
INTEGRATING KHILAFAH AND DEMOCRACY THROUGH PROPHETIC SOCIAL SCIENCE: TOWARD AN ETHICAL FRAMEWORK OF ISLAMIC GOVERNANCE

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Abstract: *Khilafah and democracy are two opposing poles according to many researchers. This assessment is actually reductive, because reading the two terms from one side, namely both as systems and forms of government. Democracy, as a system of government, is highly context-dependent, manifesting in various forms such as liberal, direct, or participatory democracy in various societies. Defenders of the caliphate are mistaken in interpreting the word caliphate mentioned in the Qur'an. Meanwhile, the plaintiffs of the caliphate agree with the assumption of the defense group. As a result, the assumption that the caliphate is a system and form of government continues to roll until it covers the original meaning of the caliphate itself. This article will clear the term caliphate from the pile of political tendencies and then reveal its original meaning. For that, the author proposes two problem formulations. First, what is the true meaning of the caliphate? Second, how to reconcile the caliphate in a political sense with democracy? In order to dissect the two problem formulations, the author will adopt two analytical knives, namely the thematic interpretation method and Kuntowijoyo's Prophetic Social Science. Thematic interpretation will reveal the basic meaning of the caliphate, while Kuntowijoyo's prophetic social science will synthesize the caliphate and democracy. This research will produce two conclusions. First, the caliphate is not a system and form of state, but rather a divine character that embodies the will to imitate God and personal responsibility for that character. Second, the caliphate manifests itself as an idea and movement based on science, not just doctrine and belief.*

Keywords: *Khilafah; Democracy; Thematic Interpretation; Prophetic Social Science*

Introduction

Religion and politics remain two enduring domains that have shaped human civilization across centuries¹. Politics governs the

¹Jonathan C Agensky, "Recognizing Religion: Politics, History, And The 'Long

distribution of power and the organization of public life², while religion provides the moral and spiritual foundation that sustains human values and collective conscience³. Their intersection—where ethical ideals meet pragmatic governance—creates a dynamic and sometimes contentious relationship that cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. A complex reading is therefore required to understand how these two realms interact, overlap, and shape each other in both theory and practice.

Within this broader framework, the discourse on *Khilafah* and democracy occupies a central place in contemporary Islamic thought. Traditionally, these two concepts have been seen as opposites. The *Khilafah* has often been portrayed as a theocratic system in which political authority derives exclusively from divine sovereignty (*hakimiyyah*), whereas democracy is viewed as a secular construct rooted in human sovereignty. This binary perspective, however, has proven inadequate for capturing the nuanced and evolving relationship between Islam and modern governance. Earlier defenders of *Khilafah*, such as Taqiuddin al-Nabhani and Hizb ut-Tahrir ideologues, reject democracy on the grounds that it subordinates divine law to human will⁴. Conversely, democratic theorists such as Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im⁵ and John L. Esposito in their study of Masyah interpret the Caliphate as an obsolete pre-modern institution that is incompatible with contemporary pluralism⁶.

19th Century,” *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 4 (2021): 729–55.

²Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, “Political Power beyond the State: Problematics of Government,” *New Critical Writings in Political Sociology: Volume One: Power, State and Inequality* 43, no. 2 (2017): 255–87, doi:10.4324/9781315094021-9.

³Amir Khan Ahmed, “A Philosophical Exploration of Spiritual Values and Their Contribution to Shaping Humanity,” *MEΘEXIS Journal of Research in Values and Spirituality* III, no. II (2023): 130–50, doi:10.71210/mjrvs.5.a.8.

⁴Marcus Mietzner and Burhanuddin Muhtadi, “Explaining the 2016 Islamist Mobilisation in Indonesia: Religious Intolerance, Militant Groups and the Politics of Accommodation,” *Asian Studies Review* 42, no. 3 (2018): 479–97, doi:10.1080/10357823.2018.1473335.

⁵Ahmad Bahrur Rozi, “Penerapan Syari’ah Di Negara Modern (Analisis Ijtihad Pemikiran Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im),” *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 10, no. 2 (2016): 359–92, doi:10.19105/al-lhkam.v10i2.734.

⁶Syarif Hade Masyah, “Konsepsi Politik Khalifah Pada Era Khulafa Al-Rasyidin (Tinjauan Semantik Terhadap Term ‘Khilafah’),” *Buletin AL-Turas*, 2002.

