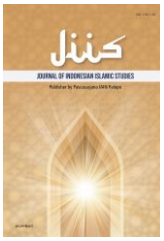
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Islamic Economic Law Analysis of the Rise in Staple Food Prices in the Gaza Strip during the October 2023–2025 Conflict

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Abstract

Since the outbreak of war on 7 October 2023, the Gaza Strip has experienced severe disruptions to trade and supply, accompanied by substantial increases in the prices of basic necessities. The wheat flour price index in Gaza rose by 197% between September 2023 and July 2024, reflecting price pressure on this commodity rather than on all basic necessities. This study examines factors associated with rising prices in Gaza from 7 October 2023 to the end of 2025, using pre-conflict data for comparison, and analyzes the findings from the perspective of Islamic Economic Law. It employs a qualitative juridical-normative approach based on library research and documentary analysis of institutional reports, statistical data, academic literature, policy documents, and Islamic legal sources. The collected data are analyzed descriptively and qualitatively, while the normative analysis draws on relevant Islamic legal evidence and fiqh literature concerning ihtikar (hoarding), justice, prevention of harm, and tas'ir (price regulation). The findings identify three interrelated factors associated with price increases: blockade and crossing restrictions, damage to infrastructure and production facilities, and imbalances between supply and demand amid declining purchasing power. The analysis indicates that price increases resulting from external supply disruptions and actual scarcity cannot automatically be classified as ihtikar, which requires evidence of deliberate withholding of goods needed by the public and resulting harm. Although restrictions on trade access may concentrate procurement among a limited number of traders, this study does not establish that deliberate hoarding occurred. Tas'ir is therefore assessed as a conditional instrument that requires consideration of market conditions, justice, public welfare, and implementation capacity. Where price increases primarily reflect supply disruptions, restoring access and distribution and monitoring trading practices may be more appropriate than imposing general price controls. This study contributes an analytical framework for distinguishing external supply shocks from potential ihtikar and for assessing the conditions under which tas'ir may be justified.

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Introduction

Since the outbreak of the conflict on 7 October 2023, staple food markets in the Gaza Strip have suffered serious disruption as a result of restrictions on trade access, damage to infrastructure and production facilities, and obstructed distribution of goods. These conditions have affected the availability of goods in the market at a time when public demand for food remains high. This price pressure is reflected in the *Market Monitor – Gaza* report published by the World Food Programme (WFP). The report records that the price index for the wheat flour group in the Gaza Strip rose by 197% between September 2023 and July 2024, with index values of 112.37 and 333.75, respectively (World Food Programme, 2024). This figure represents the change in the price index of the wheat flour group, not the percentage increase in all staple goods. This indicator is therefore used to illustrate price pressure on one of the main food commodities, while price developments for other commodities are analyzed separately on the basis of the available data. These conditions raise the question of which factors are associated with the price increases and how the matter should be assessed under the principles of Islamic Economic Law.

From the perspective of Islamic Economic Law, the issue of price increases relates to the principle of justice in transactions and the prohibition of acquiring wealth unlawfully, as affirmed in the Qur'an, An-Nisa [4]: 29.

يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا لَا تَأْكُلُوْٓا اَمْوَالَكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ اِلَّآ اَنْ تَكُوْنَ تِجَارَةً عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِّنْكُمْ ۗ وَلَا تَقْتُلُوْٓا اَنْفُسَكُمْ ۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيْمًا

This principle relates to the concept of *ihtikar*, namely the withholding of goods needed by the public, which may cause harm. The prohibition of this practice is based, among other sources, on a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) narrated in Sahih Muslim, "No one commits ihtikar except a sinner" (Muslim, no. 1605b). Nevertheless, applying the concept of *ihtikar* requires distinguishing between scarcity arising from external disruption and deliberate withholding of goods that harms the public. Accordingly, a price increase alone is not sufficient to prove the occurrence of *ihtikar*; the assessment must consider evidence of the act of withholding and the harm it causes (Qomarullah, 2024).

