

DEMOCRATIC CALIPHATE: A RECONCILIATION OF THE CALIPHATE AND DEMOCRACY THROUGH THE LENS OF PROPHETIC SOCIAL SCIENCE

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Article received January 23rd, 2025; Article revised May 23rd, 2025; Article approved June 10th, 2025

ABSTRACT

The encounter between Islam and the West has resulted in an ongoing dynamic of compromise and resistance that persists today. While there are areas of convergence between the two, their differences remain pronounced in certain fundamental aspects. One such area is their conceptualization of the state. The West advocates democracy as the prevailing global political model, whereas Islam introduces the caliphate, a political system that places divine sovereignty at its core. This dichotomy has been widely explored by scholars, intellectuals, and academics. However, few efforts have been made to reconcile these two systems through the framework of Prophetic Social Science, a paradigm of Islamic thought developed by Indonesian reformer Kuntowijoyo. This study seeks to fill that gap by employing Prophetic Social Science as an analytical tool to construct an academic and humane synthesis between the caliphate and democracy, without stripping Islam of its essential values and principles. The study addresses two central questions: What is the conceptual and thematic understanding of the caliphate in Islam? How can it be reconciled with democratic principles through the lens of Prophetic Social Science? From these questions, two hypotheses emerge: first, that the caliphate does not prescribe a fixed governmental structure, but rather embodies universal values such as justice, equality, welfare, education, and prosperity—values that are also recognized globally. Second, Prophetic Social Science, as a transformative Islamic paradigm in the contemporary era, offers a framework for articulating and implementing these values within democratic contexts.

Keywords: *Caliphate, Democracy, Prophetic Social Science, Thematic Interpretation*

INTRODUCTION

Mainstream discourse generally views the caliphate and democracy as two conflicting systems, although numerous efforts have been made to reconcile them on various levels (Ma'arif, A. S. I., & Wahid, 2009). These efforts, however, are often unbalanced, either leaning heavily toward

democratic principles or overemphasizing Islamic elements. In the Indonesian context, classical Islamic discourse continues to dominate, making it difficult to establish a clear and balanced paradigm to address the ongoing tension between religious belief and state governance. As a result, discussions on the relationship between religion and the state remain dynamic and relevant.

Anticipating the risk of religiously motivated violence arising from this unresolved tension within Indonesia's democratic framework, the Ministry of Religious Affairs launched religious moderation as a key national program. Despite the growing prominence of this initiative, a deeper reconciliatory paradigm between religion and the state is still urgently needed. This paradigm serves as a conceptual framework to help religious communities navigate conflicts between spiritual beliefs and national policy, or between moral values and political realities (Syuhudi, 2021).

Islamic political thought offers the caliphate as a model of governance, while democracy has become the prevailing system in global political discourse (Butt & Siddiqui, 2018). This contrast reveals a significant gap between the principles of divine sovereignty and human sovereignty. Addressing this gap requires a conceptual framework that enables both systems to engage with each other respectfully, through humanistic and scholarly dialogue. What Muslims require is not the unification of caliphate and democracy into a single political system, but rather a framework that allows them to function as equal partners in the pursuit of shared ideals such as justice, welfare, and national integrity.

Many scholars have contributed to discussions about reconciling the caliphate with democracy. However, the extent to which such reconciliation holds significance for Indonesia remains a critical question. Emphasizing this national context highlights the need for solutions that are practical and applicable, rather than merely normative or theoretical. Both the caliphate and democracy intersect in social matters that directly affect daily life, including justice, equality, education, public health, and well-being. Both systems aim to uphold these values and reject practices that threaten them.

Tensions between the two often emerge in moral areas, such as gender relations, social norms, and attitudes toward pleasure-seeking lifestyles. More fundamentally, both the caliphate and democracy carry distinct epistemological foundations. The caliphate, rooted in classical Islamic tradition, relies on divine revelation and is often interpreted through a literalist lens. In contrast, democracy arises from the contemporary human condition, drawing upon rational and empirical inquiry to formulate theory and guide political practice.