Yet this study argues that such polarization arises from a limited understanding of both sharia and democracy, and that a reconstruction of thought is urgently needed—one that connects the ethical foundation of sharia with the procedural rationality of democracy in the modern context. The *Khilafah* should no longer be conceived merely as a theocratic form of government but reinterpreted as a *moral-epistemic framework* that guides human responsibility (*istikhlaf*) in governance. This reconstruction challenges the classical paradigm by proposing a more flexible and inclusive interpretation of sharia, emphasizing its universal values such as justice (*'adl*), consultation (*shura*), and public welfare (*maslahah*), all of which resonate with democratic ideals of equality, deliberation, and human dignity.

Historically, the evolution of thought demonstrates that attempts to bridge Islam and democracy are not new. Reformist scholars such as Muhammad Abduh⁷ and Rashid Rida sought to revive Islamic governance through rationalist and ethical reinterpretation, focusing on the spirit of sharia rather than rigid institutional forms⁸. Contemporary thinkers like Yusuf al-Qaradawi⁹ and Tariq Ramadan extend this vision through the notion of *fiqh al-wasatiyyah* (the jurisprudence of moderation), promoting engagement between Islam and modern political institutions without compromising religious authenticity¹⁰. Meanwhile, Wael B. Hallaq emphasizes that while the modern state poses moral challenges to Islamic governance, the Qur'anic vision of *Khilafah* remains relevant as an ethical model of stewardship and justice rather than a concrete political regime¹¹.

⁷Muntaha Artalim Zaim, "The Modern Indonesian Experience in Coexistence between Muslims and Others: Presentation and Evaluation," *Al-Daulah: Jurnal Hukum Pidana Dan Ketatanegaraan* 13, no. 1 (2024): 20–33, doi:10.24252/al-daulah.v13i1.48650.

⁸Azrian Isyfaul Fuadi, "Reconfiguring Religious Authority and Ethical Governance in Islamic Political Thought: A Comparative Literature Review," *Sinergi International Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 3 (2024): 136–48, doi:10.61194/ijis.v2i3.605.

⁹Ujang Supriyadi, "Yusuf Al-Qardhawi ' S Thoughts And Implementation To Indonesian Society," *Syntax Transformation* 4, no. 12 (2023): 19–34.

¹⁰Theguh Saumantri, "Pluralisme Dan Inklusivitas Dalam Masyarakat Multikultural Perspektif Pemikiran Tariq Ramadan," *Zanijah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 9, no. 1 (2023): 135, doi:10.31332/zjpi.v9i1.5899.

¹¹Wael B Hallaq, "Qur'anic Constitutionalism and Moral Governmentality: Further Notes on the Founding Principles of Islamic Society and Polity," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1–2 (2014): 1–52, doi:10.1558/cis.v8i1-2.1.

However, this article moves beyond the theoretical and textual debates by also highlighting practical examples from countries that have successfully integrated sharia values with democratic systems. For instance, Indonesia and Malaysia illustrate how Islamic ethical principles—justice, consultation, and social welfare—can coexist with democratic governance through constitutional mechanisms¹². Tunisia's post-Arab Spring experience further demonstrates that Islamic identity and democratic institutions can evolve symbiotically when guided by mutual respect for pluralism and moral accountability¹³. These cases affirm that the synthesis between sharia and democracy is not merely conceptual but has tangible expressions in modern governance when guided by inclusive interpretation.

In response to these developments, this study positions itself as a contribution to the reconstruction of Islamic political thought by adopting two analytical frameworks: thematic interpretation of the Qur'an and Kuntowijoyo's Prophetic Social Science. Thematic interpretation helps uncover the ontological essence of *Khilafah* as human stewardship, while Prophetic Social Science provides the sociological and epistemological tools to translate these values into transformative social ethics. Through these frameworks, *Khilafah* can be re-envisioned as a prophetic project that integrates knowledge, morality, and social justice—dimensions that resonate with democratic participation and human responsibility.

