

IBN KHALDUN'S ON WELL-BEING SOCIETY: EARLY EXPLORATION ON FRAMEWORK OF IDEAS IN MUQADDIMAH

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Abstract. Social well-being carries a dynamic and evolving definition, shaped by diverse social realities. Establishing a clear concept and framework requires careful consideration of factors such as situational context, geographical setting, cultural norms, and lived experiences, all of which influence how well-being is understood and assessed. In response to this complexity, the present study focuses on an early exploration of social well-being from the classical perspective of Ibn Khaldun. Drawing primarily from his foundational text, *Muqaddimah*, this study examines the preliminary ideas and underlying principles that may constitute Ibn Khaldun's conceptualisation of a well-being society. To address the research objectives, a historical descriptive method is employed, supported by document analysis and thematic analysis techniques. The study is expected to outline a preliminary framework of Ibn Khaldun's ideas on well-being. Ultimately, these findings aim to enrich contemporary definitions and conceptual discussions on social well-being, particularly within the field of multi-ethnic nation studies.

Keywords: *Ibn Khaldun, well-being society, Muqaddimah, ideas, early exploration*

Introduction

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), an eminent Muslim scholar, historian, and philosopher, is widely recognized for his pioneering work in the field of sociology and history. His seminal work, '*Muqaddimah*', laid the foundations for many modern social sciences, including sociology, economics, and historiography. One of the key themes in his work is the concept of social well-being (or social cohesion), which he analyzes through the lens of human civilization (*umran*) and group solidarity (*asabiyyah*). This article provides an in-depth exploration of Ibn Khaldun's views on social well-being, focusing on the role of social cohesion, governance, and economic factors in promoting societal harmony.

Literature review

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), in his monumental work *Muqaddimah*, laid the foundation for the study of sociology, history, and the dynamics of civilizations. Central to his analysis is the concept of social cohesion, which he articulates through the idea of *asabiyyah*, or group solidarity. This concept is pivotal to his understanding of social well-being, which he sees as dependent on the strength of communal bonds, governance, and economic systems. This critical literature review examines various scholarly interpretations of Ibn Khaldun's views on social well-being, highlighting the

complexities and relevance of his theories in both medieval and modern contexts. The concept of *asabiyyah* is one of Ibn Khaldun's most original contributions to social theory. It refers to the social cohesion that binds a group of people, enabling collective action and political organization. According to Ibn Khaldun, *asabiyyah* is strongest in tribal and kinship-based societies, where individuals feel a sense of loyalty and responsibility toward each other (Khaldun, 2014). Scholars like Alatas (2001) and Ahmed (1966) emphasize that *asabiyyah* forms the bedrock of Ibn Khaldun's cyclical theory of civilization, where strong social solidarity is essential for societal survival and growth. Alatas (2001) argues that Ibn Khaldun's *asabiyyah* offers a unique understanding of social capital, highlighting the interplay between individual loyalty and collective well-being. In this sense, Ibn Khaldun anticipates modern sociological discussions about social cohesion, such as those by Putnam (2000) and Bourdieu (1986), who similarly stress the importance of communal bonds in sustaining social stability. However, Alatas also points out that Ibn Khaldun's emphasis on tribalism limits the universality of *asabiyyah*, as it suggests that social cohesion is strongest in smaller, homogeneous groups rather than in more diverse, modern societies.

Ibn Khaldun's theory of the rise and fall of civilizations is intricately tied to his concept of social well-being. He posits that societies progress through a natural life cycle, beginning with a period of strong *asabiyyah* and culminating in wealth, luxury, and moral decay, which weakens social cohesion and leads to decline (Khaldun, 2014). This cyclical view has been explored by several scholars, who see it as a prescient analysis of societal development. Chapra (2008) highlights Ibn Khaldun's insight into the delicate balance between material prosperity and social well-being. He argues that Ibn Khaldun's warning against excessive wealth and luxury parallels modern critiques of consumerism and inequality, which erode social bonds and lead to social fragmentation. Chapra also notes that Ibn Khaldun's emphasis on morality and ethical leadership as essential to maintaining social well-being reflects Islamic values, making his analysis particularly relevant in Muslim-majority societies. However, some scholars criticize this cyclical view as overly deterministic, suggesting that it downplays the role of human agency in shaping societal outcomes. Economic factors play a crucial role in Ibn Khaldun's theory of social well-being. He argues that a thriving economy, based on agriculture, trade, and industry, is essential for ensuring the material well-being of society's members (Khaldun, 2014). However, he also warns that as societies become wealthier, they risk falling into a state of luxury and complacency, which weakens *asabiyyah* and undermines social cohesion.

