An Examination of Patterns of Imam Ali's Treatment of Civil Oppositions and Disobedience

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the theoretical and practical dimensions of civil disobedience within the framework of Imam Ali's governance. It seeks to derive a political, social, religious, and rational model from the approach of the Islamic government during the era of Imam Ali in addressing various forms of civil opposition and citizens' protests. Civil disobedience during Imam Ali's era can be categorized into groups such as critics, political opponents, rebels, and those who broke their allegiance (e.g., the Kharijites). The primary question of this research is: How and based on what ethical and legal principles, did Imam Ali address civil disobedience during his governance, and what model did he employ? The research hypothesis rests upon the idea that Imam Ali's approach can be analyzed as a model of interactive and non-confrontational engagement with protest actions. This model is grounded in ethical, legal, and political principles, resulting in a spectrum of responses to civil disobedience (from critics to subversives). The study focuses on the conduct and governance methods of Imam Ali, aiming to uncover the latent capacities in his political discourse, behavior, and practices to address the contemporary needs of Islamic governance systems in managing civil protest actions. The research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, utilizing historical, jurisprudential, and hadith-based sources, particularly the *Nahj al-Balagha*. Data collection was conducted through library studies and analysis of Imam Ali's statements and behaviors, employing a conceptual inference method to extract his behavioral model toward civil opposition. The findings indicate that Imam Ali successfully distinguished between reformist opponents and subversive adversaries, recognizing fundamental principles such as tolerance, human

dignity, freedom of expression, and the right to advice, protest, and criticism for all citizens of the Islamic society. On one hand, with divine rationality and open-mindedness, he acknowledged the voice of dissent; on the other, as long as protesters' actions did not pose a threatening or subversive challenge to the system, he preserved their place within the social and even political structures of governance, allowing them active and constructive participation. Based on the research findings and meticulous examination of reliable sources and analysis of Imam Ali's conduct, his behavior can be described as an ethical, participatory, dialogue-oriented, and justice-centered model for addressing civil disobedience. This model not only strengthens the religious and rational legitimacy of governance but also plays a significant role in preventing social fragmentation, reducing political tensions, and maintaining national cohesion. The study suggests that civil disobedience, within the framework of Shiite rationality and Islamic theological principles, is not only acceptable but, in many cases, a constructive necessity for achieving justice, reformations, ensuring accountability of authorities, and fostering a space for political interaction and citizen participation toward societal progress.

Keywords

1. Introduction

The issue of citizens' rights in religious systems has always involved fundamental challenges. On one hand, these challenges stem from the differences between the foundations of modern human rights and jurisprudential teachings; on the other, they arise from diverse interpretations of religious texts and the historical experiences of Islamic governance. Within this context, civil disobedience as a form of peaceful protest occupies a complex position in religious discourse, as it intersects with concepts such as obedience to the legitimate ruler and the preservation of social order. The governance experience of Imam Ali during his caliphate provides a unique opportunity to examine this issue within the framework of Shiite jurisprudence. Imam Ali's government was not only a testing ground for justice-seeking but also an experience in confronting internal dissent, from the *Nākithūn* (oath-breakers), to the *Qāsiṭūn* (oppressors), and the *Māriqūn* (rebels). These groups represent various forms of political and ideological protests, and Imam Ali's responses provide a model for understanding the right to dissent within a religious system. *Nahj al-Balagha* portrays a conduct that, while setting boundaries for opposition, emphasizes patience and tolerance toward non-hostile critics. Just as the Quran in Surah Al 'Imran (3:159) highlights the Prophet's gentleness with people, Imam Ali also practiced forbearance as long as oppositions did not threaten the faith, enduring insults and slander with patience. He viewed governance as a right of the people, stating in Sermon 136: "Your pledge of allegiance to me was not impromptu... I want you for God, while you want me for yourselves." Similarly, in his letter to Mālik al-Ashtar, he emphasizes love for the people, avoidance of violence, and describes them as either religious brothers or fellow human beings. Thus, this article, through a jurisprudential and behavioral analysis of Imam Ali's approach to opponents, seeks to answer the question: How, and based on what ethical and legal principles, did Imam Ali address civil disobedience during his governance, and what model did he employ? The research hypothesis is that Imam Ali's approach can be analyzed as an interactive and non-confrontational model in dealing withacts of protest. This model, grounded in ethical, legal, and political principles, resulted in a spectrum of responses to civil disobedience (from critics to subversives). By drawing on sources such as *Nahj al-Balagha*, Quranic verses, and historical accounts, this article presents a coherent picture of Imam Ali's policies toward opponents, laying the groundwork for aligning these policies with contemporary concepts of citizens' rights. Additionally, from the perspective of public law, the article

emphasizes that while Shiite jurisprudence includes concepts like *amr bi-l-maʿrūf* (enjoining good) and *naṣīḥat al-aʾimma* (advising the leaders), defining the "right to protest" as an independent citizen's right requires a re-examination of religious sources and historical experiences. The governance of Imam Ali stands out as an exemplary model in this regard, as he sought to balance religious authority with the people's right to participate in their political destiny, even when dealing with opponents. Ultimately, civil disobedience in Imam Ali's governance is not merely a historical or jurisprudential matter but serves as a foundation for new questions about the capacity of Shiite political jurisprudence to engage with modern governance principles. This article aims to demonstrate that Imam Ali's conduct can serve as an inspiring model for bridging religious values and fundamental human rights.