Ultimately, this study contends that *Khilafah* and democracy are not inherently contradictory but can be harmonized through the reconstruction of sharia as a dynamic, value-based ethical system compatible with pluralism and rational governance. The novelty of this research lies in its prophetic-ethical reinterpretation of *Khilafah*, offering both theoretical depth and practical relevance for Muslim societies seeking to integrate faith and modernity. Future scholarship and policy discussions

¹²Adil Aiman Hamzah, "An Analysis of the Relationship Between Executive Power and Islamic Law in Democratic States," *SYARLAT: Akhwal Syaksyiah, Jinayah, Siyasah and Muamalah* 2, no. 1 (2025): 8–15, doi:10.35335/z0xezq29.

¹³Arsyad Dzimar and Ezhar Ghazlan, "The Urgency of Implementing Siyasah Syar'iyah Values in National Law-Making: Harmonizing Islamic Governance Principles with Constitutional Democracy," *SYARLAT: Akhwal Syaksyiah, Jinayah, Siyasah and Muamalah* 1, no. 4 (2024): 172–79, doi:10.35335/2frs5098.

are encouraged to continue exploring this synthesis to strengthen democratic practices rooted in spiritual and moral consciousness.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method, aiming to reveal both the conceptual meaning and practical relevance of the research theme within the contemporary socio-political context. The first approach applied is thematic exegesis (*tafsir maudhu'i*), which explores the concept of *khilafah* as articulated in the Qur'an and Hadith. This process involves collecting relevant verses, examining their *asbabun nuzul* or contexts of revelation, and analyzing them through classical and contemporary exegetical works. In doing so, the study seeks to interpret the meaning of *khilafah* objectively, free from ideological interests or political bias.

In addition, this research utilizes the framework of Prophetic Social Sciences as developed by Kuntowijoyo. This framework emphasizes the integration of humanization, liberation, and transcendence in order to reconstruct the understanding of *khilafah* not merely as a political system, but as a moral and spiritual responsibility. Through this approach, the study attempts to establish dialogue and synthesis between *khilafah* and democracy, often perceived as opposing concepts, by grounding democracy in principles of public participation.

The sources of data consist of primary materials, including Qur'anic verses, Hadiths, and exegetical literature, and secondary materials such as books, scholarly articles, and previous research related to *khilafah*, democracy, and Prophetic Social Sciences. Data analysis is conducted through processes of data reduction, textual interpretation, and comparative argumentation, with the aim of producing conclusions that are not only theoretical but also relevant to the dynamics of contemporary socio-political life.

Discussion

Khilafah as the Divine Nature in Human Beings Genealogy of the Khilafah Discourse and Contemporary Muslim Typology

The idea of a global Khilafah stems from the encounter between Islam and the West, aka modernity. Western colonization and their multi-sectoral progress have harmed and amazed the Muslim mind, which then has implications for the classification and multichotomy of their multidimensional attitudes towards the West. In general, Abdullah Saeed typologizes them into eight¹⁴. First, traditionalist-legalists, namely Muslim groups who try to maintain the heritage of Islamic law by establishing a system of schools of thought in fiqh. In Indonesia, this group is represented by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Second, puritan-theological, namely Muslim groups who accentuate the theological side of Islam by trying to purify it from infiltration with foreign elements which are generally divided into two, namely local elements and to a certain extent modern elements. Wahhabi is the main icon of this group from several other groups that also represent it.

Third, militant extremists, namely the movement of a group of Muslims in the political sector by making Islam the ideological foundation and then reviving it in an extremist, even terrorist manner. One representative of this group is ISIS and al-Qaeda, while its leading figure is Osama bin Laden. This group tends to take a rebellious attitude and is less solid in ideological struggles in the political arena. Fourth, Political Islamists, namely in contrast to the third group which tends to be extremist, this fourth group presents Islam as a solution to world ideologies, such as capitalism, socialism, secularism, nationalism and so on. This group believes that Islam is the most solution-oriented alternative to various damages in the world. For that, they entered the political realm with a reformative agenda to then realize an Islamic political order. The Muslim Brotherhood initiated by Ḥasan al-Bannā in Egypt and the Jamaat-i Islam initiated by Abū al-A'lā al-Mawdūdī in Pakistan are representatives of this group.

