The Relationship Between Islam and the State in the Qur'an: Sayyid Qutb's Perspective on Islamic Political Governance

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between Islam and the state from the perspective of Sayyid Qutb, with a focus on his interpretation of political governance in Islam. Sayyid Qutb is renowned for advocating a symbiotic theory, which posits that religion and the state are mutually dependent. In this framework, Islam requires the support of the state to effectively implement its teachings, while the state needs Islam to provide moral and ethical guidance. Qutb's perspective serves as a middle path between two opposing paradigms: the integralist approach, which fully merges religion and politics, and the secularist approach, which entirely separates them. His ideas have significantly influenced both modernist and neo-modernist movements within Islamic political thought. By analyzing Qutb's writings and interpretations, this study underscores the continuing relevance of his ideas in contemporary debates on the role of Islam in governance. The findings suggest that his symbiotic model provides a compelling framework for understanding the dynamic interaction between religion and politics in Islamic societies. Practically, this research offers insights for policymakers and scholars regarding the integration of Islamic values into modern governance systems. Future studies could further explore the implications of this paradigm across diverse sociopolitical contexts, particularly in Muslim-majority countries.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji hubungan antara Islam dan negara dari perspektif Sayyid Qutb, dengan fokus pada interpretasinya terhadap pemerintahan politik dalam Islam. Sayyid Qutb dikenal sebagai pendukung teori simbiotik, yang menyatakan bahwa agama dan negara saling bergantung satu sama lain. Menurut pandangan ini, Islam memerlukan dukungan negara agar ajarannya dapat diterapkan secara efektif, sementara negara membutuhkan Islam untuk menyediakan landasan moral dan etika dalam tata kelola pemerintahan. Pendekatan ini berusaha menjadi jalan tengah antara dua pandangan yang berlawanan: pendekatan integralistik, yang sepenuhnya menyatukan agama dan politik, serta pendekatan sekularistik, yang sepenuhnya memisahkan keduanya. Pemikiran Sayyid Qutb memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan terhadap perkembangan gerakan modernisme dan neo-modernisme dalam pemikiran politik Islam. Dengan menganalisis karya-karya dan interpretasi Qutb, penelitian ini menyoroti relevansi gagasannya dalam diskusi kontemporer mengenai peran Islam dalam pemerintahan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan simbiotik yang diusungnya menawarkan kerangka kerja untuk memahami interaksi dinamis antara agama dan politik dalam masyarakat Islam. Secara praktis, penelitian ini memberikan wawasan bagi para pembuat kebijakan dan akademisi tentang bagaimana nilai-nilai Islam dapat diintegrasikan dalam sistem pemerintahan modern. Penelitian di masa depan dapat mengeksplorasi implikasi paradigma ini dalam berbagai konteks sosial-politik, khususnya di negara-negara dengan mayoritas Muslim.

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Introduction

Islam, as a divinely revealed and holistic religion, regulates not only the spiritual relationship between humans and God but also provides comprehensive guidance for social organisation and political governance.[1] The question of Islam's relationship with the state has long been a subject of scholarly debate, producing three principal schools of thought.[2] The first maintains that Islam is a complete system that integrates religious and political spheres.[3] The second, influenced by Western secularism, regards Islam solely as a private faith with no role in state affairs.[4] The third adopts a mediating position, rejecting the idea of Islam as a full-fledged political system but affirming its relevance in shaping ethical governance.[5] These divergent perspectives underscore the complexity of reconciling religious doctrine with contemporary political structures. Despite ongoing discourse, a universally accepted framework for the integration—or separation—of Islam and the state remains elusive across the Muslim world.[6]

In the modern context, the debate on the relationship between Islam and the state has become increasingly complex. The state, as a political entity, serves as a crucial instrument in social life, making political authority essential in determining the direction of public policy.[7] To analyze Sayyid Qutb's political thought in *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, this study employs a theoretical framework based on three major paradigms concerning the relationship between Islam and the state: the integralist, symbiotic, and secularist paradigms. The integralist paradigm maintains that religion and the state form an inseparable unity in which governance must be wholly grounded in Islamic principles.[8] This view finds resonance in the classical Islamic political theories of figures such as al-Mawardi, who emphasized the necessity of a caliphate to implement Sharia, and Ibn Taymiyyah, who underscored the role of political authority in commanding the good and forbidding the evil.[9] Similarly, Abul A'la Maududi, a 20th-century Islamic thinker, advocated for a theocratic-democratic model in which sovereignty belongs solely to God.[10]

Conversely, the symbiotic paradigm envisions a dynamic interaction between religion and politics, where Islamic values inform public ethics without necessitating a theocratic

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[1] Ahmad Hamidi, Asasriwarni Asasriwarni, and Ikhwan Matondang, "The Relationship between Religion and the State in Indonesia, and Its Relation to Islamic Law," *NEGREI: Academic Journal of Law and Governance* 2, no. 1 (2022): 1–22.

[2] Serafettin Pektas, "A Comparative Analysis of Three Sunni Muslim Organizations on 'Moderate'and 'Radical'Islam in Egypt, Morocco and Indonesia," *Religion* 51, no. 2 (2021): 190–213.

[3] Munawir Sjadzali, *Islam Dan Tata Negara: Ajaran, Sejarah Dan Pemikiran* (Jakarta: UI Press, 2013), 9–10.

[4] Sjadzali, *Islam Dan Tata Negara: Ajaran, Sejarah Dan Pemikiran*.

[5] Khamami Zada, *Islam Radikal: Pergulatan Ormas-Ormas Islam Garis Keras Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Teraju, 2012), 100.

