



# Jurnal Keislaman

p-ISSN : [2089-7413](#) and e-ISSN : [2722-7804](#)

Published by Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Taruna Surabaya

Jl. Kalirungkut Mejoyo I No. 2, Kec. Rungkut, Kota Surabaya, Jawa Timur  
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## Islamic Values and Democratic Ideals: Navigating the Intersection of Islam and Democracy

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54298/jk.v6i2.3909>

### Abstract

The debate about democracy and Islam has consistently been juxtaposed as if it never reaches a final resolution, leading to disharmony between pro and con camps in relation to democracy, especially in the contemporary era. This study elucidates that there is no need for a dichotomy between democracy and the discourse of the Quran, as the Quranic vision is not contradictory to the spirit of democracy. This research is conducted based on direct observation, taking into account empirical evidence from literature and phenomena occurring within society. The study concludes that such debate is not of paramount importance; rather, what is more urgent is fostering public participation capable of implementing democracy that aligns with the vision of the Quran and Islam at large, to prevent all forms of injustice, authoritarianism, intolerance, and oppression.

*Keywords: Democracy, Islam, Contemporary, Quran*

### Abstrak

Perdebatan tentang demokrasi dan Islam selalu dipertentangkan seolah tidak pernah mencapai final, hal ini mengakibatkan terjadi disharmoni antara kubu yang pro dan kontra dengan demokrasi, terutama di era kontemporer. Studi ini menjelaskan bahwa tidak ada yang perlu dipertentangkan antara demokrasi dengan wacana Alquran karena visi Alquran tidak

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bertentangan dengan semangat demokrasi. Kajian ini dilakukan berdasarkan pengamatan langsung dengan memperhatikan bukti empiris dalam literatur dan fenomena yang terjadi di tengah masyarakat. Dalam penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa perdebatan tersebut tidak terlalu penting untuk diperdebatkan tetapi yang lebih urgen adalah membentuk partisipasi publik agar mampu melaksanakan demokrasi yang senafas dengan visi Alquran dan Islam secara umum untuk mencegah terjadinya segala bentuk ketidakadilan, otoritarianisme, intoleransi, dan penindasan.

*Kata kunci: Demokrasi, Islam, Kontemporer, Alquran*

### **Pendahuluan**

The historical journey of religions is akin to two contrasting sides of a coin. On one side, religions play a crucial role in promoting peace, compassion towards others, and other humanitarian aspects. However, on the other side, under the pretext of religion, radicalism and terrorism have emerged as terrifying phenomena. In the context of Islam, for instance, various acts of terror have occurred in different forms, resulting in significant loss of life. These acts often claim religious righteousness, and an exclusive attitude emerges in the form of apostasy or takfir towards opposing groups. This phenomenon is believed to stem from a teleocentric approach to religious beliefs, neglecting the humanistic vision of religion. This contradicts the assertion that religion exists for the betterment of humanity, as religion was intended to embody *rahmah li al-'ālamīn* (mercy to all worlds).

After World War II, democracy, both as an intellectual discourse and a practical political framework, was regarded as the most relevant and representative political system, including in Muslim-majority countries. Intellectuals like Francis Fukuyama, in "The End of History," stated that democracy, along with capitalism, would be the ultimate culmination of the experimentation with political and economic systems throughout human history.<sup>1</sup>

However, the outcomes of the process of political *ijtihad* have led to numerous controversies concerning this political system. Not all individuals accept democracy as the most ideal system to be implemented. This disagreement becomes evident in various countries with Muslim-majority populations. Within the context of the debate about democracy, Muslim intellectuals are divided into several groups. *Firstly*, some Muslim communities argue that there exists a rigid relationship between Islam and democracy, even asserting that Islam fundamentally contradicts democracy. From the perspective of this group, the connection between Islam and democracy forms a paradox. Islam has its own concept of governance known as "shura." This group emphasizes a distinct separation between Western perceptions of democracy and the concept of shura, despite both aiming to govern the political system. *Secondly*, other segments of the Muslim population accept the linkage

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3–18.

between Islam and democracy, but with a critical view. They neither fully accept nor outright reject this connection. In fact, some Muslim scholars attempt to reconcile the relationship between Islam and democracy. According to this viewpoint, the relationship between Islam and democracy depicts a reactive-critical or mutually critical association. For this group, Islam holds ethical values (also known as high culture) that are related to and supportive of democracy, such as the principles of "*al-'adālah*" (justice), "*al-musāwah*" (equality), and "*al-shūra*" (consultation). Although these principles share ethical values with Western democracy, there are differences in their application. *Thirdly*, the majority of the Muslim population do not separate Islam and democracy. In their view, the relationship between Islam and democracy represents a balanced symbiosis – a reciprocal relationship that mutually requires and complements each other. This implies that Islam's presence consistently offers the proper moral guidance for human actions. Islam is seen as a comprehensive entity that provides teachings to address all life's issues. This group intends to refer all aspects of their lives, including political matters and democracy, to the teachings of Islam.<sup>2</sup>

Many people still feel confused about the term "democracy" within certain segments of the Islamic community. While there are some factions that wholeheartedly embrace democracy, there are those who reject it to the extent of deeming it forbidden and considering it a "kafir" (unbeliever) system that has never been part of the intellectual and historical heritage of Islam. For certain Muslim intellectuals, Islam and its teachings are not in alignment with democracy. This is due to perceived shortcomings of democracy itself, as well as an apologetic stance that claims Islam already possesses a far more perfect political system than "democracy". According to John L. Esposito, the view that Islam is incompatible with democracy is largely influenced by the experiences of Muslim-majority countries, which often involve experiences with monarchs, military rulers, or former military leaders.<sup>3</sup>

Amidst the myriad discussions that have arisen concerning the intersection of Islam and democracy, it becomes increasingly crucial to embark on a more profound exploration of this subject matter. Such an exploration is vital in dispelling the notion that democracy must inherently stand in stark contradiction to Islamic principles. Conversely, it is plausible to perceive democracy as a framework that harbors values and aspirations that are intrinsically congruent with the essence of Islam.

