order to finance wars. It is a law, and it punishes the perpetrator.

The majority of participants in this research also agreed that the purpose of *zakat* is to support the less fortunate, rather than conflicts and wars. Ahmed, male Qatari citizen, said:

We cannot take it any longer - everything is bought and sold in the name of religion. I cannot pay my *zakat* for wars. There are beneficiaries [such as] the poor and needy [who] have priority over killing.

Fears of a war between Qatar and the blockading countries were expressed by the participants in this research. Maha, female Qatari citizen, said:

In the early months of the siege, we expected anything to happen, like war. I thank *Allah* that it did not happen, and the siege is over.

Mahyoud, male Qatari citizen, added:

We were shocked by the siege from our brothers in religion, Arab nationalism, and the Gulf Cooperation Council. I was very afraid for my children.

Both nations (Qatar and Saudi Arabia) can be considered to have an abundance of wealth (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, 2021), and perhaps neither require *zakat* to finance a prospective war. However, the use of the *jihadi*s' religious image in war will align public opinion with the government, whether it be Saudi Arabia or Qatar. Although there was no armed conflict between Qatar and the blockaded countries this doesn't deny that it exists in the region, such as the war between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, and the Syrian civil war between the government – backed by Russia and Iran – and anti-government rebel groups – backed by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and others (Hammad, 2022). Muslim scholars are able to convince people that the collection and distribution of *zakat* according to certain interpretations of *jihad* could support the fighting in Syria and Yemen, as well as the besiegement of Qatar, despite the fact that the parties are Muslim. *Zakat*, in this case, may either have a religious meaning, or encourage religious circumvention by scholars, jurists, and even governments in their attempts to observe *jihad*. The result has restricted *zakat* through Muslim scholars' interpretations of how 'for the cause of *Allah*' beneficiary contributes to encouraging Muslims to pay *zakat* for military purposes.

The Qataris desire to pay *zakat* individually with regard to *jihad* was not easy to discuss in Qatar society as it is a purely political matter, especially since it was one of the reasons that caused the blockade on Qatar (Chughtai, 2020). Nonetheless, participants shared their opinions regarding their supporting of *jihad*, in places agreed upon by the Islamic public opinion, such as Palestine or Burma. Samer, male Qatari resident, said:

I have no objection to paying *zakat* to stand by our Muslim brothers and sisters in defending themselves, as is the case in Palestine.

Additionally, participants, both residents and citizens, agreed to support their country through the means of *zakat* in the event of warfare under interpretations of *jihad*. Ahmed, male Qatari citizen, stated, 'if my country, Qatar, needs my *zakat*, I will not delay sending it, regardless of who is the enemy'. Nour, female Qatari resident, said: 'I send my *zakat* and my money to my country, Yemen, to defend it. I do not care if the other part is Muslim or not'. In these cases, *zakat* can be misconstrued to ignite war, which deviates from its purpose to fulfil religious goals like promoting peace. The religious goal of Islam is to spread love, to help others, and to perform charitable work to strengthen the society. Fighting, however, destroys the core meaning of Islam, that is peace and the universal unity of the Islamic community through *zakat* among other things. Heba, female Qatari resident, said:

Muslim scholars should spread awareness about peace and mercy [fostered by] the Islamic religion, and not pay *zakat* for wars.

Heba and other participants want peace to prevail in the world, despite the wars between countries, and the conflicts between Muslims themselves and Muslims and non-Muslims. The 'Vast International Participation in 14th Doha Conference For Interfaith Dialogue' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA], 2022), focused on the theme of 'Religions and Hate Speech... Scriptures and Practice'. Prominent figures, both religious and non-religious, were drawn from different parts of the world. Muslim and non-Muslim, Qatari and non-Qatari participants agreed that hate speech by leaders and influencers, for instance, should be condemned, including the prejudice shown by Muslim scholars. There are factors besides religion, however, which push Qatari society to politicise *zakat*, such as Qatari culture and the Qatari government's interference in the *zakat* process.