[6] Kamaruzzaman, *Relasi Islam Dan Negara: Perspektif Modernis Dan Fundamentalis* (Magelang: Yayasan Indonesia Tera (Anggota IKAPI), 2011), v.

[7] Depdiknas, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2002), 828.

[8] Din Syamsuddin, *Etika Dalam Membangun Masyarakat Madani* (Jakarta: Logos, 2014), 58.

[9] Salman Faris TC, "Political Thought In Islam: An Analysis of The Development And Evolution of Islamic Political Philosophy," *Maqolat: Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2024): 33–48.

[10] Sami E Baroudi, "Ideas That Travel: The Influence of Abu Al-A 'la Al-Mawdudi on the Political Thought of Two Contemporary Arab Islamists: Yusuf Al-Qaradawi and Sayyid Qutb," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 24, no. 3 (2023): 377–97.

state.[11] This view is echoed in the thought of modern reformers like Muhammad Abduh and Nurcholish Madjid, who advocated for an integration of Islamic principles with democratic ideals. They maintained that Islam supports political participation, freedom, and justice, but not necessarily through a divinely mandated political system. In stark contrast, the secularist paradigm argues for a strict division between religious and state authority.[12] Advocates such as Ali Abd al-Raziq posit that the Prophet Muhammad's mission was spiritual, not political, and that Islam leaves the structure of governance open to human reasoning. These three paradigms provide a useful framework for understanding the diverse ways in which Islamic thought has grappled with the nature of political authority throughout history.[13]

To more accurately situate Sayyid Qutb's political views, this study not only draws on these paradigms but also applies ideological hermeneutics in Qur'anic exegesis. This approach suggests that tafsir is shaped not only by theological considerations but also by the interpreter's social and political context.[14] Qutb's Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān is thus read as a form of ideological commentary that emerged in response to Western secularism, colonial domination, and authoritarian rule in Muslim-majority states Qutb's *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* is thus read as a form of ideological commentary that emerged in response to Western secularism, colonial domination, and authoritarian rule in Muslim-majority states.[15] Central to Qutb's thought is the concept of *ḥākimiyyah*, which asserts that sovereignty belongs solely to God. While this idea aligns with the integralist tradition, Qutb's emphasis on revolutionary struggle and resistance against *ṭāghut*—unjust authority—introduces a radical edge to his interpretation. His political theology thus blends classical doctrine with a distinctive call for transformative action in the pursuit of an Islamic order.[16] Through this synthesis of paradigms, classical Islamic theory, and ideological hermeneutics, this study reveals Qutb's Qur'anic exegesis. His writings propose a vision of political resistance, where governance is a moral endeavour rejecting tyranny and establishing justice under God's law, reimagining the Islamic state as a moral community upholding divine sovereignty.

Numerous previous studies have explored the relationship between Islam and the state by analysing both classical and modern Muslim thinkers. Those working within the integralist paradigm often focus on the political structures established during the time of Prophet Muhammad and the *Khulafāʾ al-Rāshidūn*, viewing these as models of ideal Islamic governance.[17] Meanwhile, studies adopting the symbiotic paradigm often discuss the ideas

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[11] Bahtiar Effendi, *Islam Dan Negara: Transformasi Pemikiran Dan Praktik Politik Islam Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2008), 13.

[12] Zainal Abidin Amir, *Peta Islam Politik Pasca-Soeharto* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2013), 15.

[13] Öner Yigit, "An Analysis of Ali Abd Ul-Raziqs Understanding of the Relationship between Islam and State" (Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2018).

[14] Bambang Husni Nugroho, Ahmad Mustaniruddin, and Ahmad Taufik, "Ideological Contestation on the Production of Gender Exegesis within Institutional Quranic Interpretation in Indonesia," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 25, no. 2 (n.d.): 346–69.

[15] Muhammad Yusry Affandy bin Md Isa and Muhammad Syahmi bin Shakhruddin, "Sayyid Qutb's Interpretations: A Focus on Political Concepts," *Maʿālim Al-Qurʾān Wa Al-Sunnah* 20, no. 1 (2024): 45–64.

[16] Kaif Hasan, Mohammad Saif, and Sadaf Ali Khan, "Rethinking the Conundrum of Law and Morality: Islamic Law between Popular Sovereignty and God's Sovereignty," *Manchester Journal of International Economic Law* 1 (2024).

[17] Fisher Zulkarnain et al., "The Contribution of Zainal Abidin Ahmad in the Discourse of Fiqh Siyasah in Indonesia," *J. Int'l L. Islamic L.* 19 (2023): 99.

of scholars such as Muhammad Abduh and Nurcholish Madjid, who emphasized the dynamic relationship between Islam and modern political systems.[18] Meanwhile, scholars aligned with the secularist paradigm tend to reference thinkers like Ali Abd al-Raziq, who argued that Islam provides moral and spiritual guidance but does not prescribe a specific political system. These various perspectives reflect a rich tradition of Islamic political thought, yet they often remain confined to abstract theorisation, without sufficient engagement with the complexities of contemporary political realities in Muslim-majority societies.[19]

Despite the volume of literature, there remains a critical analytical gap in current discussions. Much of the existing research tends to rely heavily on historical and normative approaches without adequately connecting these frameworks to present socio-political conditions. Today, many Muslim-majority nations grapple with tensions between efforts to Islamise state structures and growing pressures for secularisation. These dynamics often result in fragmented legal systems, ideological polarisation, and contested notions of legitimacy.[20] In this context, revisiting foundational Islamic political thought—particularly that of Sayyid Qutb—becomes especially pertinent. Qutb's tafsīr, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, offers not only theological interpretation but also a political vision that seeks to address such contradictions.[21] However, only limited research has systematically examined how Qutb's ideas relate to the contemporary discourse on religion and state. This study seeks to bridge that gap through a critical engagement with Qutb's political thought in light of current socio-political challenges.