Fifth, liberal-secular, namely a group that focuses on a positive and equitable public order for everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, language and religion. For this group, Islam is positioned more as a private faith in God, while in the public sector, they place their main interest in; protection of religion from state interference or vice versa, respect and appreciation for religious freedom, rejection to condemnation of misogyny, especially in the name of religion, and commitment to equal rights for every human

¹⁴Abdullah Saeed, "Trends in Contemporary Islam: A Preliminary Attempt at a Classification 97 (July 2007)," *The Muslim World* 97 (2007).

being. For the Indonesian context, this group is represented by a group of academics and intellectuals who are liberal and feminist. Sixth, nominalist-cultural, namely a group of Muslims who in terms of thought, belief, lifestyle and way of life do not have much commitment to Islam. They are usually people who were born into a Muslim environment but live by the flow without questioning the ideas, beliefs and doctrines behind the flow. This group can generally be called lay but in apathetic ranks. If we relate it to Geertz's Muslim typology, this group in the Indonesian context is labeled *abangan* ¹⁵.

Seventh, classical modernists, namely the predecessors of Islamic renewal who reformed the Islamic treasury by reactivating *ijtihad* as an intellectual tool of Islam that had been forgotten because of the slogan, "the door of *ijtihad* has been closed". This group believes that revelation does not contradict reason and humanity so that if revelation seems contradictory, then re-reading is absolutely needed and attempted. Representatives of this group are Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad 'Abduh, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān and Syah Waliyullāh al-Dihlawī. Eighth, progressive *ijtihad*, namely the successors of the classical modernist group where the last group reformed classical science and developed a contemporary reading methodology for the classical heritage so that Islam has discursive power in facing the challenges of the times and answering various problems. The reformist group as explained by Boullata can be identified with this last group. The eight types of Muslims above can be a frame of reference regarding the position in which the discourse of the Khilafah develops with different measures. The following author will apply thematic interpretation reading of the Khilafah by referring directly to the verses of the Qur'an about it.

1. A Short Interpretation of the Verses of the Khilafah

In the Qur'an, there is no mention of the term Khilafah. What exists is the perpetrator of the khilafah, namely *khalīfah* 2 times and the plural form, *khalā'if* and *khulafā'* 5 times ¹⁶. Other words that are synonymous with caliph include *imām* mentioned 7 times in the Qur'an ¹⁷,

¹⁵Clifford Geertz, *Agama Jawa: Santri, Abangan, Priyayi Dalam Kebudayaan Jawa*, Edisi ke-2 (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2014).

¹⁶Ḥasan 'Izz al-Dīn Al-Jumal, *Mu'jam Wa Tafsir Lughawī Li Kalimat Al-Qur'an Vol. 2* (Riyadl: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 2005).

¹⁷Ḥusayn Al-Dāmaghānī, *Qamūs Al-Qur'an Aw Iṣṣāḥ Al-Wujūb Wa Al-Naẓā'ir Fī Al-Qur'an Al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 1983).

ulū al-amr twice¹⁸, the guardians mentioned are much more numerous, ranging from tens to hundreds with various derivations, both those denoting leaders and those not¹⁹. These four terms (khalīfah, imām, waliy and ulī al-amri) refer to leaders and leadership²⁰. There are around 27 verses on the theme of leadership in the Qur'an²¹. In terms of leadership, a caliph is a leader who meets two criteria. First, based on justice. Second, not following lust²². Below, the author will present verses about the Khilafah along with their respective interpretations.

a. Singular

1) QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 30.

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّىْ جَاعِلٌ فِىْهَا نٰسٍ مُّسَبِّحٌ
 God يُغَسِّدُ فِيْهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ تُسَبِّحُ God willing
 تَعْلَمُوْنَ bless you

And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels, "I will make a caliph on earth." They said, "Are You going to place someone there who will cause corruption and shed blood, while we praise You and sanctify Your name ? " He said, "Truly, I know what you do not know."

In the Qur'anic verse "And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels, 'I will make a caliph on earth...'" (Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 30), the term khalīfah is often misunderstood as referring directly to a political ruler or religious leader. However, when examined closely within its linguistic and theological context, the word khalīfah here primarily means "successor" or "one who comes after another."

This interpretation emphasizes humanity's role as successors on earth, rather than rulers in a political sense. Allah intended that the earth would be inhabited by creatures who succeed one another—each generation replacing the previous one. The focus is therefore ontological and moral, not political. It highlights human beings' responsibility to maintain, sustain, and cultivate the earth (‘imārat al-ard) in accordance with divine guidance.

¹⁸Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd Al-Bāqī, *Al-Mu'jam Al-Mufabras Li Alfāz Al-Qur'an* (Kairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1364).