Baali (1981) elaborates on this point, noting that Ibn Khaldun's analysis of economic growth and decline offers a nuanced understanding of the relationship between wealth and social well-being. He contends that Ibn Khaldun's economic theory is not purely materialistic but is instead deeply embedded in his moral philosophy. For Ibn Khaldun, economic development must be accompanied by justice and equitable distribution of resources to prevent the social inequality that leads to societal decay. Baali contrasts Ibn Khaldun's view with modern capitalist theories, which often prioritize economic growth without considering its impact on social cohesion. This focus on justice and wealth distribution resonates with contemporary discussions about economic inequality and its impact on social well-being. Modern theorists, have similarly argued that extreme inequality leads to social instability, reinforcing Ibn Khaldun's assertion that material

prosperity must be balanced with ethical governance and social justice. Ibn Khaldun places great importance on governance as a determinant of social well-being. He argues that just and ethical leadership is essential for maintaining social cohesion and ensuring the prosperity of the community (Khaldun, 2014). The ruler, according to Ibn Khaldun, must act as a custodian of *asabiyyah*, preserving the collective spirit of the society while promoting justice and moral values. Dale (2015) examines Ibn Khaldun's views on governance, arguing that his emphasis on ethical leadership reflects the Islamic principle of justice (*adl*), which is central to ensuring social harmony. He compares Ibn Khaldun's concept of governance with the writings of later political philosophers, such as Machiavelli, noting that while Machiavelli advocates for the strategic use of power, Ibn Khaldun stresses the moral responsibility of rulers. For Ibn Khaldun, the legitimacy of governance depends on the ruler's ability to act in the interest of the people and to maintain social order through justice and ethical conduct.

However, some scholars critique Ibn Khaldun's idealistic view of governance, suggesting that his model of leadership is difficult to implement in practice. Alatas (2006) notes that while Ibn Khaldun's emphasis on justice is admirable, his reliance on the ruler's moral character to maintain social well-being is problematic, as it does not account for the institutional checks and balances that modern political systems provide. In addition to economic and political factors, Ibn Khaldun also highlights the role of religion and ethics in fostering social well-being. He argues that religion provides a moral framework that promotes social cohesion by encouraging ethical behavior and reinforcing *asabiyyah* (Khaldun, 2014). Religious leaders, in his view, play a crucial role in maintaining the moral fabric of society, which is essential for ensuring long-term social stability. Ibn Khaldun's views on the relationship between religion and social well-being, noting that for Ibn Khaldun, religion is both a spiritual and social force. It not only shapes individual behavior but also serves as a unifying force that strengthens social bonds. This is particularly evident in Ibn Khaldun's analysis of the role of Islam in early Arab civilizations, where religious unity contributed to the formation of strong political states. However, Fadl also points out that Ibn Khaldun's emphasis on religion may limit the applicability of his theories in secular societies, where social cohesion is often based on civic rather than religious values. Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the concept of social well-being, which is rooted in his analysis of *asabiyyah*, economic stability, governance, and ethics. His cyclical view of civilization highlights the importance of maintaining strong social bonds, ethical leadership, and balanced economic growth to ensure long-term societal stability. While some aspects of his theory, such as the emphasis on tribalism and religion, may be less applicable in modern contexts, his insights into social cohesion and the impact of wealth, inequality, and governance remain highly relevant. By examining Ibn Khaldun's ideas through the lens of contemporary sociological and economic theory, scholars continue to find valuable lessons in his work for understanding the challenges of maintaining social well-being in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Results and Discussion

The framework of Ibn Khaldun's ideas on social well-being

Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* in 1377 offers a profound exploration of social well-being through the lens of historical dynamics, group solidarity, and the rise and fall of civilizations. His analysis presents a comprehensive theory about human society, leadership, and the factors that sustain or erode social harmony. The concept of social well-being, although not explicitly named as such, can be extrapolated from his discussions on *asabiyyah* (group solidarity), the role of governance, economic stability, and the moral fabric of society. Here, we delve into the key aspects of social well-being as presented by Ibn Khaldun in *Muqaddimah*, with a focus on how these elements contribute to the overall cohesion and longevity of civilizations.