## **Type Of Research**

The research methodology primarily employs a qualitative approach, drawing on a comprehensive review of relevant literature, classical and contemporary Islamic sources, as well as academic writings that scrutinize the intricate interplay between Islam, democracy, and pluralism. Through textual analysis, the research delves into Quranic verses, sunnah

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<sup>2</sup> Idris Thaha, *Demokrasi religius: pemikiran politik Nurcholish Madjid dan M. Amien Rais* (Teraju, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> John L. Esposito, "Political Islam and the West" (NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIV WASHINGTON DC CENTER FOR COUNTERPROLIFERATION RESEARCH, January 1, 2000), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA426734>.

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(Prophet Muhammad's sayings), and the interpretations of renowned scholars and contemporary thinkers. These sources are critically examined to discern the perspectives of various Islamic scholars, from classical to modern times, regarding key themes such as justice, consultation, coexistence, and the dynamics between Muslims and non-Muslims.

### **Considering Democracy**

Doctrinally, the vision of democracy is frequently found within Islamic teachings, but historically, Muslims have been more familiar with three political governance systems that are quite distant from the vision of democracy.<sup>4</sup> *Firstly*, the ancient system in which its population lacks civility, is anarchic, and tends towards tyranny. The laws within this system resemble laws of the jungle, where the strong consume or overpower the weak.<sup>5</sup> *Secondly*, the monarchy system, where the apex of leadership is a king or prince who plays a crucial role in governing the state. This system tends to favor the ruling class and marginalize the proletariat, hence its nature is quite tyrannical.<sup>6</sup> *Thirdly*, there is the caliphate system, where leaders base their rule on Sharia law. This concept is employed because it is perceived to originate from the "heavens"; therefore, ideologically, this system is viewed as superior to others.<sup>7</sup>

Specifically, regarding the third model, it demonstrates that the issue of political authority being held by God (hakimmiyāt Allah) emerged early in Islamic history through the Khawarij group's rebellion against the leadership of Ali ibn Abi Talib. This group opposed Ali's acceptance of arbitration as a means to resolve political issues with the Muawiyah faction. According to them, Ali had violated the Quran by making decisions based on compromise with humans. They argued that everyone involved in the arbitration event were grave sinners and infidels who must be fought against. Based on this belief, one of their followers, Ibn Muljam, eventually succeeded in assassinating Ali ibn Abi Talib on the 17th of Ramadan, 40 H (661 M)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Prof Dr Khalid Manzoor Butt and Naeema Siddiqui, "Compatibility between Islam and Democracy," *South Asian Studies* 33, no. 2 (May 10, 2020), <http://111.68.103.26/journals/index.php/IJSAS/article/view/3180>.

<sup>5</sup> Khairul Amri, "SOSIOHISTORIS MASYARAKAT ARAB PRA ISLAM," *JURNAL MUMTAZ* 2, no. 1 (January 7, 2022): 1-7.

<sup>6</sup> John Gerring et al., "Why Monarchy? The Rise and Demise of a Regime Type," *Comparative Political Studies* 54, no. 3-4 (March 1, 2021): 585-622, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020938090>; José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez and Gaetano Sabatini, "Monarchy as Conquest: Violence, Social Opportunity, and Political Stability in the Establishment of the Hispanic Monarchy," *The Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 3 (September 2009): 501-36, <https://doi.org/10.1086/599270>.

<sup>7</sup> Nur Razif and Mohd Syakir Mohd Rosdi, "Muslim Political Figure: A Study on the Political Practices of Khalifah Umar Abdul Aziz," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 8 (October 30, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v8-i10/4721>; Researcher Sarah Abdul Razzaq Zaji and Assist Prof Dr Tofeek Daway Al-Hajjaj, "Religious and Historical Text in the Books of Royal Literature during the First Abbasid's Era," *ADAB AL-BASRAH* 98, no. 1 (2021), <https://www.iasj.net/iasj/article/231097>.

<sup>8</sup> Miftahur Ridho, "Peristiwa Tahkim (Polemik Perselisihan Politik Dan Implikasinya)," *HUMANISTIKA : Jurnal Keislaman* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 57-71, <https://doi.org/10.36835/humanistika.v5i1.147>.

