



The Constitution of Madina as a Covenantal Social Contract: Consent, Citizenship, and Pluralism in the First Islamic Polity

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Abstract

This paper examines the Constitution of Madina, also known as the Charter of Madina, as a covenantal social contract. It argues that the Madinan document established a political order through mutual obligation, collective security, legal responsibility, dispute resolution, and regulated coexistence among diverse communities. The paper does not claim that Madina was a modern liberal democracy, secular state, or nation-state. Rather, it argues that the Madinan polity developed a historically distinctive form of political membership rooted in revelation, prophethood, covenant, and public responsibility. Using qualitative historical-textual analysis, this study examines the Constitution of Madina through classical Seerah literature, Qur'anic principles, Hadith, and modern academic scholarship. It also compares the Madinan model selectively with Hobbesian, Lockean, and Rousseauian social-contract theories. The findings indicate that the Madinan arrangement contained important contractual elements: consent through pledges and alliances, collective defense, shared public duties, legal regulation, and religious coexistence. However, its political legitimacy differed from that of modern contract theory because consent was not treated as the sole source of authority. Divine guidance, prophetic leadership, justice, and moral accountability remained central. The paper concludes that the Constitution of Madina is best understood as a covenantal political compact. Its contemporary relevance lies in its principles of covenant, justice, social solidarity, accountable authority, and treaty-based pluralism. Its historical context, however, must be respected; it should not be reduced to a simple template for a modern state.

Keywords: Constitution of Madina; Sahifat al-Madinah; social contract; bay'ah; political membership; pluralism; Ummah; Islamic political thought; covenant; Madina.



1. Introduction

The Constitution of Madina is among the most important political documents associated with the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It is commonly described as a charter, constitution, covenant, pact, or written agreement concluded after the Hijrah to Madina. The document sought to regulate relations among the Muhajirun, Ansar, Jewish tribes, allied groups, and other residents of Madina. It addressed collective security, conflict resolution, financial responsibility, inter-tribal obligations, religious communities, and public peace.

The document is especially significant because it emerged at a moment when the Muslim community moved from being a persecuted minority in Makkah to becoming a political community in Madina. The Hijrah was therefore not merely a change of location. It marked the formation of a new social and political order. This order could not rely only on tribal loyalty, personal friendship, or military force. It required a framework of obligations, cooperation, law, and authority. The concept of a social contract provides one useful analytical lens for studying this development. In Western political thought, social-contract theory asks how political authority becomes legitimate and why people should obey the state. Hobbes associated political order with security; Locke connected political legitimacy with consent and the protection of rights; Rousseau linked political authority with the common good and the general will. The Madinan experience may be compared with these questions, but it should not be treated as identical to any of them.

Ilyas Ahmad's *The Social Contract and the Islamic State* offers an important interpretation of this issue. Ahmad argues that social-contract theory should not be understood only as a philosophical fiction. In his view, the emergence of the Islamic state in Madina provided a historical example of real contracts through which a political community, civil society, and governmental authority were formed (Ahmad, 1944, pp. 1–3). Ahmad's interpretation is valuable because it directs attention to covenant, *bay'ah*, public responsibility, and political consent. However, his claims must be examined critically through the Constitution of Madina itself, classical Seerah sources, Qur'anic principles, Hadith, and modern historical scholarship. This paper argues that the Constitution of Madina can be understood as a covenantal social contract because it established political membership, mutual defense, legal authority, collective obligations, and the regulation of coexistence among diverse groups. At the same time, it differs fundamentally from Hobbesian, Lockean, and Rousseauian contract theories because its legitimacy was rooted in prophethood, revelation, moral duty, and accountability before Allah, rather than in individual consent or popular sovereignty alone.

1.1 Background and Significance

Before the Hijrah, Madina was marked by tribal division, competition, old rivalries, and insecurity. The major Arab tribes of Aws and Khazraj had experienced prolonged conflict, while Jewish tribes also played important roles in the city's social and economic life. The absence of a unifying political authority made conflict management difficult. The people of Madina, therefore, needed a form of leadership capable of mediating disputes and creating a stable public order.