This multidimensional tension continues to sustain resistance between the two systems. The caliphate promotes submission to divine authority, while democracy positions authority within the people. Addressing this tension, the study adopts Prophetic Social Science as an analytical framework. This Islamic paradigm emphasizes transformative change grounded in human values. The inquiry begins by exploring the concept of the caliphate as represented through Qur'anic terminology and thematic content. Based on this exploration, two research questions are proposed. First, what is the Qur'anic conception and thematic structure of the caliphate? Second, how can the caliphate and democracy be reconciled through the lens of Prophetic Social Science?

Literature Review

Studies addressing democracy in relation to Islam generally fall into two categories; relevance and comparison. The first category emphasizes the compatibility of democracy with Islamic principles, often promoted by reformist and moderate groups. The second highlights the caliphate as a preferable alternative or, at the very least, as a system that can coexist without negating democracy. This perspective is typically upheld by fundamentalist and radical Muslim groups, each with its own framework. The third adopts a more neutral stance, aiming not to determine which system should be prioritized but to explore the similarities and, more importantly, the differences between the two.

This study reviews representative works from each of the three categories. The first category includes: *Islam and Democracy: A Review of the Concept of Syūrā in the Qur'an* by Muhammad Alif (2018); *Terrorism, Radicalism and the Caliphate in the Pancasila Democratic State* by Rani Dewi Kurniawati et al. (2024); and *Islam and the Challenges of Democratization in Indonesia* by Abdul Hadi WM (2020). The second category is represented by *The Relevance of the Caliphate System of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) to the Modern Islamic State System* by Muhammadin (2016) and *Towards a Prosperous Life: Efforts to Understand the Islamic Caliphate and Theocracy* by Hidayatussholihah and Mumtazah Kamilah (2017).

The third category includes *The System of Democracy and the Caliphate in Islamic Law* by Ogi Habibi (2019); *Comparison of the*

State Concept between the Caliphate System According to Hizbut Tahrir and the Pancasila Democracy System by Agung Salaksathama (2018); and *Democracy in Islamic Political Theory* by Zulhamdi (2019).

Each of these three categories presents specific limitations in terms of their transformative potential for real-life application. The relevance category remains fixated on legitimizing democracy through Islamic law but lacks forward-looking perspectives concerning the future development of Islam and democracy. The contradiction category tends to be regressive, as its emphasis on reviving the caliphate gradually steers public opinion toward past models of governance. The comparison category fails to offer prescriptive insight, as it primarily focuses on descriptive analysis without suggesting practical solutions.

Unlike these categories, the present study adopts a reconciliatory-transformative approach. While it shares common ground with the relevance category, it differs by emphasizing the transformative potential of the caliphate through a perennial-cosmopolitan perspective. This orientation seeks not only the advancement of the Muslim community but also the betterment of humanity as a whole. This transformative vision is embedded within the study's analytical framework, Prophetic Social Science.

Conceptual Framework

Prophetic Social Science is an Islamic paradigm rooted in the reinterpretation of *amr ma'rūf nahy munkar*, a core Islamic principle that plays a central role in the implementation of sharia. Departing from literal-regressive tendencies, Kuntowijoyo explored the transformative potential of QS. Āli 'Imrān [3] : 110 by initiating three discursive and practical dimensions of Prophetic Social Science: humanization, liberation, and transcendence. Humanization refers to the collective effort to fulfill human needs comprehensively, such as access to knowledge, critical thinking, and practical solutions. When translated into concrete terms, this includes optimizing the fulfillment of six essential needs: clothing, food, shelter, education, health, and transportation (Rahardjo, 2021).

Liberation involves resisting and eradicating common adversities faced by humanity, including ignorance, deviant ideologies, crime, poverty, and oppression.