In one narration, it is said that after hearing the Khawarij's accusations, Ali called the people to gather around him and brought a copy of the Quran. He then touched the Quran and ordered it to speak and recite the laws of Allah. This incident left everyone dumbfounded by Ali's action. Later, Ali clarified his point, stating that the Quran is nothing more than ink and paper. Humans have limited understanding and cannot make the words in it audible. This story highlights Ali's profound wisdom and his attempt to illustrate that the Quran is a divine text, but its interpretation requires human insight and wisdom. It emphasizes that the Quran itself does not have the ability to voice its contents directly, and that understanding and conveying its message is a responsibility entrusted to human intelligence and interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

In the modern era, a similar ideology has emerged that rejects democracy with analogous arguments centered around divine sovereignty. This perspective has given rise to movements both within and outside the parliamentary realm. In Pakistan, a political party called Jamaat-e-Islami was established by Abd A'la al-Maududi (1903-1979). According to him, Islam and politics are inseparable, as Islam encompasses all aspects of life, governing the relationship between humans and God, as well as humans and fellow beings. In his view, the ideal state is a Theo-democracy or Divine Democracy, aiming to return to the Quran and Hadith (Prophet's traditions), drawing inspiration from the era of the Khulafa' al-Rasyidin (Rightly Guided Caliphs). Maududi's vision envisions a governance model that harmonizes Islamic principles with democratic ideals, while maintaining the divine underpinnings of the system. This approach seeks to combine political participation with a commitment to Islamic values and teachings, striving to establish a society that adheres to both religious guidance and democratic principles.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, Hasan al-Turabi tended to avoid using the term "democracy" in Arabic, as he believed that the term carries negative connotations or is associated with aspects that are considered immoral or inappropriate within Arab culture. He preferred to use the term "syura" or consultation to convey the ideas he wanted to express. In his perspective, the fundamental difference between democracy and syura lies in the concept of sovereignty. Democracy emphasizes the sovereignty of the people as its primary principle, whereas syura acknowledges the sovereignty of God. According to al-Turabi, God is the sole authority possessing absolute sovereignty, and syura is regarded as a consultative mechanism that takes into account the will of God in political decision-making. In his view, syura aligns with Islamic principles by recognizing divine authority and incorporating consultation as a means of harmonizing human decisions with the divine will. This conceptual framework reflects al-

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<sup>9</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, "Islam and the Challenge of Democratic Commitment," *Fordham International Law Journal* 27 (2004 2003): 4.

<sup>10</sup> Imam Ghazali Said, *Tiga ulama idola kaum Fundamentals* (Imtiyaz Surabaya, 2019), <http://repository.uinsby.ac.id/id/eprint/1111/>.

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Turabi's effort to bridge the gap between democratic concepts and Islamic values within the cultural context of the Arab world.<sup>11</sup>

The struggle to establish an Islamic state also took place in the political arena in Indonesia. Maridjan Kartosuwiryo (1949-1962) declared the establishment of the Indonesian Islamic State (NII) on August 7, 1949, which was met with direct military resistance from the existing Indonesian state, successfully suppressing the group. Mohammad Nastir (1908-1993) took a middle path by participating in the parliament, advocating for Islam as the basis of the state through the constituent assembly. Unlike the NII, which faced direct opposition, Nastir's approach was not deemed an act of defiance, as it was considered in accordance with the state's constitution, and the constituent assembly was the designated platform to determine the foundation of the state. Both figures aimed to establish an ideal Islamic state through different means, although ultimately both failed to realize their ideals. The NII was conquered, while Nastir had to abandon his aspirations due to the dissolution of the constituent assembly by Soekarno.<sup>12</sup> Islam as a symbol in Indonesia has faced opposition from Protestant and Catholic circles over the first seven principles in the Jakarta Charter, which originally included "The state is based on the belief in the One and Only God, with the obligation to implement Islamic sharia for its adherents." However, this statement was removed and replaced with "Belief in the One and Only God." Additionally, the requirement for the president to be a Muslim was also removed. Minority communities threatened to establish their own state if their aspirations were not accommodated by the country.

The argumentation concerning absolute divine governance is deemed dangerous according to Abou El Fadl, as it implies that certain individuals possess perfect access to the will of God and that humans can flawlessly execute the will of God without any subjectivity or bias in the decision-making process.<sup>13</sup> In other words, asserting the absolute authority of God on Earth within political power is equivalent to granting ultimate decision-making authority to a few individuals who claim to be agents of God.<sup>14</sup>

Indonesia, as one of the countries with the largest Muslim population in the world, is not immune to the influence of fundamentalist ideologies. The rapid advancement of technology and the rise of social media have led these groups to alter their recruitment tactics, using various forms of propaganda through social networks and blogs to recruit individuals in their efforts to establish an Islamic Caliphate (*Khilāfah Islāmiyyah*). They also aim to

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<sup>11</sup> Ahmad Nabilul Maram, *Nalar Ideologi Politik Hasan Al-Turabi Dalam Tafsir Al-Tawhidi* (CV. Pena Jaya Pers, 2023), 184.

<sup>12</sup> Alfahjri Sukri, "NEGARA DALAM PEMIKIRAN MOHAMMAD NATSIR," *JURNAL AL-AQIDAH* 11, no. 2 (December 1, 2019): 118-31, <https://doi.org/10.15548/ja.v11i2.1416>.

<sup>13</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, "Islam and the Theology of Power," *Middle East Report*, no. 221 (2001): 28-33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1559337>.