This research sets out three main objectives: first, to critically analyse Sayyid Qutb's political ideas as articulated in *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*; second, to explore the relevance of these ideas in the context of ongoing ideological tensions between secularism and Islamism within modern Muslim societies; and third, to assess their broader implications for shaping models of governance that reflect Islamic values. By doing so, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how Islamic principles can inform contemporary state structures without falling into rigid dogmatism. The theoretical foundation of this study draws upon Islamic political theory, principles of Islamic governance, and hermeneutical approaches in Qur'anic interpretation. These frameworks will help illuminate the depth and complexity of Qutb's thought, particularly his conception of divine sovereignty (ḥākimiyyah) and its potential application in formulating just, ethical, and contextually responsive political systems.

This study employs a qualitative methodology rooted in library research, with an emphasis on the close reading and interpretation of both primary and secondary sources. The principal text is Sayyid Qutb's *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, approached not merely as a work of *tafsīr* but as a rich political and ideological document. Secondary materials include scholarly

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[18] Andi Jufri, Rosmini Rosmini, and Latifah Abdul Majid, "The Transformation of Political Islam in Indonesia: Adapting to Modernization and Secularization," *Jurnal Adabiyah* 24, no. 2 (2024): 226–50.

[19] Asma Afsaruddin, "Islam, Political Governance, and Secularism: Examining a Fraught Relationship," in *Secularism in Comparative Perspective: Religions Across Political Contexts* (Springer, 2023), 9–23.

[20] Ihsan Yilmaz and Syaza Shukri, "Islam and Politics in Democratic Muslim-Majority Countries," in *Islamist Parties and Power in Democratic Nation-States: A Comparative Analysis of Six Muslim-Majority Countries* (Springer, 2024), 15–48.

[21] Muhammad Badri Habibi, "A Comparative Study between Sayyid Qutbs and Fazlur Ahmans Political Thought: The Relationship between İslam and State" (Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2017).

analyses of Islamic political theory, contemporary interpretations of governance in Islamic contexts, and studies on the socio-political dynamics of Muslim-majority societies. To explore the political implications of Qutb's exegesis, the research adopts a thematic hermeneutical framework (*tafsīr mawḍūʿī*), enabling the identification of key motifs and their development across the text. This is complemented by content analysis to systematically evaluate the alignment between Qutb's Qur'anic interpretations and his critique of modernity. The study's novelty lies in its integrative approach, situating Qutb's thought within current political realities and offering insights that bridge classical Islamic theory with contemporary governance challenges. Unlike earlier works confined to theological or historical analysis, this research highlights the practical relevance of Islamic ethical principles in political discourse, aiming to foster a more nuanced understanding of Islam's role in state formation and promote constructive public engagement with these ideas.

The Concept of *Ḥākimiyyah* and Divine Sovereignty

The relationship between Islam and the state remains a deeply contested issue across many Muslim-majority societies. In Indonesia, this debate has persisted since before the country gained independence. During the early formation of the Republic, a central concern was deciding upon the foundational ideology of the state. While most members of BPUPKI agreed on adopting a republican system, the role of Islam in public life sparked intense discussion. Eventually, a compromise was reached: Indonesia would not be established as a theocratic state, yet Islam would be granted a respected and protected position, as enshrined in Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution.[22] However, despite this constitutional recognition, the full implementation of *sharīʿah* in governance has not materialised. The tension between secularisation and Islamisation remains a defining feature of Indonesian political life, reflecting the broader global struggle to reconcile modernity with Islamic religious identity.[23]

This ongoing tension reflects a broader global discourse on the proper relationship between religion and the state. According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith, there are two principal perspectives on this matter: the organic view, which sees religion and the state as inherently united, and the secular view, which argues for their separation in order to safeguard the purity and autonomy of religious life.[24] Yet, many Muslim scholars firmly reject the secularist model on both theological and moral grounds. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, for instance, characterises secularism as a disintegration of ethical values and a precursor to moral decline. He contends that removing religion from politics deprives society of its ethical guidance.[25] Similarly, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas insists that religion is integral to governance, and that secularising political authority undermines the role of religious

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[22] Ahmad Syafi'i Maarif, *Polemik Negara Islam: Soekarno Versus Natsir* (Jakarta: Teraju, 2002), vii–viii.

[23] Donal Eugene Smith, *Religion and Political Development* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 85.

[24] Smith, *Religion and Political Development*.