2. Conceptual Framework

Before delving into the examination of Imam Ali's behavioral and practical approach toward non-malicious civil opposition from citizens, it is essential to precisely define and clarify the key concepts that form the foundation of this discourse. A clear examination of terms such as opposition and opponents, citizens' rights, civil resistance, and Imam Ali's governance model is necessary for a deeper understanding of the arguments and analyses presented in subsequent sections of the article. This section, by providing clear and documented definitions of these concepts, establishes the necessary groundwork for embaring on the main discussion, prevents potential ambiguities, and offers a conceptual framework for the entire study.

2.1. Imam Ali's Model of Governance

This model refers to Imam Ali's leadership and governance style during his caliphate (651-661), which was grounded in the principles of justice, consultation, respect for people's rights, combating corruption, and ensuring legitimate freedoms (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1983, vol. 11, p. 356). This governance style is clearly reflected in the letters and sermons of *Nahj al-Balagha*, emphasizing tolerance toward opponents, adherence to ethics, and social justice. Imam Ali stressed the importance of consulting with the people, employing experts, and safeguarding the rights of vulnerable groups. Imam Ali's governance tolerated opposition as long as it did not threaten public order. Furthermore, economic justice and support for social progress were at the center of his attention (Mohaghegh Damad & Vesali, 2014, p. 74).

2.2. Opposition

Opposition refers to disagreement or incompatibility with a person or phenomenon. In political literature, more attention has been given to the types of opponents rather than a precise terminological definition. In this article, a distinction is made between non-hostile and hostile opponents. Opponents are individuals who, despite their affiliation with the Islamic government, do not accept certain policies. This disagreement may stem from religious or non-religious reasons, and such individuals are sometimes referred to as the opposition.

   a) Non-hostile Opponents: These individuals oppose certain governmental decisions, but their opposition is legitimate, nonviolent, and within the framework of the system. Such opposition is not only permissible but even recommended in Shiite political jurisprudence (Shahīd al-Thānī, 1998, vol. 1, p. 43; Narāqī, 1996, p. 265). In the conduct of Imam Ali, examples of this type of opposition can be, such as the criticisms from the people of Kufa and Basra regarding financial or military matters, to which the Imam responded with transparency rather than suppression (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 216).

   b) Hostile Opponents: This group denies the legitimacy of the system altogether and employs violent methods to confront the government. In Shiite jurisprudence, such individuals may fall under the rulings of baghy (rebellion) or muḥāraba (waging war against God) (Ḥillī, 1995, vol. 9, p. 295; Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī, 1988, vol. 4, p. 382). Historical examples include the *Nākithūn* (oath-breakers), *Qāsiṭūn* (oppressors), and *Māriqūn* (rebels), who incited civil war through subversive actions. In Letter 6 of Nahj al-Balagha, Imam Ali considers opposition driven by a lust for power to be outside the realm of sincere advice. Thus, the distinction between these two types of opposition—non-hostile and hostile—is based on their intent, behavior, methods, and social consequences.

2.3. Citizenship Rights

In modern thought, these rights include civil, political, and social dimensions (Turner, 1986, p. 3). In Islam, in addition to these, human dignity, justice, and mutual responsibility are also emphasized (Motahari, 2010, p. 175). The Quran underscores the inherent dignity of humanity and equality across ethnicities and races (Al-Hujurat, 49:13), recognizing rights such as security, freedom, and justice.

2.4. Civil Resistance in Modern Discourse

Civil Disobedience refers to the conscious and nonviolent refusal to comply

with unjust laws. Figures such as Thoreau, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. are prominent in this field. John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*, considers it a rational and public act aimed at reforming laws without intending to overthrow the system. John Stuart Mill, in *On Liberty*, emphasizes the importance of the clash of ideas for individual growth. Hannah Arendt, in *The Human Condition* (1958), views civil disobedience as an expression of freedom and a moral duty in the face of injustice. These perspectives view civil disobedience as a nonviolent tool for ensuring human rights and strengthening democracy. Unlike violent protests, this form of action emphasizes transparency, public ethics, and hope for reform. Within this context, Imam Ali's model, as an embodiment of monotheistic governance, offers a unique framework for the interplay between power and ethics. The conduct of Imam Ali demonstrates that he recognized opposition as legitimate, provided it did not transgress the boundaries of justice and human dignity. In this discourse, tolerance toward opponents is not a sign of weakness but rather an indication of rationality and fidelity to divine justice.