Group solidarity (Asabiyyah) and social cohesion

At the heart of Ibn Khaldun's theory of social well-being lies the concept of *asabiyyah*, or group solidarity, which he argues is the foundation of any thriving society. According to Ibn Khaldun, *asabiyyah* is the binding force that holds a community together, allowing it to achieve social cohesion and stability. Without *asabiyyah*, societies would fall into disorder, leading to the decay of civilization. He saw the rise and fall of civilizations as closely linked to the strength or weakness of this social bond (Sairan and Ahmad, 2021). In the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun contends that social well-being is inextricably linked to the ability of individuals within a group to work together for the common good. He asserts that humans are inherently social beings, and their survival and prosperity depend on collective efforts. This cooperation, driven by *asabiyyah*, enables the establishment of political structures and economic systems that contribute to the welfare of society as a whole. In the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun also introduces *asabiyyah*, or group solidarity, as the primary engine driving the success of human societies. It represents the collective bond that unites members of a group, motivating them to work for the common good. For Ibn Khaldun, *asabiyyah* is crucial for: (1) Social cohesion: A society with strong *asabiyyah* functions as a unified body, where individuals feel a sense of responsibility and loyalty to the group. (2) Political unity: *Asabiyyah* allows for the establishment of leadership and governance, as the community supports a central authority, thereby enabling collective action and political order. (3) Defense and protection: Group solidarity ensures that members protect each other from external threats, which is critical for the survival of the community.

Ibn Khaldun suggests that social well-being is directly tied to the strength of *asabiyyah*. When this bond is strong, society experiences unity, mutual support, and resilience. However, as *asabiyyah* erodes due to internal divisions, luxury, and weakening moral values, societal well-being declines, making the group vulnerable to external and internal decay. Ibn Khaldun's analysis of social cohesion hinges on his concept of *asabiyyah*. He posits that strong *asabiyyah* leads to the development of cohesive social units that are capable of collective action. These units, often tribal or kinship-based in early societies, are instrumental in forming political states and organizing governance. *Asabiyyah* serves as the primary motivating force that drives people to support and defend each other, thereby ensuring social harmony. However, Ibn Khaldun also acknowledges that *asabiyyah* tends to weaken over time as societies grow more complex. With the rise of urbanization, increased wealth, and luxurious lifestyles, the sense of group solidarity diminishes, leading to a decline in social well-being. As *asabiyyah* weakens, the ability of a society to maintain collective governance and social order deteriorates, setting the stage for societal decay. Thus, Ibn Khaldun's

cyclical theory of the rise and fall of civilizations emphasizes that maintaining strong *asabiyyah* is crucial for sustaining social well-being. When *asabiyyah* is at its peak, society flourishes; when it declines, social fragmentation and eventual collapse follow.