[25] Yusuf al-Qardhawi, *Al-Diin Wa Al-Siyaasah* (Kairo: Daar al-Syuruq, 2007), 82; Khalif Muammar, "Politik Islam: Antara Demokrasi Dan Teokrasi," *Majalah Islami* II, no. 6 (2005): 99–102.

scholars while contradicting the precedent set by the Prophet Muhammad in managing communal and political affairs. [26]

The concept of *ḥākimiyyah* (divine sovereignty) must be understood within this broader framework of resistance to secularism. Qutb redefined Islamic governance as the total submission to God's sovereignty in all aspects of life, rejecting both Western secular democracy and nationalist ideologies. His view is deeply rooted in the Qur'anic notion that ultimate legislative authority belongs to Allah alone (e.g., Q.S. 12:40), and that any form of human legislation that deviates from divine command constitutes *jāhiliyyah* (ignorance). This radical assertion positions Qutb within the integralist paradigm, in which the unity of religion and state is not only necessary but divinely mandated. Unlike proponents of the symbiotic paradigm, such as Muhammad Abduh or Nurcholish Madjid, who maintain a more pragmatic view of state-religion interaction—allowing for reciprocal influence while respecting pluralism—Qutb does not advocate for compromise.[27] His hermeneutics are ideological and normative, emphasizing a totalistic interpretation of Islamic teachings as a comprehensive *nizām al-ḥayāt* (system of life). This approach aligns more closely with the political theology of classical thinkers like Ibn Taymiyyah, who emphasized the need for a leader to enforce divine law, and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māwardī, who viewed governance as a continuation of Prophetic authority.[28]

Qutb's vision also intersects with the political ideals of Abu A'la Maududi, who similarly emphasized *ḥākimiyyah* and the necessity of the state in upholding justice and eradicating tyranny.[29] Maududi viewed the Islamic state as a moral and legal entity that not only governs external actions but also seeks to establish *ma'rūf* (goodness) and prevent *munkar* (evil) through institutional power—ideas that strongly influenced Qutb's own theorization.[30] His interpretation of divine sovereignty is not simply theological; it is also political and revolutionary. He challenges secular power structures by asserting that the only legitimate governance is that which implements Islamic law in totality.[31] This rejection of compromise has sparked controversy and critique, particularly among scholars who argue for contextual and pluralistic readings of the Qur'an. Yet, this uncompromising stance reflects Qutb's response to the socio-political realities of his time—specifically, authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world that used secular ideologies to suppress Islamic movements.[32]

Historically, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ established the prototype of an Islamic state in Medina through initiatives such as the building of the mosque, the brotherhood between Muhajirin and Ansar, and the *Mīthāq al-Madīnah*, which laid the constitutional foundation

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[26] Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: Istac, 1993), 32.

[27] Abdurahman Ibnu Khaldun, *Muqaddimah Ibnu Khaldun*, VIII (Beirut: Daar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003), 188.

[28] Imam al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam Al-Sultaniyyah Wa Al-Wilayah Al-Diniyyah*, trans. Abdul Hayyie and Kamaluddin Nurdin, I (Jakarta: GIP, 2000), 14–15.

[29] Dragos C Stoica, "In The Shade of God's Sovereignty: The Anti-Modern Political Theology of Sayyid Qutb in Cross-Cultural Perspective" (Concordia University, 2017).

[30] Abul A'la Maududi, *Khilafah Dan Kerajaan*, trans. Muhammad Al-Baqir (Bandung: Mizan, 1996), 75–76.

[31] Mustapha Kamal Pasha, "Political Theology and Sovereignty: Sayyid Qutb in Our Times," *Theology and World Politics: Metaphysics, Genealogies, Political Theologies*, 2020, 157–79.

[32] Duja Bassam Zuhair Masrouje, "The Middle East's Self-Proclaimed Islamic State in Power: Ideology, Politics, and Governance" (Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU)-Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi (DAÜ), 2022).

for governance.[33] Sayyid Qutb's reinterpretation of these early Islamic principles reflects his desire to return to this original model, rejecting modern nation-states that fail to uphold Islamic law. Furthermore, al-Ghazali's analogy of religion and the state as twin brothers supports the need for integration, where religion acts as the foundation and the state as its protector.[34] This symbiosis is critical in maintaining public morality and ensuring the welfare of both worldly and spiritual life.[35] In Qutb's vision, the failure to uphold divine sovereignty leads not only to political injustice but also to spiritual degradation. Thus, Qutb's concept of *ḥākimiyyah* can be seen as a direct response to the failures of secular governance in the Muslim world. Through a critical tafsir-based approach, he reclaims the Qur'an as a political document and situates it at the heart of Islamic revivalism. In doing so, he challenges both modernity and traditionalist passivity, presenting a unique and radical synthesis of scriptural authority and revolutionary politics. Compared to other paradigms, Qutb's vision insists on a singular foundation for legitimacy: the sovereignty of God in both private belief and public law.

Qutb's Paradigm on Secularism

Sayyid Qutb, along with other prominent Islamic fundamentalists such as Hasan al-Banna, Abul A'la al-Maududi, and Muhammad al-Ghazali, firmly rejected all forms of nationalism, whether linguistic, ethnic, or liberal.[36] Although Islamic fundamentalism is often perceived as a modern phenomenon, it is deeply embedded in early Islamic ideals, particularly the aspiration to return to the perceived purity of the Prophet's era. This movement prioritises scripturalism, advocating a strict adherence to foundational religious texts.[37] Hasan al-Banna famously encapsulated this comprehensive vision by stating that Islam is not limited to personal belief but encompasses every dimension of life: "Islam is faith and ritual, nation and nationality, religion and state, spirituality and activism, the Qur'an and the sword." Such views illustrate a holistic Islamic framework where religion and governance are inseparable, forming the philosophical backbone of Qutb's later political theology and rejection of secular political systems.[38]

Qutb's disillusionment with Western civilisation played a pivotal role in reshaping his political outlook. Initially intrigued by Western modernity, his time in the United States exposed him to what he perceived as deep moral and spiritual decay, particularly racism against Arabs and Muslims, hedonism, and an aggressive secularism. Upon returning to Egypt, the political marginalisation he experienced under the new regime, especially after the assassination of Hasan al-Banna, reinforced his belief that secular and nationalist projects were inherently corrupt.[39] He came to see the world as divided between Islam and *jāhiliyyah* (a state of pre-Islamic ignorance), concluding that Western progress was built on

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[33] Muhammad Sa'id Ramadhan al-Buthy, *Sirah Nabawiyah* (Jakarta: Rabbani Press, 2001), 171; Shafiyyur Rahman al-Mubarakfury, *Al-Rahiq Al-Makhtum* (Jakarta: Rabbani Press, 2010), 185.