The issue of price intervention also relates to the concept of *tas'ir*, namely the fixing or regulation of prices by the authorities. In the hadith narrated by Anas ibn Malik, when the people asked the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) to fix prices because prices had risen, he expressed concern about committing injustice against other people's property (al-Tirmidhi, no. 1314). This hadith is one of the foundations for discussions of caution in price fixing, but its application in fiqh cannot be separated from differences in market conditions (I'tim, 2020). The issue of *tas'ir* has been discussed in light of the relationship between freedom of trade, fair pricing, and the authority of the ruler (Kamali, 1994) . The possible application of *tas'ir* has also been examined on the basis of the thought of Wahbah al-Zuḥailī, particularly where there is a need to maintain price stability and prevent practices that harm the public (Azmi, 2022). Meanwhile, the differing views of classical and contemporary fiqh on *tas'ir*, and their relevance for Islamic economic policy, have also been discussed (Mahendra & Zen, 2025). This literature shows that the

assessment of price intervention must take into account market conditions, potential distortions, justice, and the public interest, rather than the level of prices alone.

A number of earlier studies have examined *ihtikar* from the perspectives of Islamic law and economics. One study examined the concept of *ihtikar* according to the jurists and compared it with the concept of monopoly in Indonesian business competition law (Firdaus, 2019). Another discussed the impact of goods hoarding on market mechanisms from an Islamic perspective (Faisal et al., 2025). Both studies provide a basis for understanding the prohibition of hoarding and the importance of protecting the public interest. However, neither specifically explains how the criteria of *ihtikar* apply when price increases occur in conflict conditions accompanied by disruptions to trade access, distribution, and production. In such conditions, distinguishing between deliberate withholding of goods and scarcity arising from external disruption becomes important so that legal assessment is not based solely on price changes.

Research on food conditions during the conflict likewise shows the importance of distinguishing disruptions to the availability of goods from the behavior of market actors. A retrospective analysis of food availability in the Gaza Strip from October 2023 to August 2024 examined food availability and the contribution of various supply sources during the war (Checchi et al., 2025). That study describes food availability during the conflict period but does not focus on an Islamic legal assessment of price increases. On the other hand, the structural factors influencing fluctuations in staple food prices in Gaza have been examined through a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews (Migdad et al., 2025). That study discusses infrastructure damage, restrictions on market access, supply chain disruption, and indications of market control by certain economic actors. The study by Migdad et al. is directly related to the empirical problem examined in this article. However, identifying structural factors and indications of market control does not in itself determine whether a price increase meets the criteria of *ihtikar* under Islamic Economic Law, or under what conditions intervention through *tas'ir* can be justified. The issue that still needs to be analyzed is therefore not merely the factors behind price increases, but the criteria for assessing those factors on the basis of the available evidence and the relevant normative provisions.

On this basis, this study analyzes the increase in staple food prices in the Gaza Strip from 7 October 2023 to the end of 2025, using pre-conflict data as a point of comparison. The commodities in focus are wheat flour, bread, beef, chicken, eggs, and sugar, in line with the availability of the price data used in the study. Operationally, the analysis distinguishes three issues. First, *supply shock*, that is, price increases related to disruptions in supply, trade access, distribution, or production. Second, *ihtikar*, which requires an assessment of evidence of deliberate withholding of goods and the harm it causes. Third, *tas'ir*, which concerns the possibility of intervention by the authorities when market conditions and the public interest provide a basis for considering it. This distinction is not intended to conclude that *ihtikar* has occurred without evidence, but to provide a proportionate framework for assessing market conditions during the conflict.

On the basis of the foregoing, this study answers two main questions: (1) what factors are associated with the increase in staple food prices in the Gaza Strip during the conflict; and (2) how should these price increases be assessed under Islamic Economic Law, particularly through the concept of *ihtikar*, the principles of justice and the prevention

of harm, and *tas'ir* as a conditional instrument of intervention? The first question is answered by presenting and grouping data on trade, supply, infrastructure damage, production, and prices in the Results section. The second is answered through the normative discussion in the Discussion section by comparing those findings with Sharia evidence and the relevant fiqh literature. The contribution of this study lies in formulating analytical criteria for distinguishing external supply shocks, possible *ihtikar* practices, and the conditions that may serve as a basis for considering *tas'ir*, so that legal assessment is not based solely on the magnitude of the price increase.

Method

This study uses a qualitative method with a normative legal analysis design combined with a review of statistical documents and secondary reports. It focuses on the increase in staple food prices in the Gaza Strip from the outbreak of the conflict on 7 October 2023 to the end of 2025. Pre-conflict data are used as a comparison to identify changes in trade conditions, the supply of goods, and staple food prices. Statistical data and secondary reports are analyzed to describe patterns of price change and the conditions accompanying them, not to establish causal relationships empirically. The findings are then examined in light of the principles of Islamic Economic Law.