3. Explaining the Grounds of Citizenship Rights in Imam Ali's Conduct

Citizens' rights are a fundamental pillar in the conduct of Imam Ali. As an Islamic ruler, he explicitly emphasized principles such as justice, freedom of expression, human dignity, political participation, and the right of people to oversee the government. Below, the most significant of these rights are examined with reference to *Nahj al-Balagha*:

A) Right to Justice and Equality

In Letter 53 of *Nahj al-Balagha*, addressed to Mālik al-Ashtar, Imam Ali states: "Let your heart feel compassion for the people... for they are of two kinds: either your brother in religion or your equal in creation." With this statement, he considers all people equal in human dignity, establishing this principle as the foundation of social justice and citizens' rights.

B) Right to Freedom of Speech

In Sermon 216 of Nahj al-Balagha, Imam Ali states: "Do not refrain from speaking the truth or offering just advice…" He considers criticism and consultation as rights of the people and essential for reforming power. Ibn Abi al-Hadid interprets this statement as a sign of the ruler's humility and acceptance of responsibility toward society.

C) Right to Political Participation

In Letter 53 of *Nahj al-Balagha* to Mālik al-Ashtar, Imam Ali states: "Let

the most beloved matters to you be… for the dissatisfaction of the masses outweighs the approval of the elite…" The Imam views the legitimacy of governance as dependent on public consent and considers people's participation a condition for the stability of the government.

D) Right to Social Welfare

In Letter 53 of *Nahj al-Balagha* to Mālik al-Ashtar, Imam Ali emphasizes the issue of social welfare and the necessity of upholding it for citizens, stating: "(Fear) Allah and keep Him in view with regard to the lower class …" Consequently, Imam Ali considers supporting the disadvantaged a duty of the ruler and regards it as a divine right that the government must uphold.

E) Right to Human Dignity

In Letter 53 of *Nahj al-Balagha* to Mālik al-Ashtar, Imam Ali describes people as either "your brother in religion or your equal in creation." This perspective forms the basis for a comprehensive approach to security, respect, and equal rights for all. Ultimately, in Sermon 216, Imam Ali organizes the mutual relationship between the ruler and the people within a divine framework, stating: "Then, God, the Exalted, has made some rights obligatory for some people over others…" Thus, human rights (*ḥaqq al-nās*) are not parallel to but in continuation of divine rights (*ḥaqq Allāh*), such that the realization of one is contingent upon the realization of the other.

4. Grounds of the Legitimacy of Civil Resistance in Islam

Civil disobedience in Islam refers to nonviolent protest and criticism aimed at reforming and improving the social, political, and economic conditions of society. This form of opposition is grounded in Islamic principles such as truth-seeking and social justice, based on the belief that people must stand against oppression and injustice and strive to realize justice and truth in accordance with Islamic Sharia (Hasanlou & Javid, 2022, p. 56). In essence, civil resistance refers to actions taken by individuals or groups to express their opposition to governmental policies without resorting to violence. During his caliphate, Imam Ali faced various instances of civil opposition from different groups (such as the early stages of opposition from the Kharijites or Ṭalḥa and Zubayr), but his initial approach was primarily based on principles of tolerance and preserving the rights of opponents. Given the provided definition of civil disobedience, its meaning within Islamic texts can be explored through the foundational frameworks and concepts that constitute the right to civil disobedience. These include principles such as:

a) Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil: This principle is not only a right but a religious duty emphasized in numerous Quranic verses and hadiths. One such verse is: "You are the best nation produced for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong" (Al Imran, 3:110). This verse serves as a Quranic foundation for highlighting the social responsibility of Muslims to reform society. From this, the legitimacy of ethical civil actions, including principled civil disobedience, can be inferred. Based on this principle, Muslims have the right to stand against governmental or societal wrongs, even if the ruling system is legitimate.

b) Advice to the Leaders of Muslims: This refers to constructive and reform-oriented criticism. The Prophet stated: "The religion is advice." It was asked, "For whom, O Messenger of God?" He replied, "For God, His Messenger, the leaders of the Muslims, and their general public" (Nīshābūrī, 2020, vol. 1, p. 74). Imam Ali also emphasized the necessity of sincere advice in his statements, stating (Sermon 216) stating: "Do not refrain from speaking the truth or offering just advice, for I am not above making mistakes…" He openly declares that one should not shy away from criticizing the ruler. Do not hesitate to speak the truth or offer just counsel, for I am not above making mistakes.

c) Acceptance of civil dissent, even from adversaries: In the letter to Muʿāwiya (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 6), instead of suppressing opposition, Imam Ali responds with reasoned arguments and explanatory logic, demonstrating the legitimacy of civil interaction with opponents. In Sermon 34, Imam Ali addresses the people, saying: "Do not speak to me as you would to tyrants, nor fear me as you would fear kings." As is evident, these words reflect the pinnacle of Ali's humility. He not only encourages people to engage in free critique and dialogue but also acknowledges his own fallibility and distances himself from tyranny.