The Pledges of Aqabah became a major turning point. Delegations from Madina accepted Islam and pledged support to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The Second Pledge of Aqabah, in particular, represented a commitment to protect the Prophet ﷺ and to support the emerging Muslim community. These pledges created the basis for Hijrah and later



political organization in Madina (Ibn Ishaq, 1955, pp. 197–201; Lings, 1983, pp. 133–138). After the Hijrah, the Prophet ﷺ took several steps to consolidate the new community. These included the building of the mosque, the establishment of brotherhood between the Muhajirun and Ansar, the regulation of communal obligations, and the formation of agreements with Jewish groups and others in Madina. Modern Seerah works describe these efforts as the foundations of a new social order. Al-Mubarakpuri (1996) highlights the mosque, the brotherhood agreement, and the Madinan charter as central elements in building the new community (pp. 118–125). Similarly, *When the Moon Split* presents the Madinan settlement as a framework for public order, communal obligations, and relations with non-Muslim groups (Al-Mubarakpuri, 1998, pp. 131–133).

The Constitution of Madina is significant because it provides an early historical case of a multi-community political order. It did not erase all tribal identities, nor did it require every group to adopt one religious identity. Instead, it placed different communities within a wider political framework of mutual security, law, and treaty obligations. This makes the document important for contemporary discussions of citizenship, pluralism, constitutionalism, minority protection, governance, and Islamic political thought. However, the document should not be romanticized or anachronistically interpreted. Madina was a seventh-century city-state, not a modern nation-state. Its political language, institutions, forms of membership, and legal categories differed from contemporary citizenship systems. For this reason, the paper uses the phrase “political membership” more often than modern “citizenship.” The term citizenship is used analytically, not as a claim that Madina possessed identical institutions to those of a contemporary constitutional state.

1.2 Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine the Constitution of Madina as a covenantal social contract and to assess its principles of consent, political membership, collective security, justice, and pluralism.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To explain the historical background of Madina before and after the Hijrah.
2. To analyze the Constitution of Madina as a political covenant.
3. To examine the role of *bay'ah*, consent, and covenant in political legitimacy.
4. To explore the nature of political membership in Madina.
5. To analyze the Constitution's approach to Jewish tribes and religious diversity.
6. To compare the Madinan model with selected aspects of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau.
7. To identify the contemporary relevance and limitations of applying the Madinan model to modern political thought.

1.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Questions

1. In what sense can the Constitution of Madina be understood as a social contract?
2. How did covenant and *bay'ah* contribute to political legitimacy in Madina?
3. How did the Constitution define political membership within the Madinan community?
4. What form of pluralism did the document establish for Jewish tribes and other treaty partners?
5. How did the document balance collective security, law, rights, and public duties?



6. How does the Madinan model differ from Hobbesian, Lockean, and Rousseauian social-contract theories?

7. What lessons can modern Muslim societies draw from the Madinan model without treating it as a ready-made modern constitution?

Hypotheses / Analytical Propositions

Because this study is qualitative and historical, the following are treated as analytical propositions rather than statistical hypotheses:

H1: The Constitution of Madina functioned as a covenantal social contract by establishing mutual obligations, collective defense, public order, dispute resolution, and political membership.

H2: Political membership in Madina expanded beyond tribal identity, although tribal and clan structures continued to shape specific legal and financial responsibilities.

H3: The Constitution established treaty-based pluralism by allowing religious communities to retain their identity while participating in shared public obligations.

H4: The Madinan model differs from Western social-contract theory by combining consent with revelation, prophetic authority, moral accountability, and divine sovereignty.

2. Literature Review

The Constitution of Madina has been discussed by classical Muslim historians, modern Seerah writers, legal historians, Islamic political theorists, and scholars of religion and pluralism. The literature broadly falls into four categories: classical Seerah sources, modern Seerah works, academic historical studies, and political-theory interpretations.

The earliest major source for the text is Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah*, preserved in Ibn Hisham's work and translated into English by Alfred Guillaume. The document appears in Guillaume's translation on pages 231–233 and contains provisions concerning the Muslim community, tribal obligations, financial responsibilities, security, legal protection, and relations with Jewish groups (Ibn Ishaq, 1955, pp. 231–233). Because Ibn Ishaq provides the foundational transmitted text, it remains central to any serious study of the Constitution. Modern Seerah literature supplements the classical sources by presenting the political and social context of Madina in an accessible form. In *The Sealed Nectar*, Al-Mubarakpuri describes the formation of brotherhood between the Muhajirun and Ansar, the organization of the Muslim community, and the subsequent agreement with Jewish groups as major developments in the establishment of Madinan society (Al-Mubarakpuri, 1996, pp. 118–125). In *When the Moon Split*, he similarly presents the document as a framework for public order, mutual defense, separate religious identities, and shared responsibilities (Al-Mubarakpuri, 1998, pp. 131–133). Martin Lings also narrates the Hijrah and Madinan transition as a movement from persecution and fragmentation toward a new religious and political community (Lings, 1983, pp. 141–155).

Ilyas Ahmad's work is particularly relevant because it explicitly interprets the rise of the Islamic State through the lens of social contract theory. Ahmad argues that the history of Arabia contains a real example of the sequence imagined by contract theorists: a condition of insecurity, the emergence of moral law, a social compact, civil society, and governmental authority (Ahmad, 1944, pp. 1–3). He treats the Aqabah pledges as foundational contracts and describes the Madinan covenant as a political arrangement through which the Prophet ﷺ became the chief authority of the city-state (Ahmad, 1944, pp. 97–101). Ahmad further describes the Islamic state as a “contractual organism,” meaning that individuals remain morally significant while being integrated into a larger



community of law, duty, and public purpose (Ahmad, 1944, pp. 117–118).

Ahmad's contribution is important, but it should not be accepted without critical examination. Twentieth-century concerns about the Islamic state, colonialism, democracy, and modern political theory shape his writing. His comparison of Madina with Locke and Rousseau is interpretive rather than a settled historical conclusion. The strength of his work lies in his identification of covenant and political obligation as central themes. Its limitation lies in its tendency to fit the Madinan experience too neatly into a systematic social-contract framework.

Modern academic scholarship has added important methodological caution. Michael Lecker argues that the term "Constitution of Madina" is conventional but potentially misleading, as the original designation is better understood as a written document or *kitāb* (Lecker, 2004). R. B. Serjeant goes further, suggesting that the document may consist of several related pacts or texts composed at different times rather than a single unified constitution issued at a single time (Serjeant, 1978, p. 1). Uri Rubin similarly raises questions about the document's textual history and composition (Rubin, 1985). These debates do not eliminate the historical significance of the Madinan agreements. Instead, they require scholars to be precise about what they claim.

W. Montgomery Watt treats the Constitution of Madina as central to understanding Muhammad's political role in the city, especially the relationship between the Muslim community, Jewish groups, and the new public order (Watt, 1956, pp. 221–228). Fred Donner emphasizes the early Islamic community's broad moral and religious character, suggesting that the "community of believers" initially included a wider circle than later formal religious categories might imply (Donner, 2010). Frederick Denny's study of *Ummah* in the Constitution of Madina is especially important because it explores the political significance of community membership in the text (Denny, 1977).

The political theory literature helps clarify the meaning of the social contract. Hobbes viewed political authority as necessary to escape insecurity and violent conflict; for him, the central political good was peace secured through sovereign authority (Hobbes, 1996, chs. 13, 17). Locke argued that government exists to protect natural rights and is legitimate only through consent, law, and the protection of life, liberty, and property (Locke, 1988, Second Treatise, 87–89, 123–131). Rousseau focused on collective self-rule, equality, and the general will, arguing that legitimate political authority must serve the common good rather than private interests (Rousseau, 2018, Book I, chs. 1, 6, 8). The Constitution of Madina shares features with these theories, but cannot be reduced to any of them. It shares Hobbes's concern with public security, Locke's interest in mutual obligation and political legitimacy, and Rousseau's concern with the formation of a collective political community. However, the Madinan model differs in that its highest moral authority is Allah, its political head is also a Prophet, and its legal order is connected to revelation and covenant.

The main gap in the literature is that many discussions either celebrate the Constitution of Madina as an ideal model or treat it only as a historical document. Fewer studies bring together Seerah sources, Qur'anic norms, Hadith, critical historical scholarship, and social contract theory within a single structured analysis. This paper seeks to address that gap.

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative historical-textual and socio-legal methodology. The purpose



is not to test a statistical claim but to interpret the Constitution of Madina as a political and legal document within its historical context.

The primary sources include the Qur'an, relevant Hadith collections, Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah*, and the text of the Constitution of Madina as preserved in the Seerah tradition. The Qur'an is used as a normative source for concepts such as covenant, justice, consultation, unity, religious freedom, and treaty obligations. For example, the Qur'an commands believers to fulfill agreements (Qur'an 5:1), judge with justice (Qur'an 4:58), consult in collective matters (Qur'an 42:38), honor treaties (Qur'an 9:4), and act justly even toward opponents (Qur'an 5:8).

Hadith sources are used to clarify the moral and legal importance of covenant, responsibility, and protection. The principle that lawful conditions bind Muslims appears in Sunan Abi Dawud (Hadith 3594) and Jami' al-Tirmidhi (Hadith 1352). The Prophet ﷺ also warned against harming those protected by covenant, stating that whoever kills a person under covenant would not smell the fragrance of Paradise (Al-Bukhari, 1997; Hadith 6914). Leadership responsibility is emphasized in the Hadith that every person is a shepherd and responsible for those under his care (Al-Bukhari, 1997; Hadith 7138; Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, 2007, Hadith 1829a).

The secondary sources are divided into three groups. First, modern Seerah works such as *The Sealed Nectar*, *When the Moon Split*, and *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* are used for narrative context. Second, academic studies by Lecker, Serjeant, Watt, Denny, Donner, Rubin, and Yildirim are used for historical and legal analysis. Third, political-theory texts by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Ilyas Ahmad are used to provide a comparative conceptual framework.

The analysis is organized around five themes:

1. Consent and covenant.
2. Political authority.
3. Political membership.
4. Religious pluralism.
5. Security, law, and dispute resolution.

The study also uses source criticism. It distinguishes between classical Seerah transmission, modern popular Seerah writing, and academic historical interpretation. It does not assume that all wording of the Constitution is equally certain or that all clauses were necessarily composed at one moment. It also avoids projecting modern categories such as liberal citizenship, secularism, electoral democracy, and nation-state sovereignty directly onto seventh-century Madina.

4. Findings / Results

4.1 The Constitution of Madina as a Political Covenant

The Constitution of Madina can reasonably be understood as a political covenant because it established reciprocal duties among groups that had previously lacked a unified political framework. The document was not merely a religious sermon or personal moral instruction. It addressed public order, inter-group relations, defense, conflict, and legal obligations.

The text begins by describing the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Madina as "one community to the exclusion of all people" (Ibn Ishaq, 1955, p. 231). This clause is significant because it forms a broader political community from groups previously organized primarily by tribe, clan, and locality. The new *Ummah* did not simply abolish



all earlier social structures. Instead, it placed them within a wider moral and political framework.

The document also regulates the role of tribes and clans in matters such as blood money and ransom. This shows that the Constitution did not seek to immediately erase tribal structures. Rather, it transformed their role. Tribes remained responsible for certain legal and financial duties, but they were no longer independent political units free to pursue unlimited revenge or conflict. Their responsibilities became part of a wider order of justice and mutual obligation.

This arrangement supports the description of the Constitution as covenantal. A covenant is more than a private agreement; it creates binding obligations among individuals and communities. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the moral seriousness of covenants. Believers are commanded to fulfill contracts and promises (Qur'an 5:1; 16:91), and they are reminded that covenants will be called to account (Qur'an 17:34). The Constitution of Madina can therefore be understood as a political application of a broader Islamic moral culture of trust, obligation, and accountability. Ahmad's interpretation is relevant here. He argues that the Islamic state was built through real contracts rather than fictional assumptions about isolated individuals forming a state in an imaginary past (Ahmad, 1944, pp. 1–3). Although this claim should not be accepted without qualification, the Constitution does show that agreements were central to the formation of the Madinan political order.

4.2 Consent, Bay'ah, and Political Legitimacy

The political legitimacy of the Madinan order was connected with consent, but consent did not function in the same way as modern electoral consent. The Aqabah pledges created a basis for the Prophet ﷺ to migrate to Madina and to assume a public role among its inhabitants. The people of Madina did not simply receive an external ruler through conquest. They invited the Prophet ﷺ, accepted Islam, pledged support, and committed themselves to defending the new community.

The Second Pledge of Aqabah is especially important. The representatives of Madina pledged to protect the Prophet ﷺ as they would protect their own families. This was not merely a statement of religious belief. It carried political and security implications. The pledge created a moral and practical obligation to defend the Prophet ﷺ and the Muslim community (Ibn Ishaq, 1955, pp. 197–201). Ahmad interprets this process as consisting of a social contract and a governmental contract. According to his reading, the first agreement created the Muslim community, while the second made the Prophet ﷺ the chief political authority of Madina (Ahmad, 1944, pp. 97–101). This interpretation is useful because it distinguishes between becoming part of a moral community and accepting a framework of political authority.

However, political legitimacy in Madina was not based on consent alone. The Qur'an establishes that authority must operate under justice and divine guidance. Qur'an 4:58 commands the fulfillment of trusts and judgment with justice. Qur'an 4:59 instructs believers to obey Allah, the Messenger, and those entrusted with authority, while directing disputes back to Allah and the Messenger. This means that authority was not absolute. It was limited by justice, revelation, and moral accountability. The concept of *bay'ah*, therefore, differs from a modern vote. A vote is often an expression of political preference within a constitutional system. *Bay'ah* is a moral-political pledge that includes loyalty, obedience within lawful limits, responsibility, and accountability before Allah.



The Hadith that “Muslims are bound by their conditions” reinforces the importance of keeping legitimate commitments (Abu Dawud, 2008; Hadith 3594).

4.3 Political Membership and the Formation of the Ummah

The Constitution of Madina created a form of political membership broader than tribal identity yet distinct from modern individual citizenship. The document united the Muhajirun and Ansar within one *Ummah*, while maintaining the continued role of tribes in certain responsibilities.

The relationship between the Muhajirun and Ansar illustrates this transformation. The Muhajirun had left Makkah, property, kinship networks, and security behind. The Ansar became their hosts and partners in the new community. The Prophet ﷺ established bonds of brotherhood between members of the two groups. The well-known example of Sa'd ibn al-Rabi' and 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf demonstrates the practical dimension of this brotherhood, including willingness to share wealth and support migrants (Al-Bukhari, 1997; Hadith 3780).

This brotherhood reflected Qur'anic principles. Qur'an 59:9 praises the Ansar because they gave preference to migrants even when they themselves were in need. Qur'an 49:10 describes believers as brothers, while Qur'an 3:103 instructs believers to hold firmly together and avoid division. These verses do not function as constitutional clauses, but they provide the moral worldview within which Madinan political membership developed. The Constitution did not abolish tribal affiliation. Instead, it subordinated tribal loyalties to a wider commitment to justice, peace, and public responsibility. This is visible in clauses regulating blood money, ransom, and collective liability. Each group retained certain internal obligations, but those obligations were tied to the unity and security of the broader community. This arrangement may be described as layered membership. A person could belong simultaneously to a family, clan, tribe, religious community, and wider political order. The Constitution did not demand that all identities disappear. Rather, it reorganized them under a shared covenant. This is an important distinction for modern discussions of citizenship. The Madinan model was not based on uniform cultural identity; it was based on a public order in which different communities carried shared obligations.

4.4 Religious Pluralism and Treaty-Based Coexistence

One of the most important findings of this study is that the Constitution of Madina established a form of treaty-based pluralism. The document recognized Jewish tribes as part of the political order while allowing them to maintain their religious identity.

According to the text summarized in the Seerah tradition, the Jews of Banu 'Awf were described as one community with the believers. At the same time, Jews retained their religion and Muslims retained theirs (Ibn Ishaq, 1955, pp. 231–233). Al-Mubarakpuri similarly states that the Jewish groups would practice their religion while Muslims practiced theirs, and that both sides had responsibilities regarding expenditure, defense, consultation, and mutual assistance (Al-Mubarakpuri, 1996, pp. 124–125).

This pluralism was not secular in the modern sense. The Madinan state did not claim neutrality toward religion. Its moral and legal center was Islam, revelation, and prophetic authority. However, political membership was not restricted only to those who shared the same faith. Jewish groups could retain religious identity while participating in a common framework of security and public responsibility.

The Qur'an supports principles relevant to this arrangement. Qur'an 2:256 rejects



compulsion in religion. Qur'an 60:8 permits kindness and justice toward non-Muslims who do not fight Muslims because of religion or expel them from their homes. Qur'an 9:4 commands Muslims to honor treaties with those who remain faithful to their agreements. These principles provide a moral foundation for treaty-based coexistence.

The Constitution, therefore, illustrates that religious difference did not automatically exclude groups from political cooperation. Public membership depended upon covenant, loyalty, justice, and shared obligations. At the same time, the arrangement had limits. Groups that violated agreements, joined hostile coalitions, or endangered the city's security could no longer claim the benefits of the covenant. This is a critical point: the pluralism of Madina was not unconditional individual autonomy; it was a political pluralism structured through reciprocal treaty obligations.

The Hadith concerning protected persons further reinforces the seriousness of covenantal protection. The Prophet ﷺ warned against killing a person who was under covenant, indicating that treaty obligations carried moral and legal force (Al-Bukhari, 1997; Hadith 6914). This principle demonstrates that political agreements with non-Muslims were not merely temporary expedients. They were binding commitments with religious significance.

4.5 Justice, Security, and Dispute Resolution

The Constitution of Madina linked public security with justice and legal authority. It recognized that a stable community could not survive if every group pursued revenge independently, protected criminals, or acted outside a shared legal framework. The clauses dealing with blood money and ransom reflect an attempt to regulate practices previously tied to tribal conflict. Instead of unrestricted revenge, the Constitution placed these matters within the rules of responsibility and cooperation. This is important because it transformed social obligations from private tribal concerns into matters affecting the wider political community.

The document also provided that serious disputes should be referred to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ (Ibn Ishaq, 1955, pp. 231–233). This clause gives the Prophet ﷺ a role as final arbiter. It also shows that the law in Madina was not treated as the will of a tribe, a king, or a majority alone. The ultimate reference point was divine guidance as interpreted and applied by the Messenger ﷺ. This differs from Hobbes's model of sovereign power. Hobbes argues that people authorize a sovereign to secure peace because the state of nature is a condition of insecurity and conflict (Hobbes, 1996, chs. 13, 17). The Madinan order shares the concern for peace and security, but it does not make the ruler the unlimited source of law. The Prophet ﷺ's authority was prophetic and morally bound by revelation.

The Madinan arrangement also differs from Locke's model. Locke argues that political authority is legitimate when it protects life, liberty, and property through law and consent (Locke, 1988, Second Treatise, 123–131). The Constitution of Madina likewise establishes obligations regarding security, justice, and property. However, its framework is not based solely on individual natural rights. Rights are linked with duties, morality, covenant, and divine accountability.

The document's approach to security may therefore be described as collective but not arbitrary. Security was a shared responsibility among treaty partners. Justice was necessary to maintain trust. The Qur'an emphasizes this balance by commanding believers to uphold justice even when it runs counter to their own interests or those of



their relatives (Qur'an 4:135) and by instructing them not to let hatred lead them away from justice (Qur'an 5:8).

5. Discussion

5.1 Is the Constitution of Madina a Social Contract?

The Constitution of Madina can be described as a social contract only if the term is used carefully. It should not mean that Madina reproduced the modern theories of Hobbes, Locke, or Rousseau. Nor should it imply that the document was created by isolated individuals leaving an imaginary state of nature.

The Madinan arrangement is better described as a covenantal social contract. It involved real groups, actual pledges, concrete security concerns, public duties, and recognizable political authority. It created a community through agreements rather than by relying only on lineage, conquest, or hereditary monarchy.

Ahmad's argument is strongest when he emphasizes that the formation of the Islamic political order involved actual covenants. His claim that social-contract theory was "not a mere fiction" reflects the fact that Madina was formed through pledges, agreements, mutual commitments, and treaty relationships (Ahmad, 1944, pp. 1–3). However, Ahmad's interpretation should not lead to the conclusion that all features of modern contract theory existed in Madina. The political ideas of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau emerged from different historical contexts and addressed different philosophical problems.

The primary value of the social-contract comparison lies in its analytical utility. It helps identify the political themes present in Madina: consent, obligation, security, public authority, law, and political membership. It does not prove that the Madinan polity was a modern constitutional democracy.

5.2 Comparison with Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau

Theme	Hobbes	Locke	Rousseau	Madinan Model
Main concern	Security and peace	Rights and limited government	Equality and common good	Covenant, justice, faith, and public order
Source of legitimacy	Authorization of the sovereign	Consent of rights-bearing individuals	General will of citizens	Revelation, consent, and prophetic authority
Role of law	Sovereign command	Protection of rights	Expression of the general will	Divine guidance and public covenant
Political membership	Subjects of the sovereign	Individual citizens	Equal citizens	Muslims, tribes, allies, and treaty communities
Pluralism	Limited central concern	Toleration in civil matters	Civic unity	Treaty-based religious coexistence
Political authority	Strong sovereign	Limited government	Collective self-rule	Prophet as Messenger, arbiter, and political leader

The Madinan model shares Hobbes's recognition that security is essential for political order. Madina's history of tribal conflict made public peace a necessary political goal.



However, unlike Hobbes, the Constitution did not grant unlimited authority to an absolute sovereign. Political authority was tied to justice, divine law, and covenant.

The Madinan model shares Locke's concern with consent, law, and limits on arbitrary behavior. The Aqabah pledges and Madinan agreements show that political authority did not emerge merely from conquest. However, Locke's model is centered on the protection of individual natural rights, especially life, liberty, and property. In Madina, rights were important, but they were embedded in a moral order that emphasized duties to Allah, family, tribe, treaty partners, and the wider community.

The Madinan model shares Rousseau's concern with forming a political community that rises above private or tribal interests. The *Ummah* created a moral and political identity broader than clan loyalty. However, Rousseau grounds legitimacy in the general will of the people, while the Madinan model grounds ultimate legitimacy in Allah's guidance and the authority of the Prophet ﷺ. Therefore, the Constitution of Madina cannot be fully classified as Hobbesian, Lockean, or Rousseauian. It may be said to contain elements comparable to all three, but it remains a distinct model shaped by revelation, covenant, and prophetic leadership.

5.3 Citizenship Without Modern Nation-State Assumptions

The Constitution of Madina offers a useful model of political membership, but it should not be described uncritically as modern citizenship. Modern citizenship usually assumes individual legal equality, territorial nationality, passports, bureaucratic institutions, elections, and formal constitutional rights. None of these existed in the contemporary form in seventh-century Madina.