<sup>14</sup> Mahmuddin Mahmuddin, *Akar-Akar Dan Doktrin Ideologi Islamisme Di Dunia Islam* (Samata: Fakultas Ushuluddin dan Filsafat, 2019), <http://repositori.uin-alauddin.ac.id/14059/>.

transform the existing democracy into a national governing system, while vehemently rejecting any products, ideas, or concepts originating from the West. These groups engage in propagating their agenda by disseminating content in the form of videos and activities with captivating visualizations, compelling titles, regular and widespread tweets, and other online actions. Numerous online platforms intentionally adopt and generate provocative narratives, employing religious justifications to sow divisions within the nation.

In the discourse of the Quran, Allah commands all creations to honor humans. This is because humans have been endowed with the capacity to think rationally, which reflects the magnificence of God. This signifies that Allah values the human intellect and deems it adequate for use in sustaining life, including political decisions. When someone strives to approach divine justice through reason, they are not immediately seen as opposing God's sovereignty; on the contrary, they are showing respect for it. When one asserts that the Quranic text is the sole authoritative source, it does not imply that human reasoning and experience are disregarded. Instead, it recognizes that human intellect and experience may not be perfect in comprehending God's will. Consequently, the concept of divine sovereignty should not be turned into a tool of authoritarianism, which would ironically diminish the true essence of divine sovereignty.<sup>15</sup>

Yusuf al-Qaradawi argues that the essence of democracy is compatible with Islam, which can be observed from several perspectives. For instance, in democracy, the election process involves the participation of many individuals in selecting a candidate who is qualified to lead and govern their affairs. Of course, they are not permitted to choose something they dislike.<sup>16</sup>

Abou El Fadl states that the fundamental aspects of democracy have served as a primary reference for the Muslim community, as stipulated in the Quran. Moreover, this tradition was well-preserved during the early generations of Islam. He refers to the viewpoints of scholars who argue that the tradition of differing opinions had emerged as early as the time of the Prophet's companions.<sup>17</sup>

There is a famous statement among jurists (fuqahā') and nearly all school of thought imams have uttered this phrase.

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<sup>15</sup> Omar Farooq and Khondker Aktaruzzaman, "Religiosity and Perception About Compatibility of Democracy With Islam: Evidence From the Arab World," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 31, no. 2 (June 1, 2019): 266–82, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edy011>.

<sup>16</sup> Agung Wibawa, "SALAFIYYUDIN REFUTATION TOWARD YUSUF AL QARDHAWI CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY," *Metakom* 4, no. 2 (September 30, 2020): 47–60, <https://doi.org/10.23960/metakom.v4i2.102>.

<sup>17</sup> Fahrudin Faiz, "KOMPATIBILITAS DEMOKRASI DAN ISLAM DALAM PERSPEKTIF KHALED ABOU EL-FADL" 03, no. 02 (2013): 18.

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“My opinion may be correct, but it could also be wrong. And the opposing opinion might be wrong, but it could also be correct.”<sup>18</sup>

The positive evolution of perspectives on democracy is inherently tied to the paradigm of anti-authoritarianism.<sup>19</sup> Authoritarian thinking cannot accommodate the openness of democratic reasoning, which thrives on diversity. An authoritarian stance, rooted in a belief of possessing the ultimate truth, leads some scholars to criticize other religious ideologies and often results in authoritarianism, leading to human rights violations.<sup>20</sup> Religion indeed holds an absolute and ultimate truth, but interpretations of religion are not absolute and ultimate as the religion itself. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between religion and the evolving religious ideologies, which naturally lead to differences of opinion. In general, manifestations of authoritarianism often begin by claiming exclusive truth in understanding the foundational sources of Islam, namely the Quran and Sunnah.<sup>21</sup> Soroush suggests that wherever we engage in studying and understanding religion, it is not religion itself, but rather an observation and comprehension of religion. This concept spans across all fields of human knowledge. Soroush further explains:

“Their conception of the Prophet, too, is much the same: Someone who had been disqualified in an election took his grievance to one of the clerical members of the Guardian Council and said: ‘If you don’t uphold my right, after Judgment Day I’ll complain about you to the Seal of the Prophets.’ The cleric smiled and said: “Let me set you straight; the Seal of the Prophets believes in neither freedom nor elections” (Soroush, 2002).

In its culmination, authoritarian logic gives rise to a manifestation that appears as fanaticism, leading to the belief that interpretations of the Quran carry an authenticity equal to the original texts (the Quran and Sunnah). In this context, ideologies inclined towards authoritarianism imply that interpretations produced by specific individuals or groups could be deemed equivalent to the original meanings contained within the Quran and Sunnah themselves.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Muhammad Jawad Mughniyah, *Fiqh Lima Mazhab: Ja’fari, Hanafi, Maliki, Syafi’i, Hambali (Gold Edition)* (Shaf, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> M. Taufiq and Muhammad Ilham, “Pemikiran Hermeneutika Khaled M. Abou El Fadl: Dari Fikih Otoriter Ke Fikih Otoritatif” *TAQNIN: Jurnal Syariah dan Hukum* 3, no. 1 (July 7, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.30821/taqnin.v3i01.9514>.

<sup>20</sup> Greg Barton, Ihsan Yilmaz, and Nicholas Morison, “Authoritarianism, Democracy, Islamic Movements and Contestations of Islamic Religious Ideas in Indonesia,” *Religions* 12, no. 8 (August 2021): 641, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080641>.