5. The Boundary between Civil Disobedience and Sedition from the Perspective of Imam Ali's Governance

From a jurisprudential perspective, opposition rooted in enjoining good, wise counsel, and non-violence is legitimate; however, if it leads to violence or sedition, it is deemed impermissible. This distinction is evident in the conduct of Imam al-Husayn: the Ashura uprising was a form of civil disobedience grounded in reform, not immediate overthrow. In contrast to civil disobedience, as defined above, sedition is characterized by three key elements: inciting the masses to violence, disrupting public order, and acting

against the unity and legitimacy of the community, which is strongly condemned in religious texts (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 62; Ṭabarī, 1990, vol. 3, p. 354). Imam Ali clearly distinguishes between legitimate public protest and seditious behavior. In his letter to Mālik al-Ashtar, he advises encouraging people to express their opinions freely and fostering an environment for criticism (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 53), while also warning against what he calls the "sedition of the ignorant" and "calls to division" (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 17). From a jurisprudential viewpoint, civil disobedience is legitimate if it is nonviolent, directed against injustice, and conducted within the framework of enjoining good (Shahīd al-Thānī, 1993, vol. 1, p. 203). However, if it aims to dismantle the community or oppose a just ruler, it falls under the category of rebellion and sedition (Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī, 2006, vol. 4, p. 100). Thus, the boundary between civil disobedience and sedition lies not in opposing authority but in the intent, method, and social consequences of the protest. When opposition is reformist, nonviolent, and preserves the structure of the community, it constitutes legitimate civil disobedience; but when it incites violence, divides the community, or undermines the foundation of the system, it falls into the realm of sedition.

6. Imam Ali's Behavioral Principles in the Face of Civil Disobedience

After the concept of civil dissent and its relation to the citizenship rights of opponents has been well articulated from Imam Ali's perspective, it is fitting to examine the behavioral principles and models he provided for dealing with this group of citizens in society through specific examples and cases.

6.1. Human Dignity in Facing the Opponents

Imam Ali's thought and conduct were such that he consistently urged his agents to uphold the dignity of all members of society. For instance, he advised Mālik al-Ashtar: "Your heart should be enveloped with a cover woven from compassion, love, and kindness toward the people" (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, 1993, vol. 11, p. 138). *Nahj al-Balagha* meticulously examines the concept of rights, which gains significance through Imam Ali's emphasis on its practical implementation. The understanding of this issue—individual and inherent citizenship rights, rooted in the respect for personal and social dignity—is clearly evident in the words and actions of Imam Ali. *Nahj al-Balagha* adopts a comprehensive and expansive view of citizenship rights and their foundations, which are grounded in human dignity, derived not from emotion

but from reason. From Imam Ali's perspective, communal life requires numerous relationships on the part of the individual, and familiarity with the principles of civic life facilitates the development, growth, and nurturing of individual capabilities. In this regard, *Nahj al-Balagha* consistently conveys messages that contribute to realizing a society based on the principles of civic life. The relationship between the individual and the government is expanded in *Nahj al-Balagha*, interlinking concepts such as the individual, state, citizen, ethics, society, and the like. Indeed, Imam Ali believed that under Islamic governance, the lives and property of people must be respected, and the ruling authority is obligated to uphold this critical matter. As recorded in *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa*, Imam Ali, even when referring to the Kharijites—who took up arms and fought against him—never labeled them as hypocrites or polytheists. Instead, he referred to them as "our brothers" who have launched an armed attack against us (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, 1993, vol. 11, p. 62). Thus, it is evident that, even when confronting opponents, Ali deemed it obligatory to uphold the right to dignity and preserve the human and divine status of all individuals as God's representatives on earth.

6.2. Acceptance of Advice by Citizens Based on the Rationale of Enjoining Good

According to verse 104 of Surah Al Imran: "Let there be from among you a community calling to goodness, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong; those are the ones who are successful." The phrase "let there be" in the verse clearly indicates the obligatory nature of this command, and the phrase "those are the ones who are successful" suggests that success is exclusively reserved for this group, whether they are rulers or subjects. Al-Ṣadūq, through his chain of transmission from Masʿad ibn Ṣadaqa, reports that Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq said: The Commander of the Faithful [Imam Ali] (peace be upon him) stated, "God does not punish the masses for the sins of the authorities if those sins are committed in secret and the people are unaware. However, if the authorities openly commit wrongs and the people do not confront them, both groups become deserving of God's punishment" (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, 1993, vol. 11, p. 407). Through the same chain, al-Ṣadūq narrates that Imam Ali said, "God does not punish the subjects for the sins of the authorities." He further stated that it is possible that any of you may face oppression, injustice, or even murder at the hands of a tyrannical ruler. If you cannot provide help or support, you should not be present, for assisting—when you are a witness to the act—is a religious obligation for every believer, unless an apparent proof

compels otherwise. As God has categorically referred to enjoining good in the Quran, stating that those among the Children of Israel who disbelieved were cursed by David and Jesus son of Mary. This was because of their disobedience and transgression. They did not forbid one another from the evil they committed (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, 1993, vol. 11, p. 408).