[34] Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Al-Iqtisad Fi Al-I'tiqad* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutaiba, 2003), 199.

[35] Khaldun, *Muqaddimah Ibnu Khaldun*; Maududi, *Khilafah Dan Kerajaan*.

[36] Muhammad Chirzin, *Jihad Menurut Sayyid Qutb Dalam Tafsir Zhilal* (Solo: Era Intermedia, 2001), 41.

[37] Leonard Binder, *Islam Liberal: Keritik Terhadap Idiologi-Idiologi Pembangunan*, trans. Iram Mutaqin (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2001), 250.

[38] Anthony Black, *Pemikiran Politik Islam Pada Masa Nabi Hingga Masa Ini*, n.d., 573.

[39] Nuaim Hidayat, *Sayyid Quthb: Biografi Dan Kejernihan Pemikirannya* (Jakarta: Perspektif, 2005), 12.

moral bankruptcy. For Qutb, any compromise with Western political thought endangered Muslim identity, especially in political life. Thus, he rejected gradual reform through existing systems and called instead for a total Islamic framework governed exclusively by divine law.

At the core of Qutb's critique of secularism is his concept of *al-ḥākimiyyah*, the absolute sovereignty of Allah. For Qutb, Islamic governance begins with the fundamental testimony (*shahādah*) that there is no god but Allah. This testimony is not merely theological but political, affirming that all laws and social structures must emanate from divine revelation.[40] Any governance that derives from human will or secular legislation is seen as *shirk* (associating partners with God) and therefore invalid.[41] Qutb argues that religion must be established before governance, as governance is an extension of divine sovereignty. His vision extends to a comprehensive Islamic government, transcending national borders—essentially a supranational Islamic authority.[42] This model includes a central Islamic authority uniting Muslim regions with equal rights, rejecting Western secularism for promoting materialism, atheism, and denying humanity's spiritual and transcendent nature.[43]

This dichotomy between Islam and the West leads Qutb to assert that only Islam represents the truth, while all other systems fall into error. The finality of Prophet Muhammad's mission marks Islam as the ultimate truth, and it is the responsibility of Muslims to preserve and preach this truth.[44] Any syncretism with secular traditions undermines the integrity of *tawḥīd*. For Qutb, *tawḥīd* also embodies a liberation theology: through the *shahādah*, every human becomes equal in servitude to God, breaking the chains of subjugation to man, material wealth, or base desires. This submission is holistic, extending to divine law (*sharīʿah*) and not limited to personal faith.[45] In contrast to Western secularism, which isolates religion from the public sphere, Qutb views Islam as an all-encompassing system. Adherence to *sharīʿah* is essential for genuine freedom. His early work, *Social Justice in Islam* (1949), outlines three principles of justice: freedom of will, human equality, and robust social security. He argues that Islamic justice cannot be realized unless individuals collectively uphold divine law.[46] True freedom, according to Qutb, lies in worshiping only Allah and rejecting submission to any worldly authority—including secular rulers.

Within Qutb's ideological framework, secular political systems embody *ṭāghūt*—a rebellious defiance of God's absolute sovereignty. For him, these systems not only displace divine law but actively subvert it, warranting active opposition. Central to this resistance is

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[40] Sayyid Qutb, *Al-Adalah Al-Ijtima'iyah Fi Al-Islam*, 7th ed. (Kairo: Darul Kitab al-'Arabi, 1967), 100.

[41] Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alim Fi at-Thariq*, n.d., 94.

[42] Munawir Sjadzili, *Islam Dan Tata Negara: Ajaran, Sejarah Dan Pemikiran* (Jakarta: UIPress, 1993), 149; Qutb, *Al-Adalah Al-Ijtima'iyah Fi Al-Islam*.

[43] Sayed Khatab, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Quthb: The Theory of Jahiliyah* (London: New York, 2006), 67.

[44] Sayyid Qutb, *Tafsir Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, trans. As'ad Yasin, vol. 14, 15 (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2004), 235.

[45] Qutb, *Ma'alim Fi at-Thariq*.

[46] Basically, Qutb's thoughts, according to the records of Taufiq Barkat and quoted by Mahmud Arif, there are 3 stages: the first phase of his thinking does not have an Islamic orientation, the second phase Qutb's thinking has an Islamic orientation but is still general and in the phase of Lastly, his conclusion is oriented towards militant Islam where in this phase, he is very "fed up" with Westernization, colonialism and Egyptian rulers are all considered to be contrary to Islam. Abdul Mustaqim and Sahiron (ed.) Syamsudin, *Studi Al-Qur'an Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: PT Tiara Wacana, 2002), 112.

jihād, which Qutb conceptualises not solely as armed conflict but as a broader political and spiritual struggle to establish divine governance.[47] He adopts the Prophet Muhammad's method of *da'wah*, which begins privately and moves toward a broader societal transformation. When facing resistance from those who oppose Islamic governance, Qutb endorses jihad as a legitimate response, consistent with the Prophet's approach. [48]