Data were collected through library research and documentation. Academic literature was searched through Google Scholar, while reports, statistical data, and policy documents were obtained from the official websites of relevant institutions, including the World Bank, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). The search used keywords related to staple food price increases, trade, food supply, crossings, and the conflict in Gaza, including *Gaza food prices*, *staple food prices in Gaza*, *Gaza trade and supply during conflict*, *Gaza crossings and food supply*, and *food price increases in Gaza*. For the study of Islamic law, the search also covered the terms *ihtikar*, *tas'ir*, justice, prevention of harm, and *maqasid al-shariah*. These keywords were used in line with the focus of the search in order to obtain sources relevant to Gaza's economic conditions and to the analysis of Islamic Economic Law.

The research sources consist of Islamic legal sources, academic literature, institutional reports, statistical data, and policy documents. Islamic legal sources and academic literature serve as the basis of the normative analysis, particularly regarding *ihtikar*, *tas'ir*, justice in transactions, prevention of harm, and *maqasid al-shariah*. Institutional reports and statistical data, in turn, are used to describe changes in prices, trade conditions, the movement of goods, crossing access, infrastructure damage, and local production capacity. Policy documents, including the *Protocol on Economic Relations* or Paris Protocol (1994), are used to explain the context of Palestinian economic and trade relations. Sources were selected on the basis of their relevance to the focus of the study, the clarity of the author or publishing institution, the traceability of the document, the clarity of the observation period, and the availability of verifiable information. Sources that lack a clear informational basis, that cannot be verified, or that contain speculative claims without adequate supporting evidence were not used as a basis for drawing conclusions. This

study does not use surveys or interviews and therefore does not aim to prove the behavior or motives of individual traders.

Data were extracted and grouped using a documentation matrix covering the name of the author or institution, year of publication, observation period, reported indicator, unit of measurement, location of observation, main findings, and source limitations. The year of publication is distinguished from the observation period so that data published in different years are not treated as describing conditions at the same time. Pre-conflict data are used as a comparison, while data from 7 October 2023 to the end of 2025 are used to examine developments during the conflict. Where discrepancies between reports were found, they were checked by comparing the original sources, observation periods, indicator definitions, units of measurement, geographic coverage, and data collection methods described in each source. Figures with different measurement bases or coverage were not directly equated or combined. If a discrepancy could not be explained on the basis of the available information, the data limitation is stated and the figure is not used to draw conclusions beyond the available evidence.

Data analysis was carried out descriptively and qualitatively in two stages. The first stage identified and grouped the factors associated with staple food price increases into three main aspects: access restrictions and crossing closures; damage to infrastructure, economic facilities, and production capacity; and imbalances between supply and demand. Findings from various sources were then compared to identify patterns of price change and the conditions accompanying them. This grouping is used to explain the factors associated with price increases, not as proof that each factor separately caused price changes through a measurable causal relationship. Conclusions about supply and trade conditions are therefore limited to information supported by verifiable data and documents.

The second stage analyzed the findings from the perspective of Islamic Economic Law using the concepts of *ihtikar*, *tas'ir*, justice in transactions, prevention of harm, and *maqasid al-shariah*. The concept of *ihtikar* is used to assess the possibility of withholding goods needed by the public where there is adequate evidence of such conduct and of the harm it causes. Accordingly, price increases resulting from scarcity or supply disruption are not automatically categorized as *ihtikar*. The concept of *tas'ir*, in turn, is used to analyze the possibility of price intervention under certain conditions, taking into account justice, the public interest, and the prevention of harm. Through this approach, the study distinguishes the explanation of economic factors associated with price increases from the normative assessment of their conformity with the principles of Islamic Economic Law.