6.3. Freedom of Expression and the Permission to Establish Political Parties Under Imam Ali's Governance

The Quran addresses the necessity of forming parties within the Islamic political system, both in positive and negative contexts. For instance, verse 20 of Surah al-Ahzab states: "They think the confederates have not withdrawn, and if the confederates should come, they would wish…" In some instances, the Quran portrays parties in a positive light, referring to those who join the "Party of God" (*Ḥizb Allāh*), meaning groups or individuals who believe and strive to support the Prophet and God's religion. However, the term "ḥizb" (party) is also used negatively in the Quran to describe polytheists or those led astray. Regardless of whether the term "party" is used positively (as *Ḥizb Allāh*) or negatively, it is clear that the Quran recognizes the existence of parties and organizations. The Quran acknowledges the presence of such groups in society, as indirectly affirmed in verse 41 of Surah al-Hajj: "Those who, if We give them authority in the land, establish prayer, give zakat, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and to God belongs the outcome of all affairs." This verse indicates that corruption incurs divine wrath, while the means of reform are favored when established in society. The history of Islam indicates that from its inception, there were groups, assemblies, and pacts in which the Prophet was a participant, such as the First and Second Pacts of ʿAqaba. Examining the contents of these pacts reveals that they were formed by an Islamic community seeking social and moral transformation, with their activities playing a significant role in advancing the objectives of Islam and reforming society. With some reflection and study of the Prophet's conduct and approach, it becomes clear that he not only acknowledged the existence of opposing groups within society but also tolerated them to the extent possible, as long as they did not engage in military aggression.

6.4. Justice and Equality toward Law

Imam Ali defines justice with various expressions, such as the strongest foundation (Āmidī, 1989, hadith no. 1873), the divine scale (ibid., hadith no. 3464), and the foundation of people's lives (ibid., hadith no. 1954). By

examining his practical conduct in *Nahj al-Balagha*, it becomes evident that all these expressions are articulated without regard to nationality, race, or class of people. An example is justice in the distribution of the public treasury (*bayt al-māl*), which refers to the excessive demands of Ṭalḥa and Zubayr from the public treasury. Imam Ali was able to establish an egalitarian legal foundation within the religious community. For instance, equality before the law, access to courts, and fair judicial proceedings were among the manifestations of citizens' equality from Imam Ali's perspective. His letter 48, addressed to governors, was also aimed at ensuring that citizens would not lose hope in judicial justice within society. According to *Nahj al-Balagha*, it can be said that human rights, in Imam Ali's approach and perspective, were respected in all circumstances and times, and their protection was deemed obligatory. In a segment of Sermon 207 of *Nahj al-Balagha*, Imam Ali addresses the rights of the ruler and the people, stating: "If someone has a right over another while the other has no right over him, such a right belongs solely to God, and His creation has no such privilege." What is noteworthy in this sermon is that Imam Ali addresses all people collectively, reflecting the equality of their rights in his view. Throughout his words, there is a clear emphasis on respecting the rights of both supporters and opponents equally. In this sermon, he repeatedly refers to the divine right of leadership (*khilāfa*) and elaborates on the reciprocal nature of rights between rulers and subjects, declaring: "The right is the most exalted thing in speech and the least regarded in fair action toward one another." In this same sermon, Imam Ali explicitly emphasizes the rights of the people, ensuring that through their right to criticism and protest, the governing system and rulers are safeguarded from corruption and ruin. This emphasis can be termed as the concept of citizenship rights, and even beyond that, one can discern a profound trace of Islamic human rights in his address to all people. With such an interpretation of Imam Ali's words and thought, his attention to and practice of what is today called citizenship rights become evident. It can be said that his profound statements align with the notion of civic equality as articulated by Kant, which encompasses the participation of all citizens—whether supporters or opponents, minorities or otherwise—transforming the "passive citizen" into an "active citizen" (Kant, 2022, p. 170).