Ultimately, Qutb's vision of political Islam is deeply intertwined with a critique of secularism. He emphasizes that Islam must reemerge as a dominant political force, not merely an abstract theology.[49] Peace, while desirable, is secondary to freedom in obedience to Allah—a freedom that secular systems inherently deny.[50] As interpreted from Qur'anic verses such as QS. Al-Hajj (22): 39-40, Qutb argues that the struggle for divine sovereignty is a divine mandate. The stages of jihad, as described in his writings, begin with restraint (QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 77), followed by permission to fight (QS. Al-Hajj [22]: 39-41), and finally, an obligation to fight against those who initiate hostility (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 190). This paradigm, as presented by Sayyid Qutb, rejects Western political philosophy and asserts divine sovereignty as the sole source of legitimacy in public life. Advocating for ḥākimiyyah, Qutb challenges the modern secular state's claim to legislative autonomy, placing divine revelation at the core of governance and societal organization.

The Ideal State Model According to Qutb

Sayyid Qutb's vision of the ideal Islamic state stands in stark contrast to secular governance models and to Muslim thinkers who advocate for compatibility between Islam and modern political systems. At the heart of his view lies the principle of *ḥākimiyyah*—the belief that ultimate sovereignty belongs solely to God. Any legislative authority exercised independently of divine will, in Qutb's framework, constitutes *kufr* (disbelief). He rejects any political structure rooted in human authority, arguing that only a system grounded in divine revelation can ensure justice and authenticity. This perspective forms the foundation of Qutb's broader critique of secularism, liberal democracy, and even reformist Islamic political thought. For him, divine legislation is not a supplementary feature of Islam but its very core. Thus, establishing an Islamic state is not a political option but a religious imperative, ensuring that all aspects of life conform to God's will.[51] In Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia, Qutb's ideas encounter different applications. The pesantren tradition, for instance, exemplifies a democracy based on *adab* (etiquette), aligning Islamic values with political participation while respecting religious moral authority and fostering a contextual, ethical form of integration.[52]

In the discourse surroundinSayyid Qutb articulates a vision of the ideal Islamic state that sharply contrasts with secular forms of governance, as well as with Muslim thought that seeks to reconcile Islam with modern political systems such as democracy. In his view,

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[47] Qutb, *Ma'alim Fi at-Thariq*.
[48] Qutb.
[49] Qutb, *Tafsir Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, 14, 15:75.
[50] Qutb, *Ma'alim Fi at-Thariq*.
[51] Khatab, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Quthb: The Theory of Jahiliyah*.
[52] Ibnu Hajar Ansori and Roudlatun Nasikah, "DEMOKRASI KAUM SANTRI DALAM PANDANGAN ISLAM (Mendudukkan Konsep Demokrasi Dan Ittiba>' Kiai)," *Jurnal Dakwah* 20, no. 1 (August 5, 2020): 68–92, https://doi.org/10.14421/jd.1440.

the principle of *ḥākimiyyah*—the belief that ultimate sovereignty belongs solely to God—is the core of the Islamic order. Any form of legislative authority that stands independent of divine will is regarded as *kufr* (denial of faith). Qutb rejects political structures that are based on human authority and asserts that only systems rooted in divine revelation can guarantee justice and authenticity. This perspective forms the foundation of Qutb's critique of secularism, liberal democracy, and even reformist Islamic thought. For Qutb, divine legislation is not an accessory within Islam, but its essence.

Thus, the establishment of an Islamic state is not merely a political choice, but a religious obligation to realise a life fully submitted to God's willg Islam and the constitution, at least three major schools of thought can be identified. The first school, represented by figures such as Hasan al-Banna, Abu al-A'la al-Maududi, and Sayyid Qutb himself, upholds that Islam is a complete system (nizām shāmil) encompassing all aspects of life, including politics and state governance. This school asserts that the Islamic state is not merely desirable but necessary for the realization of divine law on earth. In contrast, the second school—with proponents like Ali Abdel Raziq and Taha Hussein—argues that Islam is a purely spiritual religion unrelated to state formation. They maintain that the Prophet Muhammad's role was exclusively as a spiritual guide, not a political leader or state founder.[53] The third school, often associated with thinkers like Muhammad Husayn Haykal, takes a more nuanced position: while denying a fixed constitutional blueprint within Islam, it affirms the presence of Islamic ethical values that can guide political life.[54]

Against this backdrop, Qutb's thought offers a radical critique. For him, the Islamic state is not simply a historical possibility—it is a theological necessity. He interprets Surah An-Nisa' (4:59) as the divine injunction to obey God, His Messenger, and those in authority *only* when that authority is grounded in divine revelation:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْٓا اَطِيْعُوا اللّٰهَ وَاَطِيْعُوا الرَّسُوْلَ وَاُولِى الْاَمْرِ مِنْكُمْۚ فَاِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِيْ شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوْهُ اِلَى اللّٰهِ وَالرَّسُوْلِ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُوْنَ بِاللّٰهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْاٰخِرِۗ ذٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَّاَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيْلًا

This verse, for Qutb, implies that no authority is legitimate unless it derives from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. He categorically rejects secular sovereignty, whether democratic or autocratic, as a form of *ṭāghūt* (rebellion against God's rule). In stark contrast, Nurcholish Madjid argues that the establishment of a state is not a religious obligation but a matter of ijtihād and rational necessity. For Nurcholish, the verse in Surah An-Nisa does not mandate a theocratic regime but rather endorses a moral society governed by justice, whether or not a formal state exists. This position implies a functional, rather than ontological, understanding of political authority—one that Qutb would reject outright.[55]

Qutb's ideal state is thus *not* a product of historical evolution or communal consensus (*ijmāʿ*) but a transcendent imperative. He departs even from classical Islamic political theory, such as that of Ibn Taymiyyah, who considered the state a necessary tool

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[53] Sjadzali, *Islam Dan Tata Negara: Ajaran, Sejarah Dan Pemikiran*.