Results

Overview of the Economic and Trade Structure in the Gaza Strip

Analysis of the economic and trade structure of the Gaza Strip is an important step toward understanding the conditions that affect the availability of staple goods and the mechanisms by which they are supplied. The *Protocol on Economic Relations* (Paris Protocol) of 29 April 1994 is the legal framework governing economic and trade relations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The protocol was annexed as Annex IV to the Gaza–Jericho Agreement and was subsequently incorporated into the Oslo II Interim Agreement (Protocol on Economic Relations, 1994). In the area of imports, Article III differentiates import authority and provisions according to categories of goods

and agreed lists, including Lists A1, A2, and B. For certain categories of goods, the Palestinian side has authority to set customs duties, purchase taxes, levies, licensing requirements, and standards, whereas for goods outside those special provisions, joint arrangements apply as set out in the protocol (Protocol on Economic Relations, 1994). These arrangements limit the policy space of Palestinian trade, including in determining import policy and diversifying sources of supply. Nevertheless, these provisions describe the normative framework of import authority and do not in themselves explain price movements in Gaza during the war. Supply obstacles during the study period were more directly related to restrictions on crossings and on access for goods, as documented in reports of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). This study therefore does not draw a direct link between the Paris Protocol and the price increases.

Before the outbreak of war in October 2023, the supply of goods to the Gaza Strip depended on the movement of goods through crossings controlled by Israel and Egypt, alongside local production and trade with Palestinian and Israeli markets (FEWS NET, 2023). The entry of goods from or through Israel, including unrestricted goods, could take place only through the Kerem Shalom crossing after prior coordination with the Israeli authorities (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2023c). OCHA data record that throughout 2022, 106,449 trucks of imported goods were permitted to enter Gaza through all crossings (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2023c). In July and August 2023, the volume of goods entering reached 10,199 and 12,076 trucks, respectively. The July figure was about 15% higher than the 2022 monthly average, while the August figure was 36% higher than the same average (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2023b). In January 2023, about 24% of the goods entering were food items, while 44% were construction materials (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2023a). Staple goods, including food, were distributed to shops and markets throughout Gaza through import networks, traders, and local distributors. These pre-conflict data give a quantitative picture of the flow of goods before the war and can be used as a reference point for analyzing changes in supply after October 2023, while paying attention to the comparability of the scope of the data being compared.

Since 7 October 2023, access for goods to the Gaza Strip has changed repeatedly: humanitarian aid began to be allowed in through Rafah on 18 October 2023, while Kerem Shalom was opened for humanitarian aid on 17 December 2023. On 4 April 2024, Israel announced that it would open the Erez Crossing for humanitarian aid for the first time since 7 October 2023, while Rafah was closed again from 8 May 2024. After the ceasefire agreement in January 2025, access for humanitarian aid through the land crossings was reopened. However, on 2 March 2025, Israel halted all entry of aid into Gaza (House of Commons Library, 2025). Conditions in mid-2025 are reflected in the OCHA report for 6–19 July 2025. According to that report, on 7 July the Israeli authorities again allowed a government-to-government convoy from Jordan to proceed to the Erez West (Zikim) crossing, while the collection of cargo by the World Food Programme (WFP) at Kerem Shalom had been halted since 4 July and at Zikim since 13 July, before resuming on 20 July 2025 (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2025b). Since 9 July 2025, after 130 days of a full restriction on the entry of fuel, the Israeli

authorities have allowed two fuel trucks per day, five days a week, through Kerem Shalom (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2025c). Crossing restrictions have thus varied in intensity over the study period. These conditions show the importance of attending to the chronology, the type of crossing, and the type of goods permitted to enter when analyzing the availability of goods in local markets. Reports on humanitarian aid provide context on access and supply conditions, but do not in themselves indicate the quantity of commercial goods available in the market or the magnitude of the effect of restrictions on staple food prices.

Factors Behind the Increase in Staple Food Prices in Gaza

Blockade and Crossing Closures

Blockades and access restrictions at crossings are structural factors that can disrupt the supply of goods and contribute to higher staple food prices in the Gaza Strip. Restrictions on the movement of goods and the closure of crossings have narrowed Gaza's access to supplies from outside the territory and reinforced its isolation (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2024). In conflict conditions, disruption to the entry of goods can hinder the procurement and distribution of staple goods. The amount of food transported by truck into Gaza between October 2023 and April 2024 remained below pre-war levels (Checchi et al., 2025). This condition can potentially reduce the availability of goods in the market and put pressure on prices. However, the magnitude of the effect on prices must be analyzed by considering supply conditions, distribution, and the availability of goods in the market. Crossing restrictions are thus one of the structural factors that must be taken into account when analyzing staple food price increases in Gaza.