##### **5. Second Dimension: Restricted *Zakat* through Methods of Paying *Zakat* in the Qatari Society**

My research adds up to Kareem's conclusion that there are three ways the Qataris follow in dealing with *Zakat*: individually, through *Zakat* Fund, or through NGOs (2017). It reveals that family is another way of managing *zakat*, whether through the families of citizens or the families of residents by family bonding. The discussion of this section will focus on investigating the restriction of *zakat* in the Qatari society through (i) the behaviour of *zakat* payers in paying individually and conditional *zakat* projects, (ii) Qatar's tribal culture (citizens), family

bonding (residents), (iii) the behaviour of charitable organisations in promoting specific projects, and (iv) the interests of the Qatar state.

### 5.1 First Restriction through the Behaviour of Zakat Payers: Paying Individually and Conditional Zakat Projects

The majority of the participants in this research expressed their support for distributing *zakat* as an individual act in Qatar; individual practice here means that the payer of *zakat* gives to the beneficiary directly, rather than through intermediaries. Abeer, female Qatari citizen, said:

‘I give my *zakat* to the poor and needy in the area. I like to do this work myself in order to earn the reward from *Allah*’.

An influencing factor in why participants opted to pay *zakat* in the absence of intermediaries was religion. The Qur’an says:

If you give charity openly, it is good, but if you keep it secret and give to the needy in private, that is better for you, and it will atone for some of your bad deeds: God is well aware of all that you do. (‘The Cow’ *Al-Baqara*, 2:43)

Seeking reward from *Allah* motivates Muslims (not only in Qatar) to pay *zakat* individually. Socially, Muslim scholars such as Ibn Qudamah, Al-Qaradawi, and Al-Mawardi, explained that this behaviour not only preserves the dignity of the benefactor and the beneficiary, but also strengthens the relationship between the two parties (payers and beneficiaries). However, paying *zakat* individually causes problems to the religious awareness of *zakat*, the work of charitable organisations, and interests of the Qatar state. Religious awareness of *zakat* will be based on individual religious knowledge of the conditions and applications of *zakat*. Here the *zakat* payer derives religious knowledge through academic education (schools and universities) and Muslim scholars. The final decision of the *zakat* payer is according to his/her personal convictions. Abdel Salaam did not support individual distribution of *zakat*. He said:

I reject this completely, because we do not know exactly who is in need. If he is someone close to me, I pay him alms and *zakat*, but to [the] others [whom] I do not know, I do not pay.

Yassen, a charity staff member, also said ‘some Qataris calculate *zakat* according to their personal estimates. Many of them make mistakes’. This means *zakat* applications become blurry to the payer. Thus, *zakat* does not reach the required religious form for the beneficiaries. The charitable organisations will also suffer financially from individually distributed *zakat*. Hosa, a charity staff member, said:

Individual *zakat* affects the work of the organisation. We cannot predict *zakat* statistics for future projects.

Banks (2018) states that it is important to know the financial value of institutions in order to develop them. *Zakat* is a financial institution, and therefore, it is important to be able to determine individual *zakat* funding in order to evaluate and prioritise projects that serve *zakat* beneficiaries rather than armed conflicts. However, Qataris choose to pay their *zakat* to individual recipients as a private (confidential) transaction, to ensure that the full amount of *zakat* reaches the beneficiaries, rather than only a portion where part of the *zakat* is taken for management and organisations' expenses.

The state is unable to follow the destination of these private transactions between the giver and the beneficiary, in order to preserve its identity and sovereignty. Saif, male Qatari citizen, said:

The distribution of *zakat* (individually or through organisations) inside and outside Qatar represents the State of Qatar. *Zakat* should be monitored for fear that it would conflict with state policy.