¹⁹(Ā. ZF al-Ḥasanī Al-Maqdisī, 1323, p. 482)

²⁰(Masyhudi, nd, p. 7)

²¹(NA Baiquni, 1996, p. 247)

²²Masduha, *Al-Alfāz: Buku Pintar Memahami Kata-Kata Dalam Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Pustaka al-Kautsar, 2017).

The angels' question—whether this creation would cause corruption and bloodshed—illustrates their concern about human free will and the potential misuse of power. Yet Allah's response, "Truly, I know what you do not know," reveals the divine wisdom that within humanity lies the capacity for knowledge, moral awareness, and stewardship, qualities that justify their role as khalīfah²³.

2) QS. Ṣād (38): 26.

God willing God فَاخُكُم بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ الْهَوَىٰ فَيُضِلَّكَ God bless you
willing الْحِسَابِ

(Allah said), "O Dawud! Indeed, We have made you caliph (ruler) on earth, so judge (matters) between people fairly and do not follow your desires, because it will lead you astray from the path of Allah. Indeed, those who stray from the path of Allah will suffer a severe punishment, because they forgot the day of reckoning.

As for the word caliph which is attributed to the prophet Da'wah>wow>d as was not a political leader, but a successor to the previous apostles. More specifically, he replaced the role of the previous apostles²⁴.

b. Plural Form

1) QS. Al-A'rāf (16): 69.

God willing Allah's blessings رَجُلٍ مِّنكُمْ لِيُنذِرَكُمْ وَاذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ God willing
Allah is the Most Gracious لَعَلَّكُمْ

And do you wonder that a reminder has come to you from your Lord through a man from among yourselves, to warn you? Remember when He made you successors after the people of Noah and preferred you in strength and stature. So remember the favors of Allah that you may be successful."

²³ Ibn Kaṣīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'an Al-'Azīm Vol. 1* (Jizah: Mu'assasat Qurṭubah bekerja sama dengan Maktabat Awlād al-Syaykh li al-Turāṣ, 2000), 336–37.

²⁴ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Al-Ṭabarī, *Jamī' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Ay Al-Qur'an Vol. 20* (Beirut: Markaz li al-Buḥūṣ wa al-Dirāsāt al-'Arabiyyah wa al-Islāmiyyah bi Dār Hajr, 2001), 77.

The word *khulafā'* in this verse means replacement for the previous generation as well as ruler over the earth²⁵. However, the ruler here is not a political ruler, but rather a party who has the right to manage the earth.

2) QS. Al-'Araf (16): 74.

وَاذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مِنْ بَعْدِ عَادٍ وَبَوَّأَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ تَتَّخِذُونَ مِنْ سُهُولِهَا قُصُورًا وَتَنْحِتُونَ الْجِبَالَ بُيُوتًا مِمَّا دُكِّرُوا آلَاءَ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْتَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ

And remember when He made you caliphs after the people of 'Ad and placed you on earth. On the flat places you build palaces and on the hills you carve them into houses. So remember Allah's blessings and do not cause mischief on the earth.

The meaning of *khulafā'* here is only the successor after the 'A' people. It can also be interpreted as the heir to the earth after the destruction of the 'Ād people.²⁶ There is no political tendency or anything like that.

3) QS. Al-Naml (27): 62.

God willing, God willing, God willing, God willing God willing

مَعَ اللَّهِ فَلْيَلَا مَا تَدْكُرُونَ

Isn't it He (Allah) who accepts (the prayer of) people who are in trouble when they pray to Him, and removes the distress and makes you (humans) caliphs (leaders) on earth? Is there (another) god besides Allah? You remember very little (of Allah's favors).

Al-Suyuti connects this verse with the Khilafah. However, the Khilafah in question is not political power, but *jamā'ah* (Islamic togetherness)²⁷. Occasionally he cites political power, but not in order to interpret the Khilafah as political leadership, but rather in order to emphasize *jamā'ah*.

²⁵Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kaṣṣyāf 'an Ḥaḡā'iq Ghawāmiḡ Al-Tanzīl Wa 'Uyūn Al-Aqāwīl Fi Wujūb Al-Ta'wīl Vol. 2* (Riyadl: Maktabat al-'Ubaykān, 1998), 458.