Economic stability and social well-being

Ibn Khaldun also explores the role of economic factors in promoting social well-being. He emphasizes that a prosperous economy is vital for ensuring the material well-being of society's members, which in turn strengthens *asabiyyah*. According to Ibn Khaldun, the development of agriculture, trade, and industry plays a central role in sustaining civilizations. He observes that economic development allows for the establishment of cities, which become hubs of cultural and intellectual activity. However, he warns that with increasing wealth, societies often become complacent, leading to excessive consumption and luxury. This eventually erodes the social bonds that hold the community together, as people become more individualistic and self-centered, undermining the collective good. Therefore, Ibn Khaldun advocates for a balanced economic system that promotes the welfare of all members of society without fostering greed or excess. He believes that economic justice and equitable distribution of resources are essential for maintaining social cohesion and well-being. Ibn Khaldun provides an insightful economic analysis of social well-being, linking it to wealth generation, distribution, and consumption. He emphasizes the need for balanced economic growth that supports the material needs of society without fostering excessive luxury or greed. Key elements of his economic theory include: (1) Agriculture and trade: A prosperous society is built on strong economic foundations, particularly through agriculture and trade, which sustain the livelihoods of the population. (2) Wealth distribution: Ibn Khaldun stresses the importance of equitable distribution of wealth. When wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, social inequality grows, leading to the marginalization of the lower classes and weakening of *asabiyyah*. (3) Luxury and moral decline: As societies accumulate wealth, they tend to indulge in luxury, which Ibn Khaldun sees as a corrosive force. Luxury fosters individualism, weakens social bonds, and leads to moral decay, ultimately undermining the well-being of the community. Economic stability is a double-edged sword in Ibn Khaldun's theory. While necessary for social prosperity, unchecked wealth and luxury are viewed as threats to social cohesion. Social well-being, therefore, depends on maintaining a balance between material prosperity and communal solidarity.

Governance and social well-being

In Ibn Khaldun's view, good governance is another cornerstone of social well-being. He argues that strong leadership, guided by justice and wisdom, is essential for maintaining social order and ensuring the prosperity of the community. The ruler or governing authority must be capable of upholding the values of *asabiyyah* and promoting the common good. He also stresses that just governance requires the ruler to act in the interests of the people, rather than for personal gain. Corruption, tyranny, and injustice, he warns, are signs of a declining civilization, as they erode the social fabric and undermine *asabiyyah*. When the government becomes disconnected from the people, social trust is lost, leading to instability and, ultimately, societal collapse. Ibn Khaldun's emphasis on justice and the moral responsibility of rulers reflects his belief that social well-being is contingent upon both the ethical behavior of individuals and the

integrity of the governing system. For Ibn Khaldun, good governance is essential for ensuring social well-being. He highlights several key functions of governance that contribute to societal stability and prosperity: (1) Ensuring justice: A ruler must maintain justice within society, treating all members fairly to prevent social unrest and fragmentation. Ibn Khaldun emphasizes that unjust leadership leads to the breakdown of *asabiyyah* and erodes trust between the people and the government. (2) Preserving *asabiyyah*: The role of the ruler is not only administrative but also symbolic, as the ruler must embody the values of the society and maintain the communal spirit. (3) Promoting moral and ethical values: Governance should promote public virtues, ensuring that moral decay does not set in as society grows wealthy and complacent. Ibn Khaldun posits that social well-being is not just about material prosperity but also the ethical and moral leadership provided by the state. Governance that neglects justice and morality fosters corruption and weakens the foundations of *asabiyyah*, thus leading to social fragmentation.

The role of religion and ethics in social well-being

Ibn Khaldun underscores the importance of religion and ethical values in maintaining social cohesion. He argues that religion provides a shared framework for understanding the world, fostering *asabiyyah* through common beliefs and practices. Religious leaders, according to Ibn Khaldun, play a critical role in: (1) Promoting ethical behaviour: Religion encourages moral behavior, which reinforces social bonds and prevents the kind of individualism that can lead to social fragmentation. (2) Fostering communal identity: Religion often serves as a unifying force, binding people together with shared rituals and values that strengthen social well-being. For Ibn Khaldun, religion is both a moral compass and a unifying force that fosters social cohesion. In societies where religion plays a central role, social well-being is more likely to be sustained as individuals place the common good above personal gain. Conversely, the decline of religious adherence is associated with weakening *asabiyyah* and societal fragmentation.