In the trade sector, access restrictions and operational disruptions at crossings can put pressure on business activity and the procurement of goods. Traders in Gaza face delays in the arrival of goods, damage to goods, and higher costs associated with procurement and distribution. In addition, only a small number of traders handle most of the goods entering Gaza (United Nations Development Programme, 2024). This indicates a concentration in procurement activity. Where access to supply is limited, such concentration can potentially affect competition and price formation in the market. However, trade concentration does not in itself prove that all the traders involved engage in monopolistic practices or monopolistic pricing. Allegations of inventory withholding and of pricing practices that harm consumers must therefore be assessed on the basis of adequate evidence and cannot be regarded as direct findings of this study.

Damage to Infrastructure, Economic Facilities, and Production

Damage to infrastructure and economic facilities is one of the structural factors that disrupt the supply and distribution of staple goods in the Gaza Strip during the war. According to the Gaza and West Bank Interim Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (IRDNA), physical damage to the trade and industry sector in Gaza between 8 October 2023 and 8 October 2024 was estimated at US$5.9 billion, or about 20% of total recorded physical damage (World Bank, 2025). Economic losses in the sector over a five-year period were estimated at US$2.2 billion, mainly comprising declines in income and wages (World Bank, 2025). Of the 48,987 business units assessed in the trade and industry sector in Gaza, 32,060 were reported destroyed and 10,711 partially damaged (World Bank, 2025).

This damage reduces the capacity of economic activity and can potentially hinder the production and distribution of goods to the market.

At the same time, the local food production system in the Gaza Strip has been seriously damaged. According to 2022 data, local agricultural production met about 44% of household final consumption of agricultural commodities, while the remainder depended on imports (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2023). During the war, local production capacity was disrupted by damage to farmland and agricultural infrastructure. As of 31 December 2024, about 75% of the land previously used to grow food crops and olive groves was reported damaged or destroyed. At the end of 2024, losses in the livestock sector were reported at about 96% (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2024). Meanwhile, in August 2024, about 70% of the fishing fleet was reported destroyed (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024b). In addition to damage to local production, food supplies from outside Gaza were also disrupted. Before the war, at least 500 trucks of food entered Gaza every day, and the number of trucks permitted to enter then fell to about 8 per day in October 2023, 56 per day in November 2023, and 72 per day in December 2023 (Hassoun et al., 2024), This decline in truck inflows indicates disruption to food supplies from outside the territory. When this disruption coincides with damage to local production, the availability of goods in the market comes under greater pressure, which can potentially push up staple food prices.

These disruptions to the supply and distribution system worsened market conditions in the Gaza Strip. The price of the non-alcoholic food and beverage group in the Gaza Strip rose by 224.69% in 2024 compared with 2023. Over the same period, public purchasing power in the Gaza Strip fell by 70.41% (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2025). Meanwhile, the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Gaza Strip contracted by more than 82% at the end of 2024 compared with the previous year (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics & Palestine Monetary Authority, 2025). These data illustrate the deterioration of price conditions and economic activity during the war. In the context of damage to infrastructure, economic facilities, and means of production, disrupted local production and distribution of goods limit the availability of staple goods in the market and can raise the cost of delivering them. These conditions intensify the pressure on supply and can potentially push up staple food prices in the Gaza Strip.

Imbalance between Supply and Demand

Imbalance between supply and demand is one of the factors associated with the increase in staple food prices in the Gaza Strip during the conflict. Restrictions on the entry of goods, disrupted distribution, and damage to local food production facilities limit the availability of goods in the market (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2025a). At the same time, public demand for food remains high because food is a basic need that must be met. However, basic need must be distinguished from effective demand, that is, need accompanied by the ability to purchase goods. Declining household income and purchasing power can limit effective demand even though the public's need for food remains high. Conditions in the Gaza market must therefore be understood by considering both limited supply and the economic capacity of the population to obtain staple goods.

Changes in the prices of a number of food commodities can be seen in data from the *Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics* (PCBS, 2026), which compares prices before 7 October 2023 with average prices in 2024 and 2025. These data cover various staple commodities in the Gaza Strip, as shown in Table 1 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2026).

Table 1. Comparison of the Prices of Several Staple Goods in the Gaza Strip before the Conflict, in 2024, and in 2025

Commodity	Unit	Before 7 October 2023 (NIS)	2024 average (NIS)	2025 average (NIS)
Wheat flour	25 kg	46	100	440
White bread	1 kg	2,58	5	20
Frozen veal meat	1 kg	24	85	100
Chicken	1 kg	16	47	97
Eggs	2 kg	14	103	246
Sugar	1 kg	4	26	68

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS, 2026).