The individual distribution practice places Qatar in a difficult position; for example, supporting *jihad* in Palestine, Syria, and Iraq is seen as an endorsement of terrorism by the international community, especially since Qatar is working hard to cooperate in spreading peace through channels such as the ‘Vast International Participation in 14th Doha Conference For Interfaith Dialogue’ (MFA, 2022). When the stricken society receives *zakat* from Qatar to support military operations with arms and ammunition or fighters, it makes the State of Qatar appear to be complicit in terrorist acts. However, those engaged in the fighting believe they are rightfully defending their countries from a perceived enemy according to *jihad*. Using *zakat* funds from individual sources for this purpose is therefore justified. Qatar is aware of the source of *zakat* but also concerned about its destination. This concern provided the green light for Qatar to work on monitoring donations, including *zakat*.

Another way of restriction of *zakat* is through the behaviour of *zakat* payers in conditional *zakat* projects. The restriction on *zakat* projects when the *zakat* payers specify where their *zakat* should go. This also places a form of restriction on people who are responsible for meeting these requirements in the recipient countries; on the other hand, sometimes these countries do not need the ‘conditional’ projects. Yassen, a charity staff member,

gave an example:

In Sudan, they are in need of agricultural projects such as opening up land for planting, but the money sent is used to build mosques. The other side of the coin is that, countries in crisis or in need are ‘shocked’ by donors’ desires.

Amal, female Qatari resident, agreed, and said:

Each country has its own case; for example, in Palestine, we find a lot of orphans. Thus, the beneficiaries must be distributed according to [particular needs of] countries.

This would suit the *zakat* beneficiaries far more than following *zakat* payers’ desires. According to the majority of Muslim scholars such as Al-Qaradawi (2006), the interpretation of the two verses (*Az-Zariyat* 51:19) and (*Al-Ma'arif* 70: 24-25) gives the poor the right to the money of the rich, or, the *zakat* of the rich is the money of the poor. This suggests that rich people do not have the right to put restrictions or conditions on where their *zakat* money is spent, because it is not their money in the first place, but entrusted to them in order to pay the poor.

### 5.2 Second Zakat Restriction Through Qatar’s Cultures (Tribal Culture and Family Bonding)

The meaning of paying *zakat* with the family has another restriction dimension in Qatari society, whether it is through the families of Qatari citizens or residents. The majority of the interviewees - Qatari citizens and charitable organisation employees - stressed that the Qatari tribal culture has the strongest influence on the distribution of *zakat* in a Qatari family. Fraida, female Qatari citizen, agreed, stating that ‘in *majalis* [councils], *zakat* funds are collected to be distributed in the name of the family’. Fawze, Moutlaq, and Mahyoup, male Qatari citizens, agreed with Fraida. Fawze added:

We inherited the payment of *zakat* to the chief of the tribe every year. We don't need to follow up.

However, Mohsen, male Qatari citizen, disagreed and he said:

Sometimes I do not like the way *zakat* is distributed. The family leader distributes it according to his personal convictions. So, I pay my *zakat* again individually.

The family leader has the upper hand and makes the final decision regarding the distribution of *zakat*. Qatari family projects serve the beneficiaries of *zakat* although they have an authoritarian element. This authoritarian element restricts *zakat*, through the microcosm of a family. A Qatari family’s *zakat* distribution depends upon the personal convictions of the tribal leader. This explains the desire of some Qataris to distribute *zakat* individually.

According to residents, the bond between them and their families residing in their countries of origin is also another facet of familial authoritarianism. Jordanian residents, for example, sympathised more with their own country than with the country in which they worked. Salah, male Qatari resident, said, ‘I have sent my *zakat* every year to my relative in Jordan’. Tharout, female Qatari resident, added, ‘every year my dad asks me to send my *zakat* to him’. This shows a kind of family loyalty and solidarity between residents and their families; on the other hand, family bonding does not allow individual decision-making or choices. This suggests that national affiliation in the direction of *zakat* is another aspect of its restrictions.