Transcendence focuses on nurturing the human soul, ensuring that the pursuit of humanism does not devolve into hedonism (Fahmi, 2005). This concept embodies *ugahari*, which emphasizes peaceful living through simplicity and finding tranquility in modesty, while still remaining relevant in contemporary life. In summary, Prophetic Social Science is not merely a framework for explaining social reality. It also serves as a tool for transforming that reality. The three core elements, which are humanization, liberation, and transcendence, form the foundation for reconciling the tension between sharia and democracy.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies two main approaches in discussing the topic. The first approach is thematic exegesis, which is used to examine the concept of *khilafah* (caliphate) as articulated in the Qur'an and Hadith. This method involves the systematic collection of relevant verses, the analysis of their *asbābun nuzūl* (contexts of revelation), and interpretation through classical and contemporary exegetical works. The goal is to uncover the authentic meaning of caliphate without ideological or political bias.

The second approach employs the Prophetic Social Science framework developed by Kuntowijoyo. This approach integrates the values of humanization, liberation, and transcendence to bridge caliphate, as a moral and spiritual responsibility, with democracy, as a political system based on public participation. By applying this framework, the study aims to construct a synthesis between caliphate and democracy, two concepts often perceived as fundamentally opposed.

The data is analyzed using a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. Primary data includes verses from the Qur'an, Hadiths, and exegetical literature. Secondary data consists of academic articles, books, and studies related to democracy, caliphate, and Prophetic Social Science. The interpretation process is conducted comprehensively to produce conclusions that are both theoretically sound and practically relevant to contemporary social and political contexts.

DISCUSSION

Genealogy, Conception, and Thematization of the Caliphate in the Qur'an

Contemporary Muslim Typology as a Genealogy of Caliphate Discourse

The idea of a global caliphate originates from the historical encounter between Islam and Western modernity. Western colonization and their advancements across various sectors both undermined and captivated the Muslim intellectual landscape. This encounter led to the emergence of diverse and multidimensional Muslim responses toward the West. Abdullah Saeed categorizes these responses into eight distinct types (Saeed, 2007). The first category is traditionalist-legalists, comprising Muslims who seek to preserve Islamic legal traditions through established schools of jurisprudence. In Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is a key representative of this group. The second group, puritan-theological, emphasizes theological purity by rejecting both local and, to some extent, modern influences. Wahhabism serves as a primary example of this orientation.

A third group, militant extremists, is characterized by a radical political ideology that employs Islam as its ideological foundation. This group often resorts to extremist and violent methods, as exemplified by ISIS and al-Qaeda, with figures such as Osama bin Laden. These movements generally exhibit weak political cohesion and adopt rebellious stances. The fourth category, Islamist-political, differs from the militant extremists by engaging in formal political processes. These groups advocate for Islam as an alternative to prevailing world ideologies such as capitalism, socialism, secularism, and nationalism. They aim to implement an Islamic political order through reformist agendas. The Muslim Brotherhood, founded by Ḥasan al-Bannā in Egypt, and Jamaat-i Islami, established by Abū al-A'ḷā al-Mawdūdī in Pakistan, are representative of this group.

Liberal-secular Muslims constitute the fifth category. They advocate for a public order based on equality, regardless of race, ethnicity, language, or religion. In their view, Islam is a personal spiritual commitment, while public life must be governed by principles of religious freedom, state neutrality, gender equality, and universal human rights. In Indonesia, this orientation is often represented by liberal and feminist scholars and intellectuals. The sixth

group, cultural nominalists, includes individuals who identify as Muslims by birth but exhibit minimal engagement with Islamic beliefs or practices. They tend to follow cultural traditions without questioning the underlying doctrines. Clifford Geertz refers to this group in the Indonesian context as *abangan* (Geertz, 2014).

The seventh category, classical modernists, comprises early Muslim reformers who revitalized Islamic thought through *ijtihād*, which had long been considered closed. They argued that revelation is compatible with reason and human values, and that apparent contradictions necessitate reinterpretation. Figures such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad 'Abduh, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, and Shah Waliullah al-Dihlawi represent this group. The final group, progressive *ijtihād* thinkers, builds upon the legacy of classical modernists by developing contemporary methodologies for engaging with Islamic tradition. They seek to enhance Islam's discursive capacity to address current global challenges. According to Boullata, these reformist thinkers exemplify this last category.