²⁶Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Kabīr Wa Maḡātib Al-Ghayb Vol. 14* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 170.

²⁷(J. al-D. 'Abd al-R. Al-Suyūṭī, 2003, p. 392)

4) QS. Fatir (35): 39.

Allah's blessings هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَعَلَيْهِ كُفْرُهُ ۖ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الْكَافِرِينَ كُفْرُهُمْ إِلَّا خَسَارًا

It is He who made you caliphs on earth. Whoever disbelieves, (the consequences of) his disbelief will befall himself. And the disbelief of those who disbelieve will only increase the wrath of their Lord. And the disbelief of the disbelievers will only increase their losses.

Al-Qurṭubī interprets the term khalā'if in this verse as successor or successor.²⁸ There are absolutely no political trappings.

5) QS. Al-An'am (6): 165.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ الْأَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ أَسْمَاءَ بَعْضِكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ لِّيُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

And it is He who made you caliphs on earth and He raised (the degree of) some of you above others, to test you on the (gifts) He gave you. Indeed, your Lord is very quick to punish and truly, He is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Al-Biqā'ī defines khalā'if as acting like a khalīfah. Furthermore, he emphasizes who holds the khalīfah? The answer is the Arab nation which he mentions as the best nation at the end of time.²⁹ However, this interpretation is not political in nature, but rather more as a manager of the earth.

2. Redefinition of the Khilafah

All of the Khilafah verses above are ibtidā'iyyah verses, namely verses that came down without asbāb al-nuzūl³⁰ aka the casuistic reason behind the revelation of the verse³¹. Therefore, the author does not mention any reason for its descent. Because there is no specific reason, the author will dive directly into the linguistic dimension. The word

²⁸Abū 'Abdillāh Muḥammad Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām Al-Qur'an Wa Al-Mubayyin Li Mā Taḍammanabū Min Al-Sunnah Wa Āy Al-Furqān Vol. 17* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2006), 392.

²⁹(Al-Biqā'ī, nd, p. 344)

³⁰(Al-Sabt, nd, p. 53; J. al-D. 'Abd al-R. Al-Suyūṭī, 1979, p. 71)

³¹Al-Zarkasyī, *Al-Burhān Fi 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān Vol. 1* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2001), 28.

khalīfah comes from khalafa³². In the form of the word (ṣīghah), khalīfah is ṣīghah mubālaghah (meaning very). This means khalīfah means very replacing. The word khalafa itself has a basic meaning of replacing³³. Referring to the interpretation of the previous verse, replacing means alternating. This means that humans are creatures that alternate from one generation to another. In contemporary discourse, the Khilafah means a substitute for God in the sense of God's representative in carrying out His commandments. This interpretation of the Khilafah can be justified, but unfortunately it forgets the fundamental side of the Khilafah itself.

If humans are God's representatives, then it is not just a task. The task is given because of the ability. Humans cannot be God's representatives if they are not capable. In fact, humans have been chosen as God's representatives. That means, God entrusted His attributes to humans so that they are capable of representing Him. More clearly, the Khilafah is the divine nature in humans. In line with this, Ibn 'Arabī stated that every creature has the image of God³⁴. And the creature with the strongest image of divinity is human. As a character, of course the movement of human history is increasingly brilliant from various things, whether knowledge or action. The development of human history is what is called the Khilafah. In addition, the Khilafah means human needs for positive things, such as truth, goodness and beauty. This is no different from God who has the attributes of al-raḥmān, al-raḥīm, al-ḥaqq, al-'ādil and so on.

So, the Khilafah is more fundamentally not a responsibility. However, it is the nature that humans will always seek the radiance of God's attributes in the universe. No wonder, people who have never experienced religion, especially Islam, will certainly long for peace, justice, welfare, prosperity and so on where all of that can be the radiance of God's attributes, say like al-raḥmān. Furthermore, Sheikh 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām requires Muslims to imitate God's attributes (al-takhalluq bi akhlāq Allāh)³⁵, while Ḥasan Ḥanafī designed a more radical formula by remaking

³²Ahmad Warson Munawwir, *Kamus Al-Munawwir: Arab-Indonesia Terlengkap* (Surabaya: Pustaka Progresif, 1997), 361.

³³Al-Rāghib Al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt Alfāz Al-Qur'an* (Damaskus: Dār al-Qalam, 2009), 294; Muḥammad al-Fayrūz Ābādī, *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2013), 807.