6.5. Cooperation and Collaboration

Membership in the city and acceptance of a civil society, where all individuals can play a positive role in its governance, establishes a reciprocal relationship

between the ruler and the people, thereby laying the groundwork for upholding justice. This principle is clearly evident in the words and actions of Imam Ali. From his perspective, participation requires two conditions: (1) recognizing an individual's membership in the collective life of society, and (2) providing opportunities for all citizens to fulfill their civic duties without personal bias or prejudice (Mohaghegh Damad & Vesali, 2014). In Sermon 207 of *Nahj al-Balagha*, Imam Ali repeatedly uses the terms "taʿāwun" (cooperation) and mutual collaboration, indicating that establishing justice is only possible through collective cooperation. This cooperation is necessary even from those who are opponents or deemed insignificant by others ("even if people deem them insignificant"). He further states in the same sermon: "O people, do not hesitate to speak the truth or to offer counsel for justice, for I too am prone to error, as I am a servant of God and not immune to mistakes." Therefore, admonition and assistance are always necessary. This concept of assistance and cooperation in Imam Ali's words in *Nahj al-Balagha* aligns with what Kant describes as the indispensable need of humans, meaning that mutual help and support can manifest as a general principle, serving as both a moral imperative and, beyond that, a binding legal duty (Kant, 2022, p. 121). According to Kant, a duty is a free yet obligatory choice dictated by the law of reason. It is free because it stems from human will, and obligatory because it transcends emotional or sensory inclinations (ibid., p. 9). In *Nahj al-Balagha*, Imam Ali considers upholding citizenship rights not only a duty of rulers but also a social responsibility for all members of society, emphasizing the right of people to participate in governance (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Letter 53). Ibn Khaldūn similarly holds that citizenship rights in Islamic societies must be accompanied by adherence to principles of social justice and the elimination of discrimination (Ibn Khaldūn, 1985, vol. 1, p. 312). Citizenship rights in Islam not only ensure individual freedoms but also serve as a means to strengthen social cohesion and mutual responsibility within the Islamic community. Ultimately, considering the foundations discussed, it can be said that Imam Ali's model in this regard rests on two fundamental principles: first, transparency in governance and the accountability of authorities to the people; and second, social justice, in which the rights and dignity of individuals are recognized. Throughout his caliphate, Imam Ali consistently emphasized that any deprivation of citizenship rights—whether through unjust laws or neglect of the people's demands and needs—must be held accountable. Consequently, from Imam Ali's perspective, any form of civil protest, particularly civil disobedience arising from violations of fundamental human rights, is

legitimate as long as it does not transgress ethical and social boundaries. The most significant aspect in analyzing this relationship is the recognition that civil disobedience within Imam Ali's model is not merely a violation of the law or opposition to the ruling authority. Rather, it is often an expression of alignment with ethical principles, aimed purposefully at reforming and reconstructing judicial and governmental systems. In fact, civil disobedience in this framework is not only a protest against the status quo but also a demand for reform to uphold citizenship rights. When these rights are violated, such disobedience can challenge the legitimacy of the governing authority. Imam Ali, in various instances, including his response to public discontent, emphasized the necessity of preserving the public good and respecting individual rights. Regarding citizenship rights, it must be noted that this concept holds a special place not only in democratic and liberal systems but also within the framework of Islamic teachings, particularly in the conduct of Imam Ali, who maintained that the individual rights of every person in society—including the right to freedom of expression, the right to participate in public and political affairs, and even the right to protest against tyrannical powers—must be guaranteed. These rights, which are articulated systematically within the Islamic context and especially in Imam Ali's governance model, are understood as a prerequisite for any social and political transformation. In this regard, civil disobedience is regarded not only as a political and social tool but also as a spiritual and ethical process for upholding human and social rights. On the other hand, it should be noted that Imam Ali consistently adopted a prudent strategy in confronting oppression and corruption, which aligned with the legal system. For example, when standing against the corruption and injustice of governmental institutions, Imam Ali utilized lawful and peaceful methods, resorting to corrective actions only when internal reform was not feasible. This approach aligns precisely with the concept of nonviolent civil disobedience: a legitimate protest aimed at fundamental changes in judicial and governmental systems, grounded in ethical and legal principles.

7. Examples of Confronting Civil Disobedience in Imam Ali's Government

Based on the provided definition of civil disobedience, it can be said that during the governance of Imam Ali, there were numerous instances of civil disobedience, some of which were reformative protests while others appeared as civil disobedience but were subversive in nature. Analysis based on the

Nahj al-Balagha and historical sources indicates that Imam Ali possessed a keen ability to distinguish between genuine civil disobedience and antagonistic or subversive behavior. He adopted a precise and balanced approach in dealing with these oppositions, ensuring that citizens' rights to express protests were respected while maintaining the security and cohesion of the Islamic society. The most significant instances of civil disobedience during Imam Ali's governance can be examined in the following cases.

7.1. Protests of Ṭalḥa and Zubayr and the Battle of Jamal

Ṭalḥa and Zubayr, prominent companions of the Prophet, initially pledged allegiance to Imam Ali but later began their civil opposition due to their failure to secure the positions they desired. At first, their opposition took the form of dialogue and criticism. However, instigated by ʿĀʾisha, their dissent escalated into armed conflict, culminating in the Battle of Jamal. Prior to the military confrontation, Imam Ali repeatedly engaged in negotiations, peaceful dialogue, and rational argumentation, striving to keep their protests within the framework of reformative and civil means. However, when they chose the path of violence and sedition, Imam Ali was compelled to respond decisively (Ṭabarī, 1990, vol. 3, p. 409).