These eight typologies offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the diverse ideological positions from which the discourse on the caliphate has evolved. Each typology reflects a distinctive orientation toward Islamic governance and the caliphate ideal. The next section applies thematic exegesis to Qur'anic verses concerning the caliphate, providing a textual foundation for further analysis.

Conception and Thematization of the Caliphate in the Qur'an

This section examines the concept of the caliphate as both a term and a thematic construct within the Qur'anic text. The term "caliphate" itself does not explicitly appear in the Qur'an. What is found instead are references to the actor associated with the caliphate, namely *khalīfah*, which occurs twice, along with its plural forms *khalā'if* and *khulafā'*, which appear five times (Al-Jumal, 2005). Other terms often considered synonymous include *imām*, mentioned seven times (Al-Dāmaghānī, 1983), *ulū al-amr*, found twice (Al-Bāqī, 1364), and *waliy*, which occurs numerous times in various forms, with some referring to leadership and others not (Al-Maqdisī, 1323). These four terms, which are *khalīfah*, *imām*, *waliy*, and *ulū al-amr*,

collectively represent ideas of leadership and governance (Masyhudi, n.d., p. 7). The Qur'an contains approximately twenty-seven verses that directly address the theme of leadership (Baiquni, 1996). Within this context, a caliph is characterized as a leader who demonstrates justice and avoids being driven by personal desire (Masduha, 2017).

Thematically, the concept of the caliphate is situated within a broader socio-political framework in the Qur'an. Although primarily a political term, the caliphate also intersects with social and economic dimensions of Islamic teachings. Fazlur Rahman offers a useful classification by identifying three core themes in the Qur'an that are particularly relevant: human beings in society, the emergence of the Muslim community, and the religious condition of Muslims in Mecca (Rahman, 2009).

These themes encompass socio-political concerns and, in some cases, economic implications. The first two themes, with their normative focus on community ideals and moral order, closely relate to the concept of the caliphate. In contrast, the third theme is largely descriptive, portraying the historical and religious circumstances of the early Muslim community in Mecca. A comprehensive understanding of the caliphate requires close examination of verses associated with these broader themes.

Despite numerous references in the Qur'an and Hadith, no definitive ruling establishes whether the caliphate is a divinely ordained political system or a set of universal ethical principles to guide societal governance. Historical developments during Islam's classical period reflect an adaptive and inclusive approach to political structures. Islam engaged constructively with five major civilizations: Arab, Persian, Greek, Roman, and Indian. From Arab culture, Islam retained tribal military traditions; from Persian thought, it integrated Sufi spirituality; from Greek philosophy, it adopted rational inquiry; from Roman civilization, it embraced systems of governance and administration; and from Indian scholarship, it absorbed developments in mathematics and science. This intercultural engagement illustrates the openness and cosmopolitan character of Islam, as highlighted by Abdurrahman Wahid (2007).

The model of the Medina polity established by the Prophet Muhammad further supports the view that Islamic political systems are not fixed. Khalil 'Abd al-Karīm argued that

Medina did not meet the fourteen criteria necessary to be classified as a religious state. However, this does not imply that Medina was a secular polity. Rather, it suggests that Islamic political thought is broad and flexible, allowing for institutional diversity as long as universal ethical values remain intact.

Democratic Caliphate: Transformative Reconciliation

Democracy originates from the Greek term *demokratia*, which generally denotes a form of government based on the principle of equality. This term entered the English language in the sixteenth century and was subsequently adopted as "democracy" (Williams, 1983). A widely accepted definition of democracy is the one articulated by Abraham Lincoln: government of the people, by the people, and for the people (Epstein, 2011). While this definition remains aspirational, it lacks a concrete operationalization. To address this gap, Przeworski offers a more pragmatic definition, describing democracy as a system in which government offices are filled through competitive elections (Cheibub, 2006).

Ideally, democracy entails a decision-making process in which all citizens participate through elections. This ideal suggests that democracy genuinely reflects the will of the people (Fromm, 2002). In practice, however, Schumpeter redefines democracy as a method for selecting leaders through competition for public support. In this view, democracy does not necessarily entail direct or comprehensive representation, but rather a mechanism for legitimizing political authority via electoral processes (Schumpeter, 1994).