The data in Table 1 show price changes for a number of food commodities between the pre-conflict period and the average prices during 2024 and 2025. The changes occurred not only in wheat flour but also in bread, chicken, eggs, and sugar. This finding is consistent with the report recording that the wheat flour price index in Gaza in July 2024 was 197% higher than in September 2023 (World Food Programme, 2024). Although the two sources use different periods and forms of data, both give a picture of the price pressure experienced by the Gaza food market during the conflict.

These conditions must be understood together with the distribution disruptions and limited local production described in the preceding section. When the quantity of goods available in the market is limited, pressure on prices can increase. However, a price increase does not mean that all members of the public have the same ability to buy the goods. Declining purchasing power can limit households' access to food even though their basic need remains high. Imbalance between supply and demand thus involves two interrelated problems, namely the limited availability of goods and the ability of the public to obtain staple goods during the conflict.

Discussion

Distinguishing Price Increases Caused by Supply Shocks from Ihtikar

The findings of this study show that the increase in staple food prices in the Gaza Strip is associated with a number of structural factors, namely the blockade and closure of crossings, damage to infrastructure and the production base, and the imbalance between supply and demand. From the perspective of Islamic Economic Law, a price increase does not in itself prove the occurrence of *ihtikar*. Assessing *ihtikar* requires considering the act of withholding goods, the character of the goods withheld, market conditions, and the effect on the public. The concept of *ihtikar* has been discussed from the perspective of the jurists and compared with the concept of monopoly in business competition law (Firdaus, 2019). Both concepts relate to control over goods or markets, but they cannot simply be equated because they have different frameworks of legal assessment.

In the study of Islamic Economic Law, assessing the practice of *ihtikar* requires considering the type of goods withheld, the presence of deliberate withholding, market conditions, and the effect on the public. Accordingly, a price increase or the limited availability of staple goods in the Gaza Strip during the conflict is not sufficient to prove the occurrence of *ihtikar*. The analysis must distinguish scarcity caused by supply disruption and infrastructure damage from deliberate withholding of goods that harms the public.

On the basis of this framework, this study distinguishes three conditions that must not be equated analytically. First, scarcity resulting from external supply shocks, such as restrictions on the entry of goods, closure of crossings, and damage to production or distribution facilities. Second, stockpiling as an anticipatory measure against supply risks that can be explained and is supported by relevant information. Third, deliberate withholding of goods to exploit scarcity or price increases in a manner that harms the public. This distinction is important because the existence of stocks of goods does not automatically indicate *ihtikar*. Stockpiling as an anticipatory measure must be distinguished from deliberate withholding of goods to exploit scarcity and cause harm to the public.

To assess whether a practice can be categorized as *ihtikar*, this study uses four analytical questions. First, are the goods withheld staple goods that are essential to the public? Second, is there evidence that the seller has stock available but deliberately does not release it to the market? Third, is there evidence of the purpose of the withholding, or of a pattern of behavior indicating an attempt to exploit scarcity, rather than merely a response to documented supply risks? Fourth, does the act cause or aggravate harm to the public, for example by reducing the availability of needed goods? These four questions constitute the analytical framework used in this study; they are not evidence that *ihtikar* has occurred in particular commodities in Gaza.

In the context of the Gaza Strip during the conflict, the supply obstacles and infrastructure damage discussed in the Results section can explain the pressure on the availability of goods and the rise in prices. However, those findings are not sufficient to conclude that the price increases were caused by deliberate hoarding by particular traders. The impact of *ihtikar* on the market has been discussed from an Islamic perspective, so that study is relevant for explaining the potential harm that hoarding can cause (Faisal et al., 2025). However, a conceptual study of the impact of *ihtikar* does not in itself prove that similar acts occurred in particular commodities in Gaza.

Concentration of supply or limited distribution channels may be an aspect that needs to be examined in an analysis of market structure, but it does not in itself prove the existence of *ihtikar*. A firmer determination would require evidence on the volume and duration of the stocks withheld, the pattern of release of goods to the market, pricing behavior, and the effect on consumers. Because this study relies on library research and documentation without direct data collection from traders, the conclusions that can be drawn are limited to the analysis of the structural factors behind price increases and the normative criteria of *ihtikar*. Accordingly, the increase in staple food prices in Gaza during the conflict cannot automatically be categorized as *ihtikar* without evidence of deliberate withholding of goods and the harm it causes.