7.2. Opposition of the Kharijites and the Issue of Arbitration

One of the most significant instances of civil disobedience during Imam Ali's governance can be observed in the case of the Kharijites (Khawārij). The Kharijites were initially among Imam Ali's supporters in the Battle of Ṣiffīn, but following the arbitration (*ḥakamiyya*), they rebelled against him, accusing him of abandoning justice. Imam Ali recognized their freedom of expression and right to protest as long as they did not resort to violence or sedition. He not only engaged in debates with them in mosques but also continued to allocate their share from the public treasury, stating: "As long as you do not take up arms, I will not fight you" (Ibn Athīr, 1965, vol. 2, p. 398). However, when their actions crossed the boundaries of peaceful civil opposition and endangered public security, as seen in the incident of Nahrawān, Imam Ali confronted them decisively.

7.3. Civil Disobedience and Protests Regarding Economic Policies and the Distribution of Public Funds

Another area of civil disobedience during Imam Ali's governance was the protests by some Quraysh elites and prominent companions against his

equitable economic policies. Unlike the practices of previous caliphs, Imam Ali established equal shares for all in the public treasury and abolished the privileges of the elites and notables. This policy faced strong opposition from some groups. Nevertheless, Imam Ali stood firm against these protests, declaring: "Do you ask me to seek victory through oppression of the weak?! By God, I will never do so" (Ṭabarī, 1988, vol. 3, p. 155).

7.4. Defiance of Appointed Governors and Agents against the Imam's Orders

One of the challenges during Imam Ali's governance was the opposition from some appointed governors and administrators in various regions. For instance, Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, the governor of the Levant (al-Shām), refused to accept Imam Ali's authority and openly rebelled. Contrary to the conventional methods of governance at the time, Imam Ali initially sought to resolve this crisis through correspondence, peaceful dialogue, and attempts at political persuasion (Dashti, 2009, pp. 485–486; *Nahj al-Balagha*, Letters 6–7). However, when Muʿāwiya pursued the path of war and armed rebellion, Imam Ali was compelled to confront him.

7.5. Protests of Close Companions of the Imam against His Governmental Policies

Even some of Imam Ali's closest companions, such as al-Ashʿath ibn Qays and certain individuals from Kufa, expressed objections to his political and military decisions. *Nahj al-Balagha* records instances where Imam Ali laments the lack of cooperation and civil disobedience from some individuals regarding the implementation of governmental reforms (Dashti, 2009, pp. 75, 87; *Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermons 27, 34). In addressing such protests, Imam Ali employed methods based on dialogue, transparency, and persuasion to inform the people about his policies.

7.6. Protests during the Battle of Ṣiffīn

During the Battle of Ṣiffīn, which took place between the army of Imam Ali and Muʿāwiya, some of the Imam's soldiers criticized his policies and methods of warfare. The people rose against Ali, saying: "Respond to their call, for we are truly ruined." Al-Ashʿath ibn Qays, among the ranks of Imam Ali's army, was not only unwilling to remain silent but spoke more than others about the necessity of extinguishing the flames of war and inclining toward peace. However, Imam Ali's view on this matter was as follows: "I have

always wished that my affairs with you would endure, and that I could remain with you... Behold, I was indeed the commander of the faithful yesterday, but today I have become the commanded. I used to forbid others, and now they forbid me. Now you cherish life, and I have no power to compel you to do what you find displeasing" (Ibn Muzāḥim, 1982, pp. 483–484).

7.7. Social and Political Protests

In certain situations, people protested against the lack of fulfillment of their social and economic needs. Imam Ali responded to these grievances appropriately in various contexts, obligating his agents to establish justice in society. For example, in a hadith from Imam Ali, we read: "Justice is the foundation upon which the world's stability is built" (Majlisī, 1897, vol. 75, p. 83). In another eloquent and profound statement, he said: "Cities and lands are not prospered except through justice" (Nūrī, 1987, vol. 11, p. 320). Thus, from the very beginning of his governance, Imam Ali spoke unequivocally about the necessity of implementing social justice. In a striking statement, when he returned to the public treasury the gifts that ʿUthmān had distributed lavishly to his relatives, he declared: "By God, if I find those gifts, I will return them to the public treasury, even if they have been used as dowries for women or to acquire maidservants, for justice brings ease, and whoever finds justice burdensome will find oppression even more so" (Dashti, 2009, p. 59). From Imam Ali's perspective, disrupting societal order through armed action constitutes a crime, which is distinct from criticism or protest. In light of this, individual rights in society were of paramount importance to him, even during the most sensitive moments when opposition to him was at its peak. In his logic, the Islamic society belongs to everyone, and all enjoy equal rights. Some believe that the Kharijites were anarchists seeking chaos. While there were indeed some among them who disrupted order, they generally held that Imam Ali was chosen by the people, and since God has granted sovereignty to the people, there was a need at that time for a referendum and consultation of public opinion. They argued that instead of arbitration, the matter should have been left to the people. In this context, Imam Ali described his dispute with Muʿāwiya during the Battle of Ṣiffīn as follows: "The matter began with us facing the people of the Levant. On the surface, it appeared that both sides were Muslim and united, except for their accusation against us regarding the blood of ʿUthmān, from which we are pure and innocent" (Dashti, 2009, p. 597).