Sharia, in its linguistic sense, refers to a source of water for drinking (Nashir, 2013). This connotation implies that sharia should be beneficial and revitalizing. In technical terms, sharia refers to the body of teachings found in the Qur'an and Hadith, encompassing rituals such as prayer, social ethics such as mutual respect, and eschatological beliefs concerning the afterlife. A critical question arises: has the contemporary interpretation of sharia succeeded in fulfilling its lexical meaning as something essential and life-giving? Predominantly, sharia is associated with obligation, which implies compulsion and pressure. Such associations appear incompatible with human nature, which seeks freedom. Moreover, in modern contexts, the orientation has shifted toward human-centered

approaches rather than divine mandates. Nonetheless, sharia remains a significant aspect of religious aspiration in Indonesia, where 88% of the population identifies as Muslim (Musa, 2014). Given the enduring relevance of sharia, the need arises to foster a constructive dialogue between sharia and democracy.

Scepticism among conservative Muslims regarding democracy is not absolute. From a social perspective, democracy and Islam share common values, including justice, equality, prosperity, and peace. Yet, tensions persist. Two main sources of discord can be identified. First, Islam regards the Qur'an as the ultimate source of guidance, whereas democracy relies on the constitution. This divergence has led to the perception that constitutional principles may not adequately reflect Qur'anic values. Second, democracy is closely linked to human rights. Within this framework, prohibitions typically apply only to actions that pose a clear threat to human welfare, such as murder, theft, and corruption.

In contrast, Islam also prohibits moral transgressions, such as premarital relations and other gender-related interactions, not because they are necessarily harmful, but because they are considered improper based on scriptural evidence. These moral concerns, often tolerated in democratic societies, are perceived by some as enabling immorality.

To address this dilemma, the author introduces the framework of Prophetic Social Science, a concept developed by Kuntowijoyo. This paradigm is rooted in a verse from the Qur'an:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ
وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ
لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِنْهُمْ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

"You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allāh. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient (QS. Ali 'Imran [3]: 110)."

Kuntowijoyo identifies three core elements from this verse: *amr ma'rūf* (enjoining good), *nahy munkar* (forbidding evil), and *īmān billāh* (faith in God) (Kuntowijoyo, 2001). Each of these is reinterpreted to provide a transformative basis for reconciling Islam and democracy.

The first, *amr ma'rūf*, is reconceptualized as humanization. Traditionally, this principle has been associated with indoctrination, defined as instilling a fixed ideology that interprets reality

through predetermined beliefs (Wijaya, 2019). The term "indoctrination" has acquired a negative connotation, particularly in Western contexts, where it often denotes manipulation (Arif, 2017).

On the contrary, humanization is not indoctrination but rather academicization, which entails raising awareness of reality based on open science rather than norms detached from empirical facts (Kuntowijoyo, 1991). In general, Kuntowijoyo introduced the paradigm of Islamic science as an effort to derive innovative inspiration for scientific development by understanding Islam through scientific integrity rather than sectarian fanaticism (Wijaya, 2020).

In clearer terms, in *amr ma'ruf*, goodness is practiced because it is commanded, while in humanization, goodness is performed because it is necessary. For example, in *amr ma'ruf*, prayer is conducted as an obligation from God. In contrast, within humanization, prayer is undertaken for its benefits, such as its contributions to mental health and social balance. This requires further investigation. The role of humanization is to liberate Muslims from normative-ideological frameworks and to shift toward academic research.

Second, *liberation*. *Nahy munkar* prohibits acts in the name of God, often without contextual explanation. Liberation, however, frames prohibition based on research findings. In simple terms, while *nahy munkar* forbids because something is deemed haram, liberation forbids because it is harmful. In the case of social crimes such as corruption, collusion, and nepotism, both sharia and democracy agree on their prohibition and recognize their dangers.