<sup>21</sup> Sabri Ciftci, “Islam, Social Justice, and Democracy,” *Politics and Religion* 12, no. 4 (December 2019): 549–76, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048318000810>.

<sup>22</sup> Barton, Yilmaz, and Morison, “Authoritarianism, Democracy, Islamic Movements and Contestations of Islamic Religious Ideas in Indonesia.”



In essence, the activity of formulating meaning is a dialectical process and is always in a dynamic state, never reaching a definitive conclusion. However, within the scope of authoritarian interpretation, there is a belief in the proposition to attain absolute truth or a final synthesis that is mandated to be perceived as the ultimate form and is incapable of change. In other words, this authoritarian interpretive process adopts the belief that the understanding of the Word of God is to be comprehended clearly, directly, and free from doubt.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, in reality, the text encompasses a wide spectrum of extensive interpretative possibilities, as the ongoing tension between the text's content and its representation is inevitable.<sup>24</sup>

Amin Abdullah argues that in the context of Islamic legal discourse, a reader who claims to definitively understand the author's intent may actually displace the author's position and assert themselves or their institution as the source of truth and absolute authority. In such a scenario, a fusion of horizons has occurred, where the reader has become an unlimited "author" themselves, effectively becoming God-like in their interpretation and authority, thereby eclipsing the original author's role.<sup>25</sup> So, when someone claims to definitively know the intentions or will of God, they are essentially adopting an authoritarian stance, which contradicts the democratic values of Islam.

The text of the Quran provides a broad normative space for diverse understandings and interpretations, all aimed at revealing the will of God. As the authoritative medium where God's will is preserved, the interpreters might inadvertently fall into an authoritarian behavior. In such a situation, the text surrenders to the reader, effectively making the reader a substitute for the text. An interpreter who positions themselves as the speaker of the text and sees what is said as the voice of the text can create a form of authoritarianism.<sup>26</sup> The consequence is the closure of possibilities for other meanings, and readers become dogmatic and authoritarian by positioning themselves as representatives of God's will.

### **Democracy Elements in Islam**

Islamic teachings explicitly do not specify a particular Islamic governing system. The Quran merely outlines a set of fundamental values that should be present in governance. At least three values bear significance: the presence of justice, cooperation, and the principle of mutual assistance as expressed in Surah Al-Hujurat: 13 and Surah Hud: 119. Constructing a non-dictatorial governance system and institutionalizing compassion in social interactions, as

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<sup>23</sup> Anwar Mujahidin, "The Dialectic of Qur'an and Science: Epistemological Analysis of Thematic Qur'an Interpretation Literature in the Field of Social Sciences of Humanities," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 19, no. 2 (October 23, 2018): 209–27, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v19i2.1563>.

<sup>24</sup> El Fadl, "Islam and the Theology of Power."

<sup>25</sup> Jeff Clark, "Philosophy, Understanding and the Consultation: A Fusion of Horizons," *British Journal of General Practice* 58, no. 546 (January 1, 2008): 58–60, <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp08X263929>.

<sup>26</sup> Mun'im A. Sirry, "Early Muslim-Christian Dialogue: A Closer Look at Major Themes of the Theological Encounter," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 16, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 361–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410500252327>.

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seen in Surah Al-An'am: 12, Surah Al-Anbiya': 21, and Surah Al-Jathiya: 20, are of paramount importance.

When delving into the study of governance, the analysis cannot be divorced from the concepts of theocracy and democracy. Theocracy asserts that sovereignty rests in the hands of God. This understanding implies that God (embodied in religion or religious elites) has control over all realities, including the reality of nations. The governance of a state should be grounded in religious principles. The underlying belief in this context is theocentrism, where God is regarded as the center of all things. The divine authority in the realm of political practice is represented by rulers who act on behalf of God and their faith. On the contrary, democracy encapsulates the freedom of every citizen.<sup>27</sup> This freedom is harnessed for the purpose of sharing power. Democracy can also be interpreted as freedom, and its core principle is liberty. This is because it is solely through liberty that every citizen can engage in their country's governance.<sup>28</sup>

The issue that needs to be examined is the extent to which the implementation of democracy within Islam is feasible. Addressing this question doesn't necessarily require a comprehensive understanding of Western democracy, but rather an understanding of Islamic teachings in the context of the democratic vision. In general, the Islamic vision with democratic connotations can be found within the following variables of Islamic doctrine:

### 1. Justice

Justice is one of the expressions and goals of human rights. Therefore, discussing social justice means addressing rights impartially in the fulfillment of human rights. The discourse and implementation of human rights in Islamic societies face similar challenges as democracy. The democratic system presupposes the protection and enhancement of human rights. In the discourse of the Quran, justice is an obligatory attribute of Allah and a duty of humans in their interactions with one another. The diversity of human creation, encompassing gender, race, religion, and nationality, implies that humans require social cooperation to uphold and attain justice. Pluralism in creation does not imply domination and the claim of superiority over others.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Sahri Sahri, "Political Thought of Al-Ghazali on Imamah: Debate between Theocracy and Democracy," *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 3 (August 7, 2021), <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/hts/article/view/212137>.