    Indeed, Imam Ali responded by clarifying that the arbitration was intended

to involve a legal expert to determine who was at fault. However, this process was derailed by the deception of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ. For this reason, fully aware of the Kharijites' misunderstanding, Imam Ali stated: "Do not kill the Kharijites after me, for one who seeks the truth and protests is not like one who pursues falsehood and follows a misguided path" (Dashti, 2009, p. 599). In the Battle of Nahrawān, Imam Ali engaged in negotiations with the Kharijites, urging them not to resort to warfare. Indeed, he kept the door open for every form of criticism, dialogue, and protest. However, when the Kharijites pursued military action, Imam Ali dismantled their gathering and crushed their military strength. Nevertheless, he did not treat them as disbelievers (*kuffār*) and instead spared them. Based on the principles and practices outlined in *Nahj al-Balagha*, if an individual is killed by a Muslim during a protest in the course of legitimate self-defense, nothing from their property should be confiscated except for weapons of war. Therefore, it can be said that *Nahj al-Balagha* serves as a significant source for institutionalizing the theory of Islamic public law. In this regard, one can confidently rely on its foundations concerning citizenship rights. Based on the authoritative and valuable text of *Nahj al-Balagha*, it can be inferred that human rights are to be respected and protected under all circumstances. All individuals in society, whether supporters or opponents, possess the right to life, and their property is immune from violation. In Imam Ali's perspective, as reflected in the *Nahj al-Balagha*, upholding the rights of both the people and the government is equally emphasized, and one cannot prioritize one over the other. As stated in Sermon 207 of *Nahj al-Balagha*, Imam Ali addresses the rights of the ruler and the people, asserting that if it is assumed that someone has a unilateral right without responsibility, it must be said that this pertains solely to God. The events of the world are all rooted in justice and absolute good, and it is God who possesses infinite power and establishes absolute justice in the universe (Mohaghegh Damad & Vesali, 2014). In conclusion, the examination of these instances demonstrates that Imam Ali made a precise distinction between reformative protests and subversive movements in response to civil disobedience. When opposition was expressed within the framework of citizenship rights, justice-seeking, and reform, he showed the utmost tolerance, forbearance, and even support. However, when protests escalated into sedition, subversion, or threats to public security, he adopted a firm and lawful response. This approach can serve as a model for modern policymaking in Islamic societies, illustrating how to balance the right to civil disobedience, freedom of expression, and the preservation of social security.

8. Conclusion

The conduct of Imam Ali in dealing with opponents and upholding their citizenship rights, whether they were civil critics or political protesters, is one of the richest historical and religious experiences in the realm of balancing religious authority with the citizenship rights of dissenters. Within the framework of the aforementioned analyses, it can be understood that Imam Ali, relying on a fundamental distinction between a "hostile opponent" and a "non-hostile opponent," adopted a tailored approach to various forms of civil disobedience, consistent with the principles of human rights and citizenship rights. This distinction was not merely based on jurisprudential or political appearances but was rooted in an ethical and rational foundation: preserving the unity of the Islamic society, respecting human dignity, and differentiating between reformative aspirations and seditious actions. In comparing Imam Ali's conduct with modern theories, particularly John Rawls' theory of civil disobedience, significant similarities can be observed. Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*, defines civil disobedience as a public, nonviolent, conscientious yet political act, aimed at changing unjust laws or policies within the framework of a legitimate political system. Similarly, in Imam Ali's experience, oppositions expressed within the structure of the Islamic community, without violence and through criticism, consultation, or civil protests, were met with a proportionate, receptive, and often supportive and dialogue-based response. From this perspective, Imam Ali can be regarded as a pioneer in recognizing a form of "legitimate right to civil disobedience," albeit within the specific epistemological and religious context of his era. Thus, Imam Ali's governance model interprets the right to civil disobedience in relation to divine justice, the informed pledge of allegiance (*bayʿa*) from the people, and the divine responsibility of the ruler. This foundational difference does not preclude a comparative application of the two theories; rather, it suggests the possibility of developing an Islamic theory of civil disobedience that draws on modern experiences while being rooted in the ethical, legal, and social teachings of the Islamic tradition.

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