Challenges emerge when addressing moral issues. *Nahy munkar* prohibits prostitution because it is considered haram by religion. Liberation, on the other hand, views prostitution as a violation of womanhood (Syam, 2011), recognizing that women are objectified in such contexts. Liberation also intersects with feminist, Marxist, and postcolonial perspectives, acknowledging that approximately 80% of prostitution cases are driven by economic crises. To enable both humanization and liberation, religion must be examined within a human rights framework (Soroush, 2009), fostering healthy dialogue on religious practices.

Third, *transcendence* or *īmān billāh*. This concept is often interpreted as strict

adherence to Islamic law based on conservative understandings. However, transcendence should be viewed more broadly, which is as the human pursuit of meaning in life, rather than the exploitation of faith for power or personal interests. Transcendence cultivates maturity, discouraging exploitation of both human beings and nature. While conventional interpretations of *īmān billāh* may fit within this understanding, privileging rigid versions risks sacrificing the broader and more flexible meanings.

Based on this discussion, Muslims in the Indonesian context are not tasked with reinforcing normative Islam per se. Rather, they must be accountable for that normativity through academic research grounded in social reality. This approach aligns Islam more closely with human needs and earthly concerns, reflecting the belief that religion was revealed for human benefit, not divine necessity (A'la, 2015).

A democratic caliphate, therefore, does not subordinate the caliphate to democracy in a way that prioritizes majority rule to the extent that it nullifies essential Islamic doctrines. Instead, a democratic caliphate operates based on three main agendas. First, it prioritizes humanitarian values over certain doctrines that may be misinterpreted or misused to justify inhumane actions. Second, it evaluates aspects of Islam through scientific inquiry within a contemporary context to develop understandings aligned with common sense. This evaluation is not intended to desecrate religious teachings, but to release them from mystical and magical interpretations that lack rational and logical foundation. Third, it seeks inspiration from Islamic sources, particularly the Qur'an and hadith, to formulate innovative solutions for contemporary multi-sectoral challenges. Given its democratic orientation, this caliphate takes into account public aspirations, situational conditions, and recent scientific developments.

CLOSING

This article presents two key conclusions. First, consistent with the views of reformist and moderate scholars, Islam does not prescribe a fixed and rigid political system. The caliphate should be seen as a set of values and universal principles, such as justice, prosperity, education, welfare, and public health. Second, a democratic caliphate does not subordinate the caliphate to democracy in ways that risk replacing Islamic doctrines with

the will of the majority. In other words, a democratic caliphate does not strictly adhere to the *maxim vox populi vox dei* (the voice of the people is the voice of God). Rather, it remains cautious of *vox populi clairo dei* (the voice of the people is the cry of God). Thus, the democratic caliphate embodies three central agendas inspired by the framework of Prophetic Social Science: prioritizing humanitarian values, evaluating Islamic content through scientific approaches, and deriving innovative solutions from Islamic sources. All of these are pursued while remaining responsive to changing circumstances, public demands, and scientific advancements.

This study has several limitations. First, it relies heavily on theoretical and normative analysis without integrating empirical data. This could lead to generalizations that fail to capture the diversity of socio-cultural realities across regions. Second, the application of the Prophetic Social Science framework remains conceptual, without exploring practical implementation in everyday life, particularly in concrete political systems. Third, the study does not sufficiently incorporate a wide range of perspectives from scholars representing different Islamic intellectual traditions.

Future research should aim to integrate empirical data through fieldwork or interviews with contemporary Islamic thinkers and practitioners. Comparative studies across Muslim-majority countries could provide insights into how caliphal values are accommodated within democratic frameworks. Additionally, future investigations might apply the Prophetic Social Science framework in specific sectors such as education, economics, and environmental management to explore how the values of humanization, liberation, and transcendence can be operationalized.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researcher expresses sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions that contributed to this study. Special thanks are extended to the authors whose works were fundamental to the development of this research, as well as to academic supervisors who offered invaluable guidance and constructive feedback. Appreciation is also extended to colleagues who contributed through critical discussion and intellectual support. Deepest gratitude goes to the researcher's family for their unwavering

prayers, encouragement, and motivation. Finally, the researcher thanks the affiliated institution for providing access to literature, data, and research facilities. It is hoped that this study will make a meaningful contribution to academic discourse on Islam and democracy.

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