

# Political Interpretation of the Caliphate Verse in The Qur'an by Sunni and Shia

Muhamad Subhi Apriantoro, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta,  
[msa617@ums.ac.id](mailto:msa617@ums.ac.id)

## Abstract

*The research's objective is to compare the meanings of the caliphate in the Qur'an from the Hamka perspective in Al-Azhar and Tabataba'i in Al-Mizan. The method used is descriptive-analytical-comparative with an interpretive approach. The data presented in this research is sourced from literature, with the primary sources being the books of Al-Azhar and Al-Mizan. From the study results, it was concluded that according to Tabataba'i, the caliph should be held by ma'shum priests who were directly elected by revelation so that they could know the Muslims' spiritual problems. Hamka views that the caliph does not have to be held by a ma'shum imam, he is capable of being occupied by anyone deserving of the Muslims. As for the election, it was discussed by ablul halli wal 'aqdi not based on revelation.*

**Keywords:** Political Interpretation, Caliphate, Sunni, Shia

## A. Introduction

The number of words in the Qur'an related to the caliph is one indication that Islam encourages the role of humans to continue to improve and care for the earth (Rosadi, 2020).

In classical times, the Qur'an's interpretation of leadership was relatively uncontested, particularly during the Sahaba and Umayya periods. However, with the West's penetration of particular Islamic countries, polemics about Islamic leadership emerged, becoming a source of contention. This controversy has resulted in the formation of three schools of thought: the traditionalist school, which maintains that the Qur'an comprehensively regulates the basis and system of government; the secular school, which maintains that Islam is solely a spiritual religion with no connection to government, particularly politics; and the reformist school, which maintains that Islam only provides teachings on moral values in political practice and state (Rahim, 2012).



Islam does not provide Muslims with a unified system of leadership and state administration. This is not difficult to understand, as the system does not guarantee that it will achieve the benefit and welfare of the people, aside from being subject to change over time (WN & Afifa, 2020). Meanwhile, the establishment of the State is aimed at achieving prosperity. Thus, what can ensure the State's objectives, namely the realization of benefit and welfare or prosperity, is the application of universal principles taught by Islam, specifically the principle of justice in law enforcement, the principle of trust in the performance of duties, responsibilities, and professionalism. Tsaqifah's historical facts demonstrate that the conference or venue for political discourse was friendly, open, and democratic (Sahri, 2021).

The age of khulafa' al-Rasyidin or the era of the Companions can be described as a time of enormous power and disagreement among Muslims; due to the challenges of that era, Islamic politics grew more than ever before. This leadership crisis has fractured Islam into groups, the largest of which are the Sunni and Shia (Gholami et al., 2017). These two big groups have opposing conceptions and perceptions of leadership (Rohman, 2013). These two organizations use identical arguments and Islamic sources, especially the Qur'an and Sunnah, to support their positions (Razak, 2011).

Sunnis and Shi'i have significant differences regarding the appointment of Imams; the Shi'i are more severe and even demand a leader to come from the Ahlul Bait and Ismah circles (Hagler, 2020). Meanwhile, the appointment does not require that from among the Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a, as no human being is faultless except the Prophet Muhammad (Ebrahimi Varkiani, 2012).

Although, in the end, there was disagreement over how to appoint. The imam is expected to assume the prophetic role of protecting religion and ruling the world (Alwajeeh, 2021). Giving the position of caliph to a person who can carry out the above tasks to the people is obligatory based on consensus.

Hamka is a well-known Sunni preacher in Indonesia, actively writing even as the country undergoes numerous post-independence examinations. He was purposefully picked for this role because he lived and wrote during Indonesia's political turbulence. In Indonesian politics, his participation in chastising ma'ruf nahi munkar has helped him better understand his country's leading climate.



Meanwhile, Muhammad Husein Tabataba'i was a revolutionary Shi'i scholar due to his association with Murtadha Mutahhari during Iran's 1979 Shia political revolution led by Khomeini (Armstrong, 1993; Walt, 1996).

In 1981 AD, Hamka and Tabatabai died in the same year. As a result, they both experienced the same world political turmoil, and the context of this era will influence the style of their respective interpretations (Waharjani, 2019).

These two political theologians represent the two primary schools of political theology. Both ideas are supported by commentators who are considered reliable sources of information (Tamrin, 2019).

This research is expected to contribute to the study of leadership between these two schools and lessen horizontal tensions between Sunnis and Shi'i connected to the caliphate that arise from the interpretation of revealed texts.

## **B. Discussion**

### ***1. Hamka's Interpretation***

When the Prophet Muhammad died, his companions assumed control of society in his absence. There was thus a leadership vacuum until the friends agreed to name Abu Bakr Ash-Siddiq as a leader. His companions dubbed him the Prophet Muhammad's caliph. