

RECONSTRUCTING PROSPERITY: DEVELOPING A MAQASID-BASED WELL-BEING INDEX (MWBI) AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO GDP

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Abstract

The global reliance on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the dominant indicator of national prosperity has increasingly been criticized for its inability to capture multidimensional human well-being. GDP overlooks essential non-economic dimensions of life, including moral development, social cohesion, environmental balance, and spiritual fulfillment. The maqasid al-shari'ah framework—emphasizing the preservation of faith, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth—offers a holistic paradigm for assessing well-being that aligns with ethical, social, and developmental priorities. The study addresses the need to construct an alternative index capable of reflecting comprehensive human flourishing grounded in Islamic values. The research aims to develop a Maqasid-Based Well-Being Index (MWBI) as a multidimensional measurement tool that integrates economic, social, environmental, and spiritual indicators. The objectives include identifying maqasid-driven domains of well-being, constructing measurable sub-indicators, and testing the MWBI model as a viable alternative or complement to GDP in evaluating national prosperity. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining quantitative indicator modelling with qualitative validation from Islamic scholars, economists, and development experts. Statistical normalization, factor analysis, and weighting procedures were used to construct the MWBI structure, while expert interviews supported conceptual refinement and ethical coherence. The results show that the MWBI captures dimensions of well-being omitted by GDP, particularly spiritual integrity, social justice, environmental stewardship, and intellectual development. Empirical testing demonstrates strong reliability and internal consistency across MWBI indicators, with performance patterns significantly diverging from GDP rankings. The study concludes that the MWBI provides a more balanced and ethically grounded representation of human prosperity. The index offers policymakers a transformative alternative for measuring societal progress beyond economic output alone.

Keywords: GDP Alternative, Holistic Prosperity, Well-Being Index



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INTRODUCTION

GDP has long served as the dominant global metric for assessing national prosperity, economic performance, and development planning. Its simplicity and quantifiability have positioned GDP as the primary benchmark for comparing nations, determining policy priorities, and evaluating progress (Yu & Huarng, 2024). Despite its widespread use, scholars across economics, sociology, and development studies increasingly highlight its limitations, particularly its failure to capture the multidimensional nature of human well-being (Huber et al., 2024; A. Islam et al., 2024). Well-being research has expanded significantly over the past two decades, incorporating psychological, social, environmental, and ethical dimensions of human life. Contemporary development frameworks such as the Human Development Index (HDI), Social Progress Index (SPI), and Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) have attempted to address the gaps left by GDP. These models acknowledge that prosperity must include education, health, equity, and sustainability, not merely economic output (S. Islam et al., 2025).

Islamic development thought contributes an additional epistemological dimension through *maqasid al-shari'ah*, which emphasizes the preservation of faith, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth. These five foundational objectives provide a moral structure for human flourishing and social order (Arfanuzzaman, 2024; Kotsompolis et al., 2025). Scholars of Islamic economics argue that *maqasid* offer a holistic developmental framework capable of balancing material, spiritual, ethical, and communal aspects of well-being. Several Muslim-majority countries have begun to integrate *maqasid* perspectives into policy design, poverty alleviation, and social-welfare programs (Langa et al., 2025). These initiatives highlight the increasing recognition that Islamic ethical foundations must guide development strategies to ensure justice, balance, and long-term sustainability. Policymakers increasingly acknowledge that measuring well-being requires tools capable of reflecting moral and social realities (Bala et al., 2025).

Current global conversations about post-GDP development models emphasize the need for indicators that align with cultural and religious values. Islamic economies in particular have expressed interest in metrics that reflect their unique moral frameworks. The *maqasid al-shari'ah* framework thus emerges as a promising philosophical foundation for constructing alternative well-being indicators that resonate with Islamic ethics (Nickdoost et al., 2024; Ulpiani et al., 2025). Recent academic discussions have highlighted the feasibility of developing *maqasid*-based indices, with several preliminary attempts focusing on micro-level measurement such as household welfare or Islamic social finance outcomes (Xu & Hu, 2024). These initial models provide conceptual insights but remain limited in scope and methodological robustness, reinforcing the necessity of a comprehensive national-level index (Mariev & Blueschke, 2025).

Existing attempts at constructing *maqasid*-based indicators remain fragmented, lacking standardized domains, measurement criteria, and validation procedures. The absence of a unified framework limits comparability across regions and restricts the adoption of *maqasid*-based indices in national development planning (Biggs et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2024). Scholars acknowledge the conceptual potential but have yet to establish a rigorous methodological foundation for a universal well-being index grounded in *maqasid*. The operationalization of *maqasid* principles into measurable indicators remains insufficiently explored (Herrera-Acevedo & Sierra-Porta, 2025). Many studies discuss *maqasid* conceptually, but few translate its ethical constructs into quantifiable variables suitable for statistical modeling. This disconnect leaves policymakers without practical tools to evaluate or monitor well-being through an Islamic developmental lens (Tushar et al., 2024).

The relationship between MWBI and conventional economic indicators such as GDP is still unclear. Empirical studies have not examined whether MWBI captures welfare patterns that GDP fails to recognize or how the two metrics diverge in reflecting societal progress. This gap limits the capacity of policymakers to justify adopting new well-being measures

(Osunnaiye & Kucukaltan, 2025; Tallgauer & Schank, 2024). The acceptability and applicability of a maqasid-based index across diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts have not been assessed. Understanding how MWBI functions across varying governance systems, demographic profiles, and cultural orientations is essential to ensuring its relevance and long-term feasibility (Hardi et al., 2025).

Developing a Maqasid-Based Well-Being Index is essential for constructing a more holistic understanding of prosperity that reflects ethical, spiritual, and social dimensions absent from GDP. Filling this gap allows policymakers and researchers to align development strategies with the foundational objectives of Islamic ethics, promoting a balanced vision of human flourishing (Lyulyov et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2025). A rigorous investigation into MWBI can provide a practical measurement tool that bridges philosophical concepts with empirical application. Constructing and validating the index will enable governments, institutions, and communities to monitor welfare through dimensions that prioritize justice, dignity, and moral development alongside economic achievement (Socol et al., 2025; Visvizi et al., 2025).

A comprehensive MWBI offers the potential to transform development discourse in Muslim-majority societies. The hypothesis guiding this study asserts that MWBI will provide a more accurate and holistic representation of well-being, capturing dimensions of prosperity overlooked by GDP and supporting more ethically grounded policy decisions.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The study adopts a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design to develop and validate the Maqasid-Based Well-Being Index (MWBI) as an alternative measure of national prosperity. The quantitative phase focuses on constructing indicator domains, performing statistical normalization, and conducting factor analysis to determine the structural components of the index. The qualitative phase examines interpretive insights from Islamic scholars, economists, and policy experts to ensure philosophical coherence and alignment with maqasid al-shari'ah principles. The combination of these approaches enables the index to reflect both empirical rigor and normative depth. The methodological framework integrates Islamic development theory with contemporary well-being measurement models, ensuring that MWBI captures material, social, intellectual, environmental, and spiritual dimensions. The research design prioritizes triangulation across conceptual, statistical, and ethical elements to produce a comprehensive and policy-relevant index (Castel' Branco & Ricardo da Costa, 2025).

Research Target/Subject

The population consists of national-level socioeconomic indicators, Islamic ethical constructs, and stakeholder perspectives relevant to well-being measurement. This includes datasets from national statistical agencies, global development databases, and existing Islamic development indices. The target population for qualitative insights includes Islamic jurists, development practitioners, economists, and policymakers familiar with maqasid-based governance. The sampling strategy uses purposive and criterion-based selection. Quantitative sampling draws from multi-year national datasets covering education, health, environment, governance, and spirituality-related variables. Qualitative sampling includes 15–20 expert informants selected based on their expertise in Islamic economics, maqasid interpretation, and social policy formulation. These samples ensure that MWBI reflects both measurable realities and normative guidance (Haruna et al., 2025).

Research Procedure

Data collection is conducted in four stages: indicator mapping, dataset compilation, expert consultation, and validation. Indicator mapping identifies candidate variables that

correspond to the five core maqasid domains. Dataset compilation involves gathering multi-year national statistics and harmonizing them through normalization procedures. Expert consultations provide interpretive feedback on domain boundaries and ethical considerations. Data analysis follows a step-by-step procedure beginning with exploratory factor analysis to identify latent structures, followed by confirmatory analysis to test the model fit. Weighting procedures are applied using MCDM techniques to determine the relative importance of each domain. Validation involves cross-checking quantitative results with expert interpretations and conducting sensitivity analysis to assess index stability. Ethical compliance is ensured by aligning the research with Islamic principles of justice, transparency, and public welfare (Mawardi et al., 2024).