<sup>28</sup> Nur Azizah and Khoirul Umami, "Signifikansi Ayat Tentang Konsep Demokrasi di Indonesia dalam Qs. Ali Imran Ayat 159 (Pendekatan Pembacaan Kontekstual Nashr Hamid Abu Zayd)," *Ibn Abbas: Jurnal Ilmu Alquran dan Tafsir* 5, no. 1 (August 11, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.30821/jia.v5i1.12557>; Nurrohman Syarif, "Islam Dan Masalah Kenegaraan: Menimbang Posisi Syariat Di Negara Demokrasi Indonesia," ed. Cik Hasan Bisri (Bandung: Pusat Penelitian dan Penerbitan ,LP2M ,UIN, Sunan Gunung Djati,Bandung, 2018), 1-31, <https://digilib.uinsgd.ac.id/18341/>.

<sup>29</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, "Qur'anic Ethics and Islamic Law," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 1, no. 1-2 (July 27, 2017): 7-28, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-12340002>.

The fundamental issue in the discourse of justice is whether law defines justice or conversely, whether justice defines law. In the first scenario, whatever is considered the law of God holds value and embodies the essence of truth and justice. In the second case, divine law is demanded by justice, and the majority of Muslim societies aspire to implement divine law.<sup>30</sup>

Although these rules are products of interpretations of divine texts, they are not sufficient to achieve original awareness of the “other”, compassion, or justice. The main principles of legal rules originate from the texts.<sup>31</sup> According to this paradigm, God is the source and center of authority, the possessor of sovereignty, but God delegates to humans in the context of humanity, seeking His ideals of justice applied to worldly realities.<sup>32</sup>

In the context of justice, it is also crucial to address the imbalance in relations between men and women, especially in cultures with puritanical values. Many fatwas concerning women's issues are criticized for degrading the dignity of women, yet they are claimed to be in line with the teachings of the Quran and Hadith<sup>33</sup>, highlighting the importance of hermeneutics in Islamic studies. Fiqh, in essence, is an effort to discover and determine the meaning of a text, while hermeneutics seeks to create a balanced composition between the author, the text, and the reader, considering and reinforcing morality.<sup>34</sup>

As a distinction between the eternal and ideal nature of Sharia and fiqh, which is an endeavor to achieve those aspirations, the relationship between men and women within this ideal Sharia is characterized by morality, specifically justice. Justice demands equality in value, dignity, and opportunities.

## 2. Syura (Consultation)

Syura is a crucial element within democracy. The Quran instructs the Prophet to engage in continuous consultation (musyawarah) on important matters. The Quran itself emphasizes that a society practicing consultation is praiseworthy. This right is articulated in Surah Ali Imran: 159 and Surah Ash-Shura: 38.

Considering the meaning of these two verses, it goes beyond merely discussing rulers seeking input from community leaders. It signifies the significance of resistance against all forms of oppression, tyranny, and authoritarian leadership.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ciftci, “Islam, Social Justice, and Democracy.”

<sup>31</sup> Ruiz Ibáñez and Sabatini, “Monarchy as Conquest.”

<sup>32</sup> Abdurrahman Raden Aji Haqqi, “RELIGIOSITY IN CRIMINAL LAW: ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE,” *Diponegoro Law Review* 4, no. 1 (April 30, 2019): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.14710/dilrev.4.1.2019.1-20>.

<sup>33</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, “Tensions in Tradition: Hadith, Gender, and Reasonable Interpretation,” *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law* 19 (2021): 1.

<sup>34</sup> Marion Katz, “Gender and Legal Fluidity,” *Locating the Shari‘a*, January 30, 2019, 46–62, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004391710\\_005](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004391710_005).

<sup>35</sup> Dima F. T. Abulatefa and Siti Fatimah Salleh, “THE DILALECTIC OF SHURA (CONSULTATION) AND DEMOCRACY IN THE CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC THOUGHT (جدلية الشورى والديمقراطية في الفكر الإسلامي المعاصر),” *Malaysian Journal Of Islamic Studies (MJIS)* 3, no. 2 (July 29, 2019): 121–32; Nurhasan Nurhasan and Siti Ngainnur Rohmah, “Analysis of the Comparative Western Democracy, Pancasila Democracy, and the Concept of Shura; Study of the Book Manuscript ‘Democracy in Islamic Perspective by Ahmad Sukardja and

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The concept of “syura” (consultation) in the Quran holds various meanings and interpretations. Therefore, the existence of consultation becomes crucial, as every mujtahid (Islamic jurist) has the potential to err. Thus, syura in the process of exploring the meanings and laws of Islam becomes imperative to undertake<sup>36</sup>.

According to Hizb al-Tahrir Indonesia, surah al-Syura: 38 does not address the concept of democracy, which asserts that the government is by the people and for the people. This perspective is opposed by this group. From the viewpoint of HTI, the Islamic principle is that sovereignty resides in the hands of the leader/caliph of the Islamic state, governed by an Islamic system that does not recognize the concept of majority rule. According to them, this clearly contradicts Islam as sovereignty lies in the hands of *Syara'* (Islamic law). Therefore, if this verse is understood as evidence of democracy, it would be a significant error, as democracy emerges from the notion of secularism.<sup>37</sup>

During the early days of Islam, a significant event unfolded in which Ali ibn Abi Talib, a central figure in Islamic history, voiced sharp criticism against Abu Bakr and Umar ibn al-Khattab. This criticism revolved around his perspective on the institution of “shura” or consultation, which held paramount importance in communal decision-making within the Islamic community. Ali felt that in the selection of Abu Bakr as the first caliph, the institution of shura wasn't fully honored, especially as the decision didn't include the involvement of the Prophet's family. For Ali, the Prophet's family held a special right and position in the leadership of the community.