[54] Rachel Scott, *The Challenge of Political Islam: Non-Muslims and the Egyptian State* (Stanford University Press, 2010).

[55] Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif, *Islam Dan Cita-Cita Dan Masalah Kenegaraan* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1985), 12.

for implementing the Shari'ah, but did not view it as a sacrosanct institution.[56] While Ibn Taymiyyah acknowledged that governance serves religion, he did not equate the two. Qutb, however, fuses the two entirely—obliterating the secular-sacred divide. Interestingly, thinkers like Muhammad Natsir and Buya Hamka—influenced by Ibn Taymiyyah—accepted the state as a practical necessity, not as an inherently religious institution.[57] Qutb's approach, however, resists this instrumentalism. He envisions an ideological state grounded in divine law, where governance is a form of worship, and any deviation from Shari'ah is an existential threat to the ummah.

Critically, Qutb's model exhibits both *tafsīrī* and *ideological* traits. His political theory stems from a scriptural hermeneutic that takes revelation as the only legitimate source of legislation.[58] While other modernist reformers engage in contextual reasoning or *maqāṣid*-based ethics, Qutb insists on textual fidelity—thereby delegitimizing pluralist, democratic, or secular frameworks as forms of *jāhiliyyah* (pre-Islamic ignorance).[59] The persistence of the phrase *al-Islām huwa al-dīn wa al-dawlah* ("Islam is both religion and state") among many Muslims[60] reflects Qutb's enduring influence. His vision resonates with those who view the modern nation-state as morally bankrupt and seek a return to prophetic governance. Yet, this vision also raises normative and pragmatic questions about pluralism, coercion, and the role of dissent in an Islamic polity.

In comparison, modern Islamic political theorists argue that Islam provides *principles* rather than *structures* for governance. From this perspective, the Qur'an and Sunnah offer normative goals—such as justice (*'adl*), consultation (*shūrā*), and welfare (*maṣlaḥah*)—without prescribing a single form of government. Qutb's rigidity, then, can be seen both as a strength (for its moral clarity) and a limitation (for its intransigence). Thus, Sayyid Qutb's model of the ideal Islamic state is not merely a rejection of secularism, but a comprehensive theological-political project. It aims to reassert God's sovereignty in totality—law, society, and conscience—redefining the very foundation of legitimate rule. This vision represents a paradigmatic shift in political theory: it relocates the source of all authority from the will of the people to the will of God, thereby nullifying the legitimacy of human-made laws that do not conform to divine revelation. Qutb's project is, therefore, not only religious in orientation but revolutionary in scope—seeking to reconstruct societal order from the ground up based on the exclusive supremacy of Sharī'ah.

The Relevance of Qutb's Exegesis in the Contemporary Context

Sayyid Qutb's legacy is deeply embedded in the ideological matrix of modern Islamic political movements. Often compared to contemporaries like Abu A'la al-Mawdudi in Pakistan and Ali Shariati in Iran, Qutb stands out due to his integrated contribution as both a political thinker and a Qur'anic exegete. His magnum opus, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, represents

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[56] Ibnu Taimiyah, *Min Al-Sunnah Al-Nabawiyyah Fi Naqd Al-Syi'ah Wa Al-Qadariyah*, vol. 1, n.d., 147.

[57] Muhammad Natsir, *Persatuan Agama Dan Negara Islam* (Padang: Japi, 1968); Zainal Abidin Ahmad, *Membentuk Negara Islam* (Jakarta: Widjaya, 1956); Rusjdi, ed., *Studi Islam* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, n.d.).

[58] Habibi, "A Comparative Study between Sayyid Qutbs and Fazlur Ahmans Political Thought: The Relationship between İslam and State."

[59] Laith S Saud, "Reading A Radical Thinker: A Study on Sayyid Qutb," 2017.

[60] Dale F Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Ekspresi Politik Muslim*, trans. Rofik Suhud (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), 71–72.

not merely a tafsir in the traditional sense, but a dynamic fusion of scriptural interpretation and socio-political commentary. This work, along with his other writings, continues to be highly influential among Islamic revivalist movements, particularly those that support the re-establishment of Islamic governance or a caliphate. [61] In his book *Al-'Adālah al-Ijtimā'iyyah fī al-Islām* (Social Justice in Islam), Qutb argues that Islam offers a holistic, divinely revealed system unmatched by any other ideology, past or present. He insists that Islam is entirely independent of other universal systems, emphasizing its unique spiritual, legal, and sociopolitical framework.[62]

A significant aspect of Qutb's political theory lies in his vision of an Islamic polity distinct from both imperialism and nationalism. Islam, according to him, recognizes no artificial boundaries between peoples of different races and regions. All Muslims, regardless of geography, are equal citizens within the broader *ummah*. The Islamic state, therefore, is not a colonial enterprise but a unifying structure based on shared religious identity and justice.[63] This universalist view contrasts with modern nation-state models and aligns with thinkers like Muhammad Iqbal, emphasizing pan-Islamic unity. Qutb's tafsir must be understood in his historical context. Growing up amid Egypt's cultural contest between traditionalism and modernism, his education in both secular and Islamic ideologies shaped his outlook.[64] At just 11 years old, Qutb had memorized the Qur'an. At 13, he moved to Cairo and studied at *Dār al-'Ulūm*, where he engaged with modern Arabic literature and Western philosophical currents, including secular nationalism. Influenced by figures such as 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād, he initially embraced reconciliationist views, showing admiration for Western culture.[65]