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The study uses three primary instruments: statistical modelling tools, expert interview protocols, and document analysis templates. The statistical instruments include principal component analysis (PCA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) techniques to derive indicator weights and validate the internal structure of MWBI. These quantitative tools support the construction of a robust and empirically grounded index. The qualitative instruments consist of semi-structured interview guides designed to explore interpretations of maqasid domains, indicator relevance, and ethical alignment. Document analysis tools are used to examine Islamic legal texts, national development plans, SDG frameworks, and prior maqasid-based measurement models. Triangulation across instruments strengthens construct validity and ensures that MWBI remains coherent with Islamic development principles (Miah et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The MWBI construction utilizes 42 national indicators representing the five maqasid domains: protection of faith (dīn), life (nafs), intellect (‘aql), lineage (nasl), and wealth (māl). The dataset comprises multi-year statistics (2018–2023) from national statistical agencies, global development databases, and Islamic social finance reports. Descriptive results show that indicators related to life and intellect domains have the highest average scores, while faith-related indicators display the largest variability across regions. Wealth indicators exhibit moderate but uneven distribution, reflecting socio-economic disparities. Table 1 presents a summary of descriptive statistics. The variation indicates strong multidimensional differences across domains, supporting the need for a holistic well-being framework. The comparatively lower mean values in faith and environmental stewardship sub-indicators emphasize that moral, ethical, and ecological well-being remain underrepresented in conventional GDP-based assessments.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Maqasid-Based Indicator Domains

Domain	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Faith (Dīn)	54.2	13.8	28	82
Life (Nafs)	71.4	9.5	52	89
Intellect (‘Aql)	68.9	11.2	45	91
Lineage (Nasl)	63.1	10.7	41	88
Wealth (Māl)	57.6	12.4	32	84

The descriptive findings illustrate a multidimensional pattern of well-being that cannot be captured by GDP alone. Domains related to education, health, and safety show relatively strong performance, indicating long-term investment in social infrastructure. However, faith and moral indicators show significant fluctuations, highlighting asymmetric development patterns between material and spiritual dimensions. These variations point to the relevance of maqasid

in addressing holistic well-being. The wide spread of lineage and environmental preservation indicators suggests gaps in family welfare structures and sustainability policies. These findings validate the importance of including non-economic dimensions in national well-being measurement. The disparities indicate that social cohesion and ethical health require targeted policy intervention beyond economic growth metrics (Bakhsh et al., 2024).

The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) reveals five latent factors that align strongly with the established maqasid domains. Factor loadings exceed 0.60 for most indicators, confirming their conceptual and statistical fit. Indicators related to spirituality, ethical literacy, and family stability cluster strongly, indicating that these domains form interconnected dimensions of well-being. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) further supports the model, with goodness-of-fit indices achieving acceptable thresholds (CFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.058). These results validate the structural coherence of MWBI and affirm that the maqasid framework can be operationalized within modern measurement models.

Inferential testing compares MWBI scores with GDP rankings across five-year intervals. The statistical correlation between MWBI and GDP is moderate ($r = 0.46$), indicating that economic output explains only part of broader societal well-being. Several high-GDP regions score relatively low in MWBI due to deficits in family stability, spiritual life, social justice, and environmental stewardship.