The majority of Qataris (citizens and residents) are inclined to pay their *zakat* to their families, regardless of where they live. The problems caused to the state and charitable organisations by the individual distribution of *zakat* are similar to paying *zakat* through the family. This presents a complication to Qatar in its *zakat* organisation. Charitable organisations will also suffer if families opt to distribute their *zakat* independently. Additionally, family authoritarianism, by way of making *zakat* givers dependent on their family head, will diminish a giver’s awareness of *zakat* as the third pillar of Islam. (Alkahlout, 2021) confirms this through finding that a Qatari’s awareness of *zakat* diminishes when more challenging questions were asked of them. Though family bonding is a socially desirable behaviour, it should not be fulfilled at the expense of the religious awareness of Qataris regarding *zakat*. Though this blind form of trust ensures *zakat* continues to be paid, it leads to a *zakat* being paid unconsciously.

The other way of distributing *zakat* in the Qatari society is through *Zakat* Fund and NGOs, such as Red Crescent and Qatar Charity (Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities [RACA], 2022a). The work of governmental institutes and NGOs has been considerable in Qatari society, which can be clearly seen through the relationship between these organisations and the Qatari behaviour when paying *zakat*.

### 5.3 Third Restriction Zakat through the Behaviour of Charitable Organisations in Promoting Specific Projects

Qatari citizens and residents expressed their confidence in the Qatari charities such as *Zakat* Fund and Qatar Charity and Qatar Red Crescent. Mai, female Qatari resident, said:

I do not mind giving my *zakat* to Qatar charities. They work hardly and I trust them.

According to Hukoomi (2018), ‘The majority of the beneficiaries of the fund are of limited income, but the *Zakat* Fund also provides aid, training and support to middle-income and needy people who face financial difficulties in covering the costs of daily life’. Qatar Charity’s website provides sponsorship to donors or *zakat* payers for orphans, students, and families, as well as projects contributing to building mosques and housing for the poor, water provision, health care, and education (Qatar Charity, 2020). It is understandable to keep the charities working, to ensure continuity of donations. Therefore, charities use various methods to attract *zakat* payers, such as advertising campaigns, humanitarian appeals, TV reports, supported by religious scholars and preachers. Hosa, a charity staff member, said:

There is an excessive use of encouragement in *zakat* advertising campaigns on the streets and in the malls.

It was noted that the promotion of projects is based on religious recommendation. Choosing the orphans project, for instance, is related to a religious motivation as mentioned in Qur’an:

Those who, for the love of Him, feed the needy, and the orphan, and the captive (*Ad-Dahr*, 76: 8).

In this case, the response of the Qataris to pay *zakat* is faster, especially as the Qatari society follows Islamic teachings. However, distributing *zakat* could be problematic when promoting certain projects, such as the project in Sudan in which Qurans were distributed while the Sudanese society was in dire need to agricultural tools<sup>2</sup>. The behaviour of *zakat* payers in conditional *zakat* is a reaction to the promotion of dedicated projects. A similar incident occurred in Indonesia, which was evident in McLaren and Qonita’s (2019) study on the problems of orphan projects in Indonesia, due to the promotion of charitable organisations at the expense of other projects such as poor parents who have to care for their children. The interests of payers are thus prioritised over the interests of beneficiaries, which needs further reflection by scholars and organisations working with *zakat*. This research has, therefore, presented a platform for charitable organisations to consider the establishment of projects which are marketed in proportion to the requirements of beneficiaries, and which do not prioritise the (sometimes unreasonable) interests of the *zakat* payers or the charitable organisations.

#### *5.4 Fourth Restriction Zakat Through Interests of the Qatar State*

Since 2017, the *zakat* mechanism has come under extensive government control, which is due to Qatar being accused of supporting terrorism from Islamic donations, including *zakat*. Safwat, a charity staff member, said:

All projects that are established under *zakat* fund have been approved by the Qatari government.