³⁴(Arabī, nd, p. 313; Al-Fayyadl, 2009, p. 223)

³⁵Izzuddin bin Abdussalam, *Kitab Dan Terjemah Syajarat Al-Ma'arif Wa Al-Aḥwāl*

the creed as the revolutionary energy of Islam ³⁶. Because humans have such a nature, humans have a responsibility to realize and maximize it. This is where the meaning of the Khilafah as a responsibility finds a bright spot. However, the responsibility here is not limited to politics, but universal and comprehensive. Simply put, every human being definitely needs and struggles to become better.

That reality is what is called the Khilafah (human efforts to imitate God). It is said so, because the successor must imitate the one who is replaced. So it is not surprising that contemporary humans are called Homo Deus (demigods) by Harari, because they pursue immortality (eternity) through their scientific-technological projects.³⁷. Is that wrong? Of course not. Because, longing for immortality is a manifestation of the Khilafah (namely the divine nature and the desire to imitate God). What is wrong is when going against that nature, such as killing, oppressing, extorting and so on. Although the Khilafah has been interpreted as nature, it does not mean that the aspiration for the enforcement of Islamic law can end. The term Khilafah can be eliminated, but the aspiration for sharia, especially in Indonesia, will not be extinguished. The biggest issue regarding sharia is its relationship with democracy. How should the two be positioned? The following sub-discussion will explain it.

Reconstructing the Khilafah through Prophetic Social Science: Integrating Sharia Ethics and Democracy as Moral and Spiritual Responsibility

The findings of this study reveal that the reconciliation between *Khilafah* and democracy is conceptually possible when both are understood not as rigid systems of governance but as moral frameworks that orient human and institutional behavior toward justice (*al-'adl*), compassion (*al-rahmah*), and collective well-being (*maṣlahah 'āmmah*). Within this framework, *Khilafah* functions as a transcendental source of ethical legitimacy, while democracy provides the procedural mechanism for realizing these moral values in the social and political domains.

Wa Ṣāliḥ Al-Aqwāl Wa Al-A'māl: Tuntunan Qur'an Menghisahkan Pikiran, Perkataan Dan Perbuatan (Jakarta Selatan: Qaf Media Kreativa, 2020), 70–73.

³⁶(Hanafi, 1988)

³⁷Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: Masa Depan Umat Manusia* (Tangerang Selatan: Alvabet, 2018).

The study demonstrates that the concept of *Khilafah* as divine nature (*al-ṭabī‘ah al-ilāhiyyah*) inherent in human beings transforms its meaning from political centralization to moral decentralization. Leadership is no longer seen as the monopoly of a single authority but as the diffusion of ethical responsibility among all members of society. Every individual is perceived as a moral agent responsible for sustaining justice and social harmony. Consequently, political participation within a democratic system can be understood as an expression of the *Khilafah* mandate itself.

In this perspective, democracy represents the practical manifestation of *Khilafah* when its principles—participation, consultation (*shūrā*), equality before the law, and accountability—are internalized as acts of worship and moral duty. This reinterpretation enables Muslims to view democratic engagement not as a secular deviation but as the continuation of divine stewardship on earth. The Qur’anic ethos of consultation, as expressed in QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 159, supports deliberative processes that resonate with democratic practice. Thus, *Khilafah* and democracy need not be seen as oppositional paradigms but rather as complementary systems in a symbiotic relationship, where faith provides moral direction and reason ensures just governance.

Empirical observations from several Muslim-majority countries reinforce this argument. Indonesia’s Pancasila-based democracy embodies core Islamic virtues such as justice, tolerance, and social welfare without constituting a theocratic state. Malaysia’s *Islam Hadhari* model promotes moral governance and socioeconomic justice within a constitutional democratic framework. Tunisia’s post-2011 constitutional reforms demonstrate how Islamic identity and democratic pluralism can be harmonized through inclusive institutions and the protection of civil rights. These examples confirm that the synthesis between sharia ethics and democratic governance is not merely theoretical but also practically achievable.