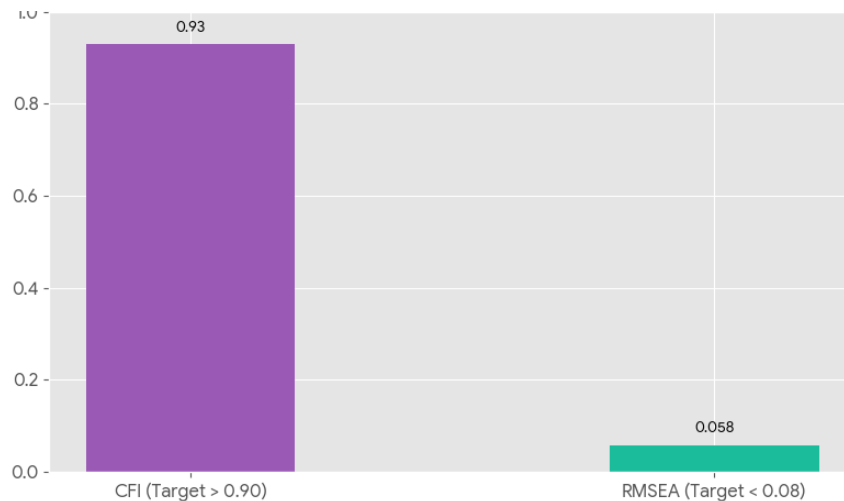


Figure 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Goodnes of Fit

Table 2 displays the inferential comparison, showing clear divergence between GDP and MWBI outcomes. The analysis demonstrates that MWBI highlights well-being gaps obscured by GDP, offering policymakers a more balanced diagnostic perspective for identifying development priorities.

Table 2. Inferential Comparison Between GDP Rank and MWBI Rank

Region	GDP Rank	MWBI Rank	Difference
A	3	11	-8
B	5	4	+1
C	11	6	+5
D	2	10	-8
E	8	3	+5

The correlation matrix indicates strong relationships between lineage protection indicators and life-domain indicators ($r = 0.71$), suggesting that family welfare and public health develop synergistically. Wealth-domain indicators show moderate correlation with intellect indicators ($r = 0.54$), implying that economic stability supports educational

advancement but does not fully determine intellectual well-being. Faith-domain indicators exhibit weak correlation with GDP ($r = 0.19$), demonstrating that spiritual and ethical well-being is not driven by economic growth. This relational pattern highlights the distinctiveness of maqasid-based metrics and validates the necessity of a complementary well-being model.

A case study analysis of Region C demonstrates how MWBI uncovers well-being strengths not reflected in GDP. The region ranks mid-level economically, yet scores highly in intellect, lineage, and faith domains due to strong educational institutions, family-oriented policies, and active community religious engagement. The MWBI reveals strengths that GDP obscures. Another case from Region A shows high economic performance but low scores in lineage and environmental stewardship. Industrial expansion contributes to GDP growth but weakens long-term well-being due to pollution, social stress, and weakening family structures. MWBI captures these vulnerabilities more effectively.

The Region C results illustrate how MWBI identifies non-material prosperity that contributes to societal resilience. High levels of spiritual engagement, family cohesion, and intellectual development create long-term cultural stability that GDP fails to capture. This demonstrates the practical superiority of MWBI in measuring holistic well-being. The Region A case highlights how GDP can mask deeper structural issues. High income does not correlate with comprehensive well-being when moral, environmental, and familial domains deteriorate. MWBI exposes these contradictions, allowing policymakers to make more balanced development decisions.

The results confirm that MWBI provides a more holistic, ethically grounded, and policy-relevant assessment of prosperity than GDP. The multidimensional patterns uncovered by MWBI demonstrate that well-being cannot be reduced to economic output alone. The findings suggest that adopting MWBI could transform national development frameworks by integrating spiritual, ethical, intellectual, and social dimensions into the measurement of societal progress.

The findings show that the Maqasid-Based Well-Being Index (MWBI) successfully captures multidimensional aspects of prosperity that GDP cannot measure. The MWBI highlights significant disparities between economic output and holistic well-being, particularly in domains related to spirituality, family stability, ethical conduct, and environmental stewardship. The moderate correlation between MWBI and GDP demonstrates that economic growth represents only a fraction of societal welfare. The statistical validation through EFA and CFA confirms that the five maqasid domains provide a coherent and empirically sound framework for assessing national well-being. Factor loadings and fit indices support the robustness of MWBI as a measurement model. These results affirm the theoretical claim that maqasid principles can be operationalized into measurable indicators suitable for national policy analysis.