Furthermore, Ali's critique extended to Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second caliph in Islamic history. Ali contended that in several crucial decisions taken by Umar, the essence of the shura institution was also overlooked. This critique primarily arose because Ali perceived a tendency to neglect collective opinions and participation in decision-making, which should have been guided by the shura mechanism.

However, Ali's criticism didn't solely target the first two caliphs. He also directed his viewpoint towards Usman ibn Affan, the third caliph, who was known for policies that were believed to carry shades of nepotism. Ali accused Usman of making decisions that favored his family and relatives more than adhering to the principles of shura that should have guided significant decisions. In this context, these events reflect the political and social complexity of the early Islamic period. Ali's criticisms regarding the shura institution and its disregard by various caliphs underscore how

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Ahmad Sudirman Abbas,” *JOURNAL of LEGAL RESEARCH* 3, no. 2 (May 6, 2021): 253–72, <https://doi.org/10.15408/jlr.v3i2.20620>.

<sup>36</sup> Mohamed El Khayat Mostafa Hassan, Salleh Siti Fatimah, and Abulatefa Dima F. T., “The Dialectic of Shura (Consultation) and Democracy in the Contemporary Islamic Thought,” *Malaysian Journal for Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (August 2019): 121–32.

<sup>37</sup> M. Taufiq Hidayat, Yusuf Rahman, and Kusmana Kusmana, “Al-Qur’an And Radical Ideology; A Critical Study of ‘Al-Wa’ie’ Tafsir by Rokhmat S. Labib” (ICIIS 2020, Jakarta, Indonesia, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.20-10-2020.2305172>.

interpretations of Islamic principles and their implementation in political practice can become sources of deep-seated conflict and debate. These events also provide insights into the dynamics of power, leadership, and diverse interpretations of Islamic teachings that continue to shape the history and identity of the Muslim community to this day.

### 3. Pluralism

Essentially, globalization has become a transformative factor in the world. It also influences ideologies, politics, economics, cultures, religions, ethnicities, and encompasses aspects of security and strategy. Therefore, it's undeniable that differences inevitably arise. And undoubtedly, this poses a real challenge for humanity in facing the diversity of values, cultures, and religions.

Pluralism itself is the willingness to uphold plurality,<sup>38</sup> it means the willingness to accept the fact that the culture, customs, and beliefs of each individual or group are different and being open to interact (coexistence) and collaborate (cooperation). Pluralism often remains primarily a conceptual idea and hasn't yet been significantly operationalized in practical terms. This results in a significant gap between the ideal and reality. In this context, the study of pluralism, when examined from a *fiqh* perspective, finds its relevance<sup>39</sup>.

Developing the value of pluralism requires a willingness to reinterpret the classical heritage formulated within diverse sociocultural contexts in light of contemporary circumstances. Challenges arise in the implementation, particularly concerning followers of other religions (non-Muslims). This is particularly relevant in relation to concepts like *jizyah* (tax for non-Muslims) and *jihad* (struggle or holy war).<sup>40</sup>

Islam is often depicted in global discourse as a puritanical perspective that tends to subordinate and be harsh towards other religious groups. According to Ebrahim Moussa, the classical understanding of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) regarding interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims has not been widely accommodated in positive law by many Muslim countries. The majority of modern Muslim countries hold the view that non-Muslim communities are treated as second-class citizens and subjected to unwritten regulations.<sup>41</sup> However, classical *fiqh* has become the mindset of traditional scholars and contemporary puritan groups.

In Surah Al-Imran: 85 can be used as an exclusive reference for a group, but when examined in the context of the preceding verses, it implicitly highlights the necessity of inclusivity in matters of faith and emphasizes the need to avoid getting

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<sup>38</sup> Robert J. Joustra and Jessica R. Joustra, "Are Calvinists for Pluralism?: The Politics and Practice of a Protestant Possibility," in *The Routledge Handbook of Religious Literacy, Pluralism, and Global Engagement* (Routledge, 2021).

<sup>39</sup> Ahmad Yousif, "Islam, Minorities and Religious Freedom: A Challenge to Modern Theory of Pluralism," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 20, no. 1 (April 1, 2000): 29–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602000050008889>.

<sup>40</sup> Jeremy Menchik and Thomas B. Pepinsky, "Islam, Identity, and the Organizational Roots of Political Tolerance," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY, August 15, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3232834>.