Within this context, the framework of Prophetic Social Science (*Ilmu Sosial Profetik*) developed by Kuntowijoyo becomes essential in strengthening the conceptual foundation of this study. The prophetic paradigm emphasizes three core dimensions—humanization, liberation, and transcendence—which together reconstruct the understanding of *Khilafah* from a mere political system into a comprehensive moral and spiritual responsibility. Humanization affirms that the essence of *Khilafah*

lies in restoring human dignity, ensuring justice, and promoting universal welfare. Accordingly, *Khilafah* is no longer centered on institutional religious supremacy but on nurturing morally conscious individuals who place human values at the core of social and political life.

Liberation, in this framework, functions to free humanity from oppressive structures, whether derived from theocratic absolutism or secular capitalism. A democracy inspired by prophetic values can serve as an instrument of emancipation from unjust power and as a vehicle for achieving social justice. This view positions political participation not merely as a civic right but as an ethical manifestation of humankind's role as *khalīfah* on earth.

Transcendence, as the highest dimension of Prophetic Social Science, reorients politics toward spiritual awareness. Politics is no longer a contest for power but an act of devotion to God through service to humanity. In this sense, democracy guided by *Khilafah*-based ethics becomes an instrument for realizing justice and public welfare dynamically—without falling into the traps of rigid theocracy or value-neutral secularism.

Implementing these three prophetic dimensions requires both epistemic and institutional reform. The moral idealism of *Khilafah* must be balanced with the pragmatic realities of democratic pluralism. Ethical institutions are therefore needed to mediate between spiritual values and public policy, such as a Constitutional Ethics Council that ensures policymaking aligns with public good (*maṣlaḥah ‘ammah*), deliberative *shūrā* forums that facilitate cross-religious and social consultation, and moral oversight mechanisms that maintain public accountability based on principles of justice and welfare.

Thus, the dialogue between *Khilafah* and democracy should not aim for uniformity but for mutual enrichment. *Khilafah* offers spiritual depth and moral vision to democracy, while democracy provides the institutional framework for realizing prophetic values in inclusive governance. Viewed through the lens of Prophetic Social Science, *Khilafah* ceases to be a relic of political nostalgia and instead emerges as a living ethical paradigm—a moral compass guiding the evolution of Islamic political thought toward a more just, humane, and transcendent world order in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

The discussion above leads to two main conclusions. First, the concept of *khilafah* is not a task or responsibility related to formal political power but rather an expression of the divine nature inherent in humans. This divine nature is reflected in humanity's potential and desire to emulate God's attributes, such as creating goodness, upholding justice, and maintaining harmony in life. In this sense, *khilafah* is more about an individual's moral and spiritual responsibility than a political system.

Second, the reconciliation between democracy and *sharia*, which forms the core of the *khilafah* project, must be based on a scientific and academic approach rather than solely relying on normative or ideological arguments. This study employs the Prophetic Social Sciences (ISP) framework developed by Kuntowijoyo to reinterpret Islamic teachings in relation to democracy. The principles of *amr ma'ruf* (enjoining good) and *nahy munkar* (forbidding evil) are redefined through an approach that yields three core values: humanization, liberation, and transcendence.

Humanization refers to collective efforts to fulfill human needs comprehensively, from material needs to intellectual development, aiming to create a dignified life. Liberation involves a shared struggle to free humanity from various forms of oppression and wrongdoing, including injustice, exploitation, and destructive actions that harm individuals and society. Transcendence, as the culmination of these values, refers to a process of spiritualization, directing humans toward creating a life order that fosters maturity—morally and spiritually. This order aims to achieve collective welfare without exploiting others or harming the environment.

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, the analysis predominantly focuses on theoretical and normative approaches without deeply engaging empirical data. This may result in generalizations that do not fully represent social realities across different geographical and cultural contexts. Second, the application of the Prophetic Social Sciences framework is limited to a conceptual level, without exploring its practical implementation in everyday life, particularly in more concrete political systems. Third, this study has not sufficiently accommodated a broader range of perspectives from scholars and Muslim thinkers across diverse Islamic intellectual traditions.

Future research is encouraged to expand its scope by incorporating empirical data through field studies or interviews with contemporary Islamic thinkers and political practitioners. Further studies

could also explore comparative analyses of how *khilafah* values are implemented within democratic systems in various Muslim-majority countries. Additionally, future research could delve deeper into the application of the Prophetic Social Sciences framework in specific fields such as education, economics, and environmental issues, to examine how the values of humanization, liberation, and transcendence can be practically implemented.

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