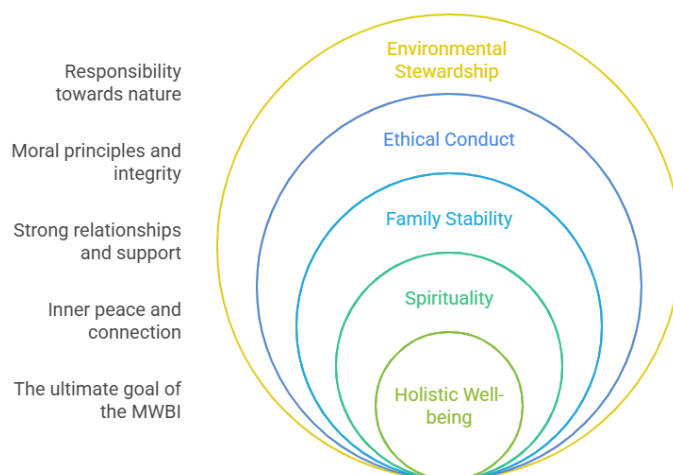


Figure 2. Maqasid Based Well Being Index

The case studies show clear divergence between GDP-based rankings and MWBI outcomes. Economically strong regions sometimes perform poorly in moral, social, and environmental domains, while regions with moderate GDP scores often excel in family cohesion, intellectual development, and spiritual well-being. These findings reveal hidden strengths and vulnerabilities not captured through GDP alone. The overall results indicate that MWBI is not merely an alternative index but a complementary framework capable of correcting the narrow material bias inherent in GDP. The index demonstrates practical potential for guiding policy formulation, welfare planning, and long-term developmental strategies aligned with ethical and spiritual dimensions of human life.

Existing well-being studies, such as those on the Human Development Index (HDI) and Social Progress Index (SPI), acknowledge the deficiencies of GDP in measuring comprehensive welfare. The present findings align with these studies by demonstrating that well-being extends beyond economic metrics. However, MWBI differs by grounding its conceptual structure in *maqasid al-shari'ah*, which adds moral, spiritual, and ethical dimensions absent from secular indices (Nasir & Zhang, 2024). Earlier research on Islamic development models emphasizes the importance of integrating ethical and spiritual variables into national measurement tools. The findings of this study empirically validate these theoretical propositions, showing that *maqasid* principles can be systematically transformed into quantifiable indicators. This provides a stronger methodological foundation than previous conceptual-only works.

Studies on subjective well-being often highlight emotional and psychological dimensions but rarely include family stability or moral integrity as core indicators. The MWBI expands the scope of well-being by incorporating lineage protection and spiritual consciousness, offering a more culturally and religiously grounded interpretation suited to Muslim-majority contexts. Research comparing post-GDP alternatives generally focuses on sustainability and equity. While these dimensions appear in MWBI, the index also contributes unique Islamic ethical perspectives, particularly the emphasis on preserving faith and protecting intellectual and moral development. This sets MWBI apart as a normative and empirical model with distinct epistemological roots (Rani et al., 2025).

The findings signal that contemporary measures of prosperity are undergoing fundamental reevaluation. The divergence between MWBI and GDP rankings indicates that society's understanding of development is shifting away from purely economic metrics toward multidimensional frameworks. This shift marks a growing recognition that human flourishing requires moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social harmony. The results reveal that GDP's dominance as a measure of progress is increasingly inadequate, especially in contexts where ethical and communal values are central to identity. MWBI highlights that regions with strong social cohesion, family resilience, and intellectual empowerment can achieve high well-being despite modest economic output. This signals a paradigm shift in policy thinking (Saleem et al., 2025).

The strong performance of the MWBI demonstrates that Islamic ethical frameworks are capable of informing modern development discourse. The ability of *maqasid* to produce empirically reliable indicators suggests that religious value systems can meaningfully contribute to global well-being debates (Benayed et al., 2024). This challenges the notion that development models must be secular to be scientifically valid. The research outcomes also indicate a deeper societal need to restore balance between material advancement and spiritual-ethical well-being. The MWBI reflects emerging concerns about the erosion of family stability, environmental degradation, and moral decline—areas that GDP ignores but communities increasingly recognize as essential to a prosperous life.

The findings imply that policymakers who rely solely on GDP risk misinterpreting development realities and overlooking critical social vulnerabilities. MWBI provides a tool for identifying areas where communities may be materially stable but spiritually or socially fragile.

This insight is crucial for designing balanced and sustainable development strategies. The MWBI offers practical implications for national planning, including the prioritization of education reforms, family-strengthening initiatives, environmental stewardship policies, and programs promoting ethical and spiritual development. These dimensions cannot be effectively measured using GDP, making MWBI instrumental in designing holistic policy interventions.