The Principles of Justice and the Prevention of Harm in Trade

The distinction between price increases resulting from supply shocks and the practice of *ihtikar* relates to the principle of justice (*'adl*) and the prevention of harm in *fiqh muamalah* (the jurisprudence of commercial transactions). The maxim *lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār* affirms the prohibition of causing harm to others. This maxim is discussed in the fiqh literature, among others in *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wa al-Ḥikam* by Ibn Rajab. In the context of trade in staple goods, this principle is relevant for assessing deliberate withholding of goods that can aggravate the hardship of the public (Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, 2008). Price increases must therefore be assessed by considering their causes and their effect on the public, not merely the magnitude of the increase.

In the context of Gaza, the principle of justice requires a distinction between price increases related to higher costs of procurement, transportation, storage, and distribution risk resulting from supply obstacles, and price increases that may stem from trading behavior that causes harm. A price increase that can be explained by rising trade costs and risks does not in itself indicate a violation of the principle of justice. Conversely, if it is proven that traders deliberately withheld staple goods in order to create scarcity or to profit through practices that harm the public, such conduct must be assessed under the principles of justice and the prevention of harm. This assessment becomes important when public purchasing power is declining and access to basic needs is limited.

To assess the fairness of prices, indicators that may conceptually be considered include changes in procurement costs, transportation and storage costs, distribution risk, the availability of goods, and evidence of deliberate withholding of goods. Increases in trade costs and risks must be distinguished from behavior that exploits scarcity to the detriment of consumers. However, this study has no direct data on the cost structures, profit margins, and pricing decisions of individual traders in Gaza. These indicators are therefore used as a normative evaluative framework and do not serve as a basis for determining that particular traders have engaged in exploitation or that particular prices violate the principle of justice.

The principles of justice and the prevention of harm can also be analyzed through the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, particularly the protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) and the protection of property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*). In the *maqasid* approach, the objectives of Islamic law relate to the protection of human interests and the public good (Auda, 2008). The protection of life is relevant because the availability and affordability of food relate to meeting the basic needs of the public. The protection of property, in turn, relates to households' ability to obtain staple goods and to the economic interests of the parties to trade. Both objectives must be considered together: the public's difficulty in obtaining food must not be ignored, but the assessment of trading practices must also take into account real distribution costs and risks. *Al-maṣlaḥah al-'āmmah* (the public interest) is thus an important consideration in evaluating issues in the trade of staple goods, without treating every price increase as proof of a violation of the principle of justice.

Tas'ir as a Conditional Instrument of Intervention under Conditions of Scarcity

In *fiqh muamalah*, *tas'ir*, or the fixing of prices by the authorities, is a matter on which the scholars disagree. One of the bases for its discussion is the hadith of Anas ibn Malik concerning the people's request to the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) to fix prices when the prices of goods rose. In that hadith, the Messenger of Allah (peace be

upon him) explained that Allah is *al-Musa'ir* (the Price-Setter) and expressed his concern about causing injustice against the people's property (Al-Tirmidhi, n.d.). This hadith is also discussed in *Tuhfat al-Ahwadhi*, which explains the context of the request for price fixing (Al-Mubarakfuri, n.d.). The hadith is one of the bases for discussing the limits of price intervention, but it does not in itself settle all legal questions concerning *tas'ir*. Fiqh studies show differing views on price fixing, particularly regarding the balance between market mechanisms and the authority of the ruler to prevent injustice (Mahendra & Zen, 2025)(Kamali, 1994). The assessment of *tas'ir* must therefore consider the causes of price increases, market conditions, and whether there are practices that harm the public.

In the context of Gaza, the findings of this study show that the increase in staple food prices is associated with supply obstacles caused by the blockade and crossing restrictions, damage to infrastructure and economic facilities, and a decline in local production capacity. These conditions show that price increases cannot immediately be regarded as the result of manipulation by traders. General price fixing that does not take into account the costs of procurement, transportation, storage, and distribution risk can potentially produce prices that do not match actual supply conditions. Conceptually, this situation could also create risks to the continuity of supply if the prices set do not allow reasonable trade costs to be covered. Conversely, where there is evidence of deliberate hoarding, market manipulation, or other trading practices that harm the public, intervention aimed at addressing such practices may be considered on the basis of the principles of justice and the prevention of harm (Kamali, 1994)(Mahendra & Zen, 2025). Intervention must therefore be distinguished between efforts to control trading practices that are proven to be harmful and general price fixing that is not based on adequate cost information and market conditions.