This means it is unlikely that these projects, especially outside Qatar, would contradict the wishes of the Qatari government. Accordingly, projects abroad will bear the name of the State of Qatar, benefitting the government through political activity. This will develop Qatar politically and improve its public relations with other countries. This suggests that there is a chance that *zakat* will be restricted through its politicisation in one way or another. The activity of charitable organisations (NGO) inside and outside Qatar was noticeable from the volume of humanitarian campaigns calling for donations. Was the destination of these funds legitimate in the eyes of the international community? To help answer this question, Qatar established a major controlling body – the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities (RACA). RACA became responsible for the behaviour of charitable organisations regarding donations, including *zakat*, by adopting a collective responsibility and the co-operation between local NGO and INGO to ‘ensure external assistance would contribute to achieving the goals of sustainable global development’ (RACA, 2022b). Qatar’s intention was to show the world and the Arab states that it was taking positive steps to address the allegations of ‘harbouring terrorists’ or ‘supporting terrorism’ elsewhere (the main reasons for the siege). Blockading countries claimed that the financing of terrorism from Qatar occurred through charitable organisations within the country and some Qatari businessmen (Al-Jazeera, 2017).

Kareema, a charity staff member, confirmed that the implementation of projects for charitable organisations outside Qatar has become under heavy control. Control of the source and destination of those funds administered by charitable organisation was an important move, not only to preserve Qatar’s security and sovereignty, but also to redeem the approval of the international community as well as its Arab neighbours. The concern was that some charitable organisations had particular interests rather than religious intentions by supporting projects that may have contradicted Qatar’s government policies or international public opinion. Qatar had to make a firm decision to take command over the operation of these organisations. However, the avenue of charitable NGOs

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<sup>2</sup> See section: First Restriction through the Behaviour of *Zakat* Payers: Paying Individually and Conditional *Zakat* Projects



for *zakat* is restricted. It is inevitable that projects will be implemented in states which policies do not coincide with that of Qatar's. The Qatari government's intervention on one hand, and the behaviour of Qataris on the other, show that *zakat* had more of a political element rather than a religious one. *Zakat*, in this case, sits between two banks: one to achieve the religious goal, and the other to ensure the safety of Qatar's internal and external security. A consensus between the two banks is difficult, but not impossible: the Qatari government attempted to achieve a balance between religious goals and political interests.

To conclude, Figure 1 below explains the factors that contribute to the restrictions of *zakat* in the Qatari society.