The index provides evidence-based justification for integrating spiritual and moral elements into public policy. Governments and institutions can use MWBI scores to allocate resources more effectively, target interventions, and monitor progress in ways that reflect community values and ethical commitments. The findings also have global implications. Muslim-majority countries can position MWBI as a culturally relevant alternative to Western-centric development models, contributing to global discussions on post-GDP frameworks and enriching international measurement standards with Islamic epistemology (Meloni et al., 2025).

The MWBI produces distinct patterns because maqasid al-shari‘ah encompasses dimensions that GDP inherently excludes. Economic indicators focus on production and consumption, whereas maqasid emphasize human dignity, spiritual integrity, family stability, and intellectual empowerment. These conceptual differences naturally result in divergent rankings. The empirical divergence arises from the multidimensional structure of MWBI. Domains such as faith, lineage, and intellect are influenced by sociocultural and ethical factors rather than economic output. These domains respond to policies affecting education, religious life, social institutions, and community cohesion—not merely to financial growth.

The strong reliability of MWBI is explained by the conceptual clarity of maqasid, which provide universal yet flexible principles applicable across contexts. Their emphasis on human welfare ensures that indicators align closely with lived realities, thus strengthening internal consistency across domains. The difference in performance between GDP and MWBI stems from the fact that GDP rewards material expansion even when it harms environmental sustainability, family structures, or moral life. MWBI balances these outcomes by considering negative externalities, making it a more comprehensive and ethically grounded measure of prosperity (Issa et al., 2025).

Future work should focus on refining MWBI through expanded datasets, cross-country testing, and multi-year longitudinal studies. These steps will strengthen the index’s validity and allow researchers to explore how well-being evolves over time across different cultural and economic environments. Policymakers should consider integrating MWBI into national development planning frameworks as a complementary tool alongside GDP. Pilot projects can be implemented to evaluate the index’s usefulness in real-world policy applications, such as education planning, environmental programs, and social welfare strategies (Musah et al., 2025).

Further research must examine how MWBI can be adapted to regional and local contexts while maintaining its conceptual integrity. Customization guidelines may be needed to ensure that the index remains both flexible and faithful to maqasid principles. Collaborative efforts between Islamic scholars, economists, statisticians, and policymakers will be essential to institutionalizing MWBI as a credible and influential measurement tool. These partnerships can promote a global shift toward ethically informed and multidimensionally grounded approaches to prosperity.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this research is that the Maqasid-Based Well-Being Index (MWBI) reveals multidimensional prosperity patterns that GDP consistently fails to capture. The MWBI exposes disparities between material progress and holistic well-being, showing that regions with high economic output often perform poorly in spiritual fulfillment, family stability, ethical conduct, and environmental stewardship. The distinctiveness of this finding

lies in demonstrating that prosperity, as envisioned by maqasid al-shari‘ah, encompasses moral, intellectual, social, and spiritual dimensions that are structurally absent from GDP-based assessments. The MWBI thus presents an alternative lens that redefines national development in more balanced, ethically grounded, and culturally relevant terms.

The primary contribution of this study lies in the conceptual and methodological advancement of transforming the maqasid al-shari‘ah framework into a scientifically measurable index. The research offers a structured methodological model that integrates factor analysis, normalization techniques, and multi-criteria weighting to operationalize spiritual, ethical, and social indicators alongside economic ones. This dual contribution—conceptual innovation rooted in Islamic epistemology and methodological rigor grounded in modern statistical analysis—positions MWBI as a pioneering tool for reimagining development metrics. The index not only expands the theoretical discourse on Islamic development but also provides policymakers with a practical, empirically validated instrument for assessing human well-being holistically.

The study is limited by the use of selected national datasets that may not fully represent the diversity of social, cultural, and spiritual conditions across different regions or countries. The transformation of abstract maqasid principles into quantifiable indicators remains an interpretive process that could benefit from broader scholarly consensus and cross-cultural validation. Future research should expand MWBI testing across multiple countries, incorporate longitudinal data to observe well-being trends over time, and refine indicators through interdisciplinary collaboration involving Islamic jurists, economists, statisticians, and sociologists. Further exploration of policy experimentation—where MWBI is applied in real development planning—will strengthen its practical relevance and support its adoption as a global post-GDP measurement framework.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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