Qutb's transformation began during his academic sojourn in the United States (1948–1950), where he pursued postgraduate studies at the University of Northern Colorado and Stanford University.[66] His exposure to Western culture, particularly its materialism and perceived moral decadence, deepened his critique of secularism. The post-WWII unrest in Egypt further radicalized him, as political instability and colonial entanglements revealed the fragility of secular nationalist regimes.[67] In the realm of Qur'anic exegesis, Qutb criticizes scholars who reduce the Qur'an to an object of academic inquiry devoid of transformative praxis. The Qur'an, he insists, must be a guide for life—a manifesto for liberation through *tawḥīd* and *sharī'ah*.[68] His *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* is saturated

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[61] Qutb, *Tafsir Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, 14, 15:122.

[62] Qutb.

[63] A Rizqan Khamami, "Sayyid Qutub Dan Perubahan Islamisnya," *Jurnal Kontemplasi* 7, no. 2 (November 2010): 172.

[64] A Fadly Rahman Akbar, Asif Trisnani, and Rine Heriska, "The Concept of Infaq in The Qur'an According to Sayyid Quthb and Its Relevance to The Concept of Philanthropy," *KACA (Karunia Cahaya Allah): Jurnal Dialogis Ilmu Ushuluddin* 15, no. 1 (2025): 27–67.

[65] Adnan A Musallam, *Posthumous Impact on Radical Islamists and Global Jihadists: The Life and Thought of Sayyid Qutb, 1906-1966* (Fulton Books, Inc., 2024); Shimon Shamir, "Liberalism: From Monarchy to Postrevolution," in *Egypt From Monarchy To Republic* (Routledge, 2021), 195–200; Muhammad Sayyid al-Wakil, *Pergerakan Islam Terbesar Abad Ke 14 H*, n.d., 220.

[66] al-Wakil, *Pergerakan Islam Terbesar Abad Ke 14 H*.

[67] Saiful Amin Ghofur, *Profil Para Mufasir Al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Insani Madani, 2008), 183; Khamami, "Sayyid Qutub Dan Perubahan Islamisnya."

[68] Muhammad Qasim Zaman and Roxanne L Euben, "Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from Al-Banna to Bin Laden," 2021.

with the spirit of activism, portraying the Qur'an not merely as divine literature but as a revolutionary force.[69]

Qutb's tafsir underscores the idea that Islam is a civilizational blueprint, not just a private faith. The doctrine of *tawḥīd* lies at the heart of this vision, acting both as the theological starting point and the eschatological goal. Through the full realization of divine unity, human beings can be emancipated from all forms of subjugation.[70] This is where Qutb's theological project intersects with political theory: true justice and peace, he argues, can only flourish under Islamic governance.[71] Crucially, he adopts a *manhaj rabbānī* that begins with immutable divine truths rather than empirical realities, contrasting with rationalist thinkers like Muḥammad 'Abduh and Fazlur Rahman, who prioritise contextual *ijtihād* and ethical reform. Qutb's Qur'anic exegesis thus serves not merely as theological commentary but as a blueprint for a political-theological order. His legacy continues to inspire Islamic movements seeking to integrate faith and governance, though it requires critical scrutiny due to its potential for exclusivist and absolutist interpretations.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis in this article, Sayyid Qutb's vision of the Islam–state relationship presents a distinctive synthesis, affirming the necessity of divine sovereignty as the foundation of political legitimacy. His symbiotic paradigm challenges both secular disengagement and rigid theocratic models by advocating for the integration of Islamic ethical principles within governance. Qutb's Qur'anic hermeneutics, shaped by historical and ideological contexts, provide a transformative framework where governance becomes an expression of religious commitment and moral responsibility. This study highlights the enduring relevance of Qutb's thought in addressing contemporary challenges faced by Muslim-majority societies, especially in navigating ideological tensions between Islamism and secularism. His approach offers a compelling alternative for reconceptualising political authority, contributing to a deeper understanding of Islamic political thought and its application in evolving state systems.

The completion of this research opens new avenues for further inquiry, enriching theoretical, practical, and academic discourses on Islamic political thought. Theoretically, it invites comparative studies between Sayyid Qutb's paradigm and other Islamic or secular political models, refining the understanding of divine sovereignty and governance. Practically, future research could explore the contextual viability of Qutb's concept of ḥākimiyyah within pluralistic political systems, offering valuable insights for policy development in contemporary Muslim-majority societies. Academically, this study provides a foundation for interdisciplinary engagement across political science, Islamic jurisprudence, and socio-religious studies, fostering a more nuanced examination of Qur'anic exegesis as a source of political ideology.

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[69] Deni Albar, Dadang Darmawan, and Solehudin Solehudin, "Deradicalizing Interpretation of Jihad Verses by Sayyid Qutb," *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 3, no. 1 (2023): 61–70.

[70] Risma Ayu Nursyahidah, Rofi Nugraha, and Asep Abdul Muhyi, "Islamic View On Secularism Through The Methodology Of Maudhu'i Interpretation," *Bulletin of Islamic Research* 2, no. 3 (2024): 365–84.

[71] Tauseef Ahmad Parray, *Islam and Democracy in the 21st Century* (Oxford University Press, 2023).

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