The Ibn Khaldun's framework concept of social well-being

Ibn Khaldun's framework concept of social well-being is deeply interconnected with the principles of *asabiyyah*, governance, economic stability, and moral values. His cyclical view of civilization highlights the delicate balance that must be maintained between material prosperity and ethical leadership to sustain societal well-being. His analysis remains relevant in contemporary discussions on social cohesion, illustrating the timeless nature of his insights into human society. There are some keys takeaway to be consider in developing Ibn Khaldun's Framework Concept of Social Well-Being: (1) *Asabiyyah* is the foundation of social well-being, fostering unity and collective action. Civilizations rise and fall based on the strength of their social bonds, as wealth and luxury often erode societal cohesion. (2) Governance plays a crucial role in promoting justice, maintaining social harmony, and preventing the moral decay of society. (3) Economic prosperity must be balanced with equitable wealth distribution and avoidance of excessive luxury to maintain social stability. (4) Religion and ethics serve as vital unifying forces that strengthen *asabiyyah* and ensure social well-being.

By providing this multi-faceted analysis, Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah offers a robust framework for understanding how societies can thrive or decline based on the principles of social well-being. Therefore, based on the discussion of Ibn Khaldun's ideas that have

been discussed in this paper, we can summarize Ibn Khaldun's overall concept of social well-being in the following *Figure 1*. Ibn Khaldun's insights into social well-being resonate with contemporary theories of social capital and social cohesion. Modern sociologists, such as Pierre Bourdieu and Robert Putnam, have explored similar themes, arguing that social networks, trust, and shared norms are essential for the functioning of society. Like Ibn Khaldun's *asabiyyah*, these scholars emphasize the importance of collective social bonds in promoting well-being. However, Ibn Khaldun's cyclical theory of civilization, which links social well-being to the rise and fall of political states, provides a unique historical perspective that is often absent from modern social theory. His focus on the interplay between economics, governance, and social cohesion offers a holistic approach to understanding the factors that contribute to societal well-being.

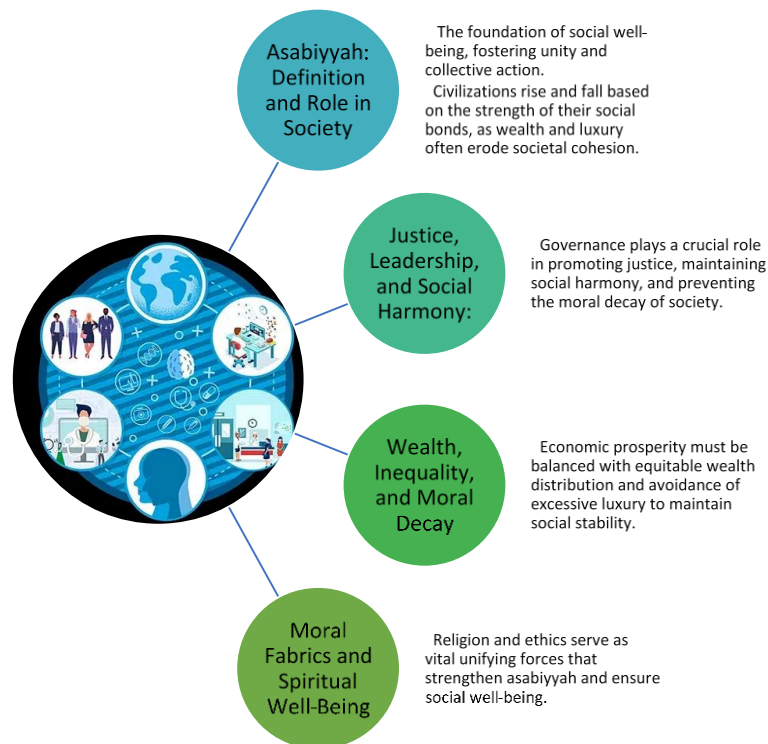


Figure 1. Ibn Khaldun's framework concept of social well-being.

Conclusion

Ibn Khaldun's concept of social well-being is rooted in the idea of *asabiyyah*, or group solidarity, which he sees as essential for the survival and prosperity of civilizations. Through his analysis of principles of *asabiyyah*, governance, economic stability, and moral values, he provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of social well-being. While his ideas were formulated in a different historical context, they offer valuable insights into the factors that promote social harmony and collective welfare. His work remains relevant today, offering timeless lessons on the importance of social bonds, economic justice, and ethical governance in promoting a healthy and thriving society.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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