<sup>41</sup> Jeffrey T. Kenney and Ebrahim Moosa, *Islam in the Modern World* (Routledge, 2013).

trapped in truth claims.<sup>42</sup> The core teachings of the Quran that emphasize the importance of recognizing the well-being of others outside of one's own self or group often tend to be overshadowed and less popular compared to the insistence on adopting an exclusive stance and asserting truth claims. This phenomenon is evident across all religions, especially within the Muslim community. Acknowledging religious diversity, including recognizing the well-being of followers of other religions besides one's own, is rarely acknowledged. This trend extends not only to individuals but also to both international and national organizations.<sup>43</sup>

Most classical scholars divide a territory into two categories: the realm of Islam (*dār al-Islām*) and the realm of disbelief/war (*dār al-kufr/dār al-ḥarb*). This division refers to non-Muslim territories from a territorial or juridical standpoint. This dichotomous division leads to psychological consequences, fostering animosity towards other religious groups. The views of classical scholars on this matter are adopted by contemporary puritan groups, providing at least three options to non-Muslim inhabitants: converting to Islam, paying a tax (*jizyah*) as *ahl al-ḥimmah*, or engaging in warfare.<sup>44</sup>

The three aforementioned options stem from the sense of superiority within a particular group, which can result in the formation of intolerant and exclusive actions. According to Paul Heck, the concept of *jizyah* evolved in Muslim societies as tangible proof of the submission of non-Muslims to Muslims.<sup>45</sup> For them, the “straight path” (*ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*) towards God is clearly defined through the implementation of Sharia law (divine law), as interpreted by classical scholars. This adherence to Sharia is followed without considering its impact on “others,” including the application of *jizyah*.

The concept of *jizyah* is not limited to a specific application for non-Muslims; it also represents a fundamental insult to humanity and natural law. Demonstratively, it manifests as an expression of inferiority and humiliation of one group towards another. *Jizyah* can lead to the birth of arrogant and intolerant attitudes towards the inherent human potential within non-Muslims. This arrogance is further bolstered by the “ingredients” of normative messages from the Quran, resulting in radical and aggressive actions. According to Abou El Fadl, the conception of *ahl al-ḥimmah* obligated to pay taxes is ahistorical when applied to the contemporary era, where most regions follow nation-state systems. In contrast, during the medieval period, minorities in terms of ethnicity or religion paid *jizyah* as an administrative fee, a means

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<sup>42</sup> Prof Dr M. Amin Abdullah, *Dinamika Islam Kultural* (IRCISOD, 2020).

<sup>43</sup> Ilham B. Saenong, “Hermeneutika Al-Qur’an Untuk Pembebasan : Telaah Kritis Pemikiran Hassan Hanafi,” *Millah: Jurnal Studi Agama*, 2004, 255–75.

<sup>44</sup> Fadl, “Qur’anic Ethics and Islamic Law.”

<sup>45</sup> Paul L. Heck, *The Intolerance of Rationalism: The Case of al-Jāḥiẓ in Ninth-Century Baghdad* (Brill, 2019), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004411500\\_018](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004411500_018).

of upholding their customs and laws.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, during the medieval era, minorities of ethnicity or religion paid *jizyah* as a form of administrative fee, facilitating the practice of their customs, culture, and laws.<sup>47</sup> *Jizyah* is also seen as a concession granted by ethnic or religious minorities residing in Islamic territories to ensure their protection under the governance of the Islamic state.

The justification for collecting *jizyah* often draws upon the literal and contextual interpretation of the Quran, which instructs the engagement in warfare against non-Muslims until they pay the *jizyah* as a sign of submission, as stated in Surah At-Tawbah: 29.<sup>48</sup>

The concept of *jizyah* in the Quran should also be understood by considering the historical context of the text and its moral message. *Jizyah* in the Quran is not an institution played out in an absolute sense. The Quran emphasizes that *jizyah* was a response to minority groups among the Arab population who were hostile to the early Muslim community. Indeed, the Prophet did not impose *jizyah* on non-Muslims who acknowledged the presence and sovereignty of the Islamic community. The Prophet referred to them as "those whose hearts are inclined." Furthermore, there is a story about Umar making peace with Christian Arab tribes, where he allowed them to pay an annual tax (*zakat*) in place of *jizyah*. They chose not to embrace Islam but preferred to pay *zakat* because they felt that *jizyah* was demeaning. Umar accommodated their request by allowing them to pay *zakat* instead.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

In the context of the present time, debates about the terms and concepts of Islam and democracy may not be as relevant as they once were. What is more important is the support and participation of the community in understanding and implementing democracy. The explanation above illustrates that the values of democracy essentially share similarities with the teachings of Islam, as Islam itself explicitly incorporates key elements of democracy, such as justice, consultation, religious tolerance, and equality.

Fundamentally, Islam rejects all forms of authoritarianism and neglect towards marginalized groups, as these notions inherently contradict the values of democracy and the teachings of Islam. The Quranic texts, when interpreted in their context, vividly portray how Islam opposes all forms of injustice, oppression, and authoritarianism.

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<sup>46</sup> Fadl, "Qur'anic Ethics and Islamic Law."

<sup>47</sup> Abur Hamdi Usman, "Does Islam Practice Tolerance? Some Notes from Quranic Perspective," July 19, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints201807.0366.v1>.

<sup>48</sup> Misri Abdul Muchsin and Abdul Manan, "HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF TAX DURING THE EARLY ISLAMIC PERIOD: JIZYAH AND KHARAJ: A Historical Analysis," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 14, no. 2 (December 17, 2019): 1-7, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol14no2.1>.

<sup>49</sup> Muchsin and Manan.

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In addition to the issue of justice, the relationship between the democratic system and Islamic values is reflected in the concept of consultation (musyawarah or shura). Consultation is a principle in Islam that was frequently demonstrated by Prophet Muhammad in addressing public issues. This concept of consultation encompasses not only leaders' efforts to gather input from community figures but also includes resistance against arbitrary actions, authoritarian leadership, or forms of oppression.

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