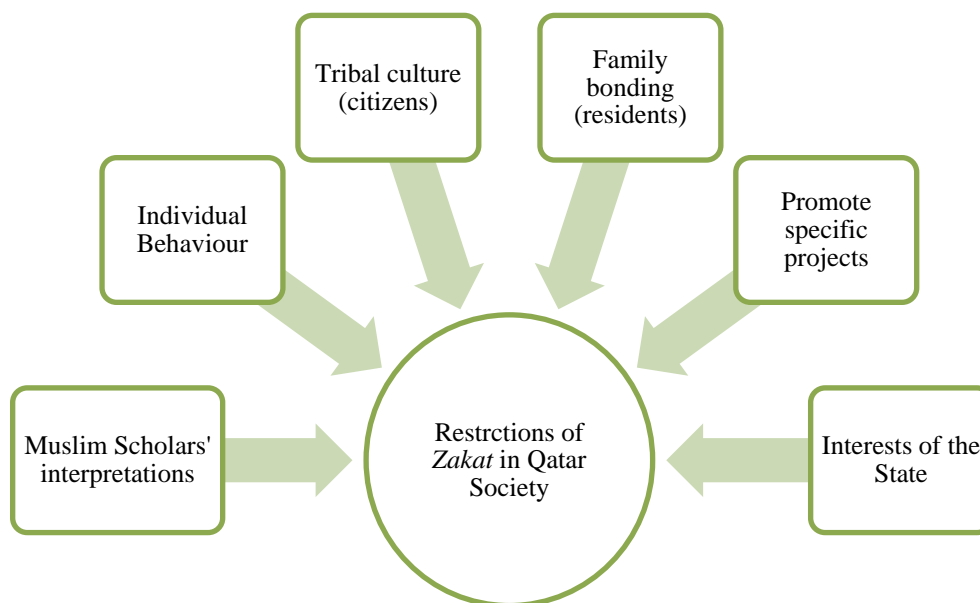


Figure 1. The factors of restrictions of *zakat* in Qatar society

The restrictions of *zakat* in Qatar society consists of Muslim scholars' interpretations of 'for the cause of *Allah*' beneficiary by urging payers to pay *zakat* as part of *jihad*; the behaviour of *zakat* payers in paying individually and conditional *zakat* projects; tribal culture (citizens) and the authoritarianism adopted by Qatari citizens in controlling the distribution of *zakat*; family bonding of Qatari residents in sending *zakat* abroad; the behaviour of charitable organisations in promoting specific projects; and Qatari government monitoring and controlling the collection and distribution of *zakat*.

## 6. The Implications of This Study and Recommendations

This research has shown that *zakat* is not limited to Qatari society, but it is also an Islamic religious matter that concerns the Muslims and their societies. The findings show that most Muslims in Qatar (citizens and residents) believe in *zakat*. The findings also show that there are some similarities between the Qatari society and other Muslim societies in the Middle East such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey regarding ways of dealing with *zakat* (Pew Research Center, 2009). But the different feelings and emotions of the human make it is difficult to generalise the findings with other societies (Babbie, 2015), additionally, *zakat* cannot be resolved in a cohesive pattern or framework of interpretations<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, the characteristics of Qatar as a demographically diverse society may apply to other societies with similar mixed populations such as Pakistan (Muslim-majority) and United Kingdom (Muslim-minority). In addition, countries that share one or more characteristics of Qatari society such as Islamic identity, tribal system, and wealth can consider the findings of this study regarding *zakat*. The Gulf and neighbouring countries – for instance, Kuwait, the Emirates, and Saudi Arabia – have Muslim-majority populations which observe the Islamic tenets of *zakat* (Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC], 2022).

The recommendations of this research fall to a greater extent on the shoulders of Muslim scholars. *Zakat* in its conditions and applications is a religious basis, and Muslim scholars bear the largest part in religious education and awareness.

Muslim scholars need to spread the peaceful meaning of the 'for the cause of *Allah*' beneficiary that relates to the

<sup>3</sup> See section: The Third Pillar of Islam: *Zakat* in Qatar Society.

religious quality of *jihad*, rather than the political aspect of financing wars and conflicts. *Zakat's* role is to help and reduce the beneficiaries such as the needy in the society, not to increase the cases of the beneficiaries which resulted from wars and conflicts.

Spread awareness of the concept of personal responsibility of giving *zakat*, especially in the tribal community. *Zakat's* contributions are not only a family's responsibility. The onus also lies on individuals. The individual responsibility of a Muslim in understanding *zakat* religiously, especially its distribution to its beneficiaries.

Additionally, Muslim scholars are duty-bound to raise awareness that mixing religion and politics (or individual desires such as national affiliation) is detrimental to the whole of society. Political intervention in the collection and dispersal of *zakat* should be in accordance with religious rules that serve the humanitarian goals of *zakat*, rather than fulfilling the personal interest or political desires of leaders.

Spread awareness about the conditional *zakat*. Socially, *zakat* is primarily to serve of the beneficiary rather than fulfilling the desire of the payer. If so, raising awareness about the distribution of *zakat* according to the environment that suits their condition, to avoid for example what happened in Sudan.

*Zakat* beneficiary cases in Qatar need more academic studies. Through the studies, Muslim scholars refer to the beneficiaries in Qatar society, and charitable organisations, in turn, promote projects for them.

Recommendations also fall on the behaviour of charitable organisations through the promotion of projects that specialise and serve the environment of the affected country. Every country has its own situation and its own needs and therefore the projects of *zakat* beneficiaries has to help them get rid of the suffering.