Nevertheless, Madina contained important elements of political membership. Groups had identifiable obligations, protections, legal responsibilities, and public roles. The Muslim community formed a single *Ummah*, while Jewish groups entered the political order through treaties. Clans and tribes remained socially significant, but they were connected to a wider public framework. This form of membership was layered rather than uniform. A person could be Muslim, a member of a tribe, part of a clan, subject to a covenant, and a participant in Madina's public security. This layered character may be relevant to contemporary societies with ethnic, religious, linguistic, tribal, and regional diversity.

The key lesson is not that modern states should copy Madinan tribal structures. Rather, political unity does not require cultural uniformity. A society can recognize local and communal identities while creating shared duties of justice, security, law, and public welfare.

5.4 Pluralism Without Secularism

The Constitution of Madina is often discussed in contemporary debates about pluralism. Its most important contribution is the recognition that religiously diverse communities can enter a shared political order without abandoning their distinct identities.

However, the pluralism of Madina differs from modern secular pluralism. A secular state often presents itself as formally neutral toward religion. The Madinan polity did not operate on the basis of religious neutrality. Islam was the moral center of the political order, and the Prophet ﷺ possessed both religious and political authority.

However, this did not prevent treaty-based coexistence. Jewish groups retained their religion, participated in public affairs, and shared obligations for defense and peace. Their membership in the political order was not dependent on conversion to Islam. It was



dependent on covenantal loyalty and public responsibility.

This may be called covenantal pluralism. It is a model in which plural communities coexist through binding agreements, shared duties, legal protection, and mutual security. Such a model remains relevant because many contemporary conflicts result from the failure to balance group identity with common political responsibility.

5.5 Contemporary Relevance and Limits

The Constitution of Madina offers several lessons for contemporary political thought. First, political authority requires trust and public legitimacy. Second, the law must protect the weak and restrain injustice. Third, social unity cannot be built only through force; it requires shared moral commitments. Fourth, religious diversity can be managed through covenant, justice, and public responsibility. Fifth, rights must be accompanied by duties. At the same time, the Madinan model has limits when applied to modern states. It cannot simply be copied as a constitutional blueprint. Modern states have different populations, economies, technologies, legal systems, international obligations, and institutional structures. A modern state requires detailed constitutional arrangements that did not exist in seventh-century Madina.

Therefore, the most responsible contemporary use of the Constitution of Madina is principled rather than literal. Its lessons include justice, covenant, consultation, public responsibility, protection of treaty partners, accountability of leadership, and the possibility of plural political membership. These principles can guide Muslim political thought without forcing modern realities into historical categories.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined the Constitution of Madina as a covenantal social contract. The analysis shows that the Madinan document created a political order through mutual obligation, public security, dispute resolution, legal authority, and regulated coexistence among diverse communities.

The Constitution can be described as a social contract because it involved real agreements that created political membership and collective responsibility. The Aqabah pledges established the basis of consent and protection; the Hijrah created the conditions for political organization; the Madinan document provided a framework for law, security, and inter-group relations.

The political legitimacy of Madina was not based on consent alone. It was shaped by revelation, prophetic authority, justice, and covenant. This distinguishes it from Hobbesian, Lockean, and Rousseauian theories. Hobbes emphasizes security, Locke emphasizes rights and consent, and Rousseau emphasizes the general will. The Madinan model includes concerns related to all three but places them within a revelation-based moral order. The Constitution also provides an important model of treaty-based pluralism. Jewish groups retained religious identity while participating in shared public obligations. This was not secular pluralism, but it was a meaningful form of political coexistence based on covenant, justice, security, and responsibility.

The central conclusion is that the Constitution of Madina should neither be treated as a modern liberal constitution nor reduced to a symbolic religious document. It was a historically significant covenantal political arrangement. Its enduring value lies in its emphasis on justice, public trust, accountability, solidarity, treaty obligations, and the possibility of creating a shared political order among diverse communities.



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