The application of *tas'ir* must also consider the authority and capacity of the institutions that could implement it. In conflict conditions, formal authority to supervise trade is not always accompanied by the ability to control access at crossings, guarantee the entry of goods, or reach all markets. The report of the *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* (OCHA) on the humanitarian response in Gaza for 27 May–9 June 2024 describes obstacles to distribution and to the monitoring of market conditions during the conflict (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024a). Legal authority must therefore be distinguished from implementation capacity on the ground. This study does not identify any particular authority as effectively able to apply comprehensive price fixing in Gaza during the study period. The feasibility of *tas'ir* must be assessed by considering the availability of price and cost data, the reach of supervision, and the ability of the relevant institutions to carry out the policy consistently.

On the basis of these considerations, measures consistent with the principles of Islamic Economic Law must be adapted to the cause of the problem and the capacity for implementation. Monitoring prices and the availability of goods can help identify price spikes that require further study. Where there is evidence of deliberate hoarding, manipulation, or other trading practices that harm the public, supervision of and action against such practices may be considered in accordance with the available authority. Meanwhile, supply obstacles stemming from crossing restrictions, infrastructure damage, and distribution disruption require efforts to restore access for goods and support for distribution networks. Implementation depends on humanitarian access, security

conditions, and the capacity of the competent parties. The *Paris Protocol* (1994) is relevant as part of the context of Palestinian economic and trade relations, but does not in itself prove that any particular authority has the capacity to overcome supply obstacles in Gaza during the conflict. *Tas'ir* therefore cannot be positioned as a general solution or as a measure that can always be carried out, but as a conditional instrument that requires a legal basis, evidence of injustice, adequate market information, and implementation capacity. Where price increases are mainly caused by supply shocks, restoring access and distribution and monitoring the market may be more appropriate steps than general price fixing that ignores actual conditions.

Conclusion

This study identifies several structural factors associated with the increase in staple food prices in the Gaza Strip during the conflict, namely the blockade and crossing restrictions, damage to infrastructure and production facilities, distribution disruption, and the imbalance between supply and demand. On the basis of the institutional reports and statistical data analyzed, these factors show a pattern of association with the limited availability of goods and with increasing pressure on procurement and distribution costs. At the same time, declining public purchasing power has worsened households' ability to obtain staple goods. However, because this study uses secondary data with varying coverage and observation periods, its findings describe associations identified in documents, not causal relationships that have been tested empirically.

The normative contribution of this study lies in formulating criteria for distinguishing price increases caused by external supply shocks from the practice of *ihtikar*. First, price increases and scarcity of goods are not sufficient to establish the occurrence of *ihtikar* without evidence of deliberate withholding of staple goods and the harm it causes. Second, *tas'ir* cannot be positioned as a general response to every price increase, but must be assessed on the basis of market conditions, evidence of distortion or practices that harm the public, the principle of justice, the public interest, and the capacity for implementation. Accordingly, where price increases are mainly related to supply and distribution obstacles, restoring access for goods and supervising the market are more appropriate priorities than general price fixing that ignores supply conditions and trade costs. This framework affirms that an assessment under Islamic Economic Law must take into account, together, the causes of price increases, evidence of trading behavior, and the potential for harm.

This study has limitations because it relies on library research and documentation without direct observation of, or interviews with, traders. It therefore cannot establish the behavior, motives, or practices of withholding goods by particular market actors in Gaza. In addition, comparison of data across time is limited by differences in observation periods, geographic coverage, indicator definitions, units of measurement, and data collection methods in the secondary reports. These differences can affect the comparability of figures and limit the conclusions that can be drawn about price changes from one period to another. Although the sources used were selected on the basis of relevance and traceability, the consistency and reliability of the information still depend on the methods and completeness of each report. Future research is recommended to use more detailed data on prices, supply volumes, distribution costs, and stock availability, with comparable indicators and observation periods. Where conditions permit, such data could be

complemented by empirical research on traders' behavior, patterns of stock release, and price formation mechanisms. Further research could also deepen the fiqh study of the criteria of *ihtikar* and the conditions for applying *tas'ir* under conditions of conflict, scarcity, and limited authority to supervise the market.

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