Furthermore, the separation of politics from religion in the role of the Qatari government. If so, create a department for Muslim scholars to observe path of *zakat*, and avoid the interest of state.

## 7. Conclusion

*Zakat* is strongly advocated in both the Qur'an and *Hadith*, the source of Islamic doctrine. The majority of Qataris (citizens and residents) pay their *zakat* according to Muslims scholars' interpretations. The religious factor of the interpretation of 'for the cause of *Allah*' beneficiary is not the only aspect that contributed to the restriction of *zakat* in Qatari society. There are also other factors such as behaviour of *zakat* payers in paying individually and conditional *zakat* projects, Qatar's tribal culture (citizens), family bonding (residents), behaviour of charitable organisations in promoting specific projects, and interests of the state.

This article investigated the restrictions of *zakat* in Qatar through two dimensions: (i) the restriction of *zakat* is subject to different interpretations of 'for the cause of *Allah*' beneficiary that related to the supply of arms and militants in defence of Islam and Muslim countries under the name of *jihad*. However, it was also for helping the poor and needy, building mosques, hospitals, and schools, for instance. The majority of Qataris expressed their unwillingness to support the political aspect of *zakat* and preferred to pay their *zakat* for religious and humanitarian purposes. Qatari citizens, however, had no objection to using *zakat* to provide the funding for wars according to their national affiliations, especially after the blockade on Qatar.

(ii) They have a choice on how they distribute their *zakat*: individually, with the family, charitable organisations. This paper discussed how these choices, in one way or another, have been instrumental in restricting *zakat* in Qatar. According to individual behaviour, *zakat* restricted through personal convictions on how to distribute *zakat*. In this case the *zakat* will face three issues: religious awareness of *zakat*, the work of charitable organisations, and interests of the Qatar state. Furthermore, the *zakat* under conditions also was issue in restricted the project of *zakat*.

The authoritarianism of the family: Qatar's tribal culture (citizens) and family bonding (residents), also restricted *zakat*. The effect of tribal culture – tribal jurisdiction (for citizens) over the distribution of *zakat* in Qatar resulted in familial authoritarianism according to customs and traditions. *Zakat* became a mark of the tribe's loyalty, and *zakat* was distributed according to the wishes of the leader. The family ties between the residents and their relatives also made *zakat* a restrict issue for the same reasons.

The behaviour of charitable organisation through promotes specific projects restricted *zakat*. The results of this promotion encouraged the *zakat* payer to set conditional *zakat*. This did not suit other societies, such as the distribution of Qurans in Sudan, while Sudanese society needs agricultural tools.

Furthermore, the Qatari government restricted *zakat* in Qatar by tightening the supervision and control over the practice of *zakat* in Qatari society through Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities (RACA). The Qatari government has the right to maintain the country's internal security as well as the good international reputation it has recently enjoyed. Particularly, supporting terrorism from Qatari donations, including *zakat*, was one of the

most prominent accusations inspiring the blockade of Qatar in 2017-2021. This led to tightening the control over *zakat*, on Qatari charitable organisations. This does not mean that *zakat* has not been politicised. In other words, *zakat* has come under the authority of the Qatari government to direct the path in accordance with the interests of the state.

The eight beneficiaries of *zakat* serve all parts of society: sects, classes, and race. The beneficiary ‘for the cause of *Allah*’ does not only mean defending one’s country from external threats in the name of *Allah*; It also means that the interpretation of this beneficiary extends to benefiting all the society – from building mosques and religious foundations of education, to addressing the well-being and safety of the population. Raising awareness of Islam and its peaceful, humanitarian goals far exceed the necessity for wars. Wars have never solved anything, *zakat* has, especially when it is used in times of peace. The time has come to appreciate the meaning of Islam (and *zakat*) in order to improve the lives of people, instead of restricting its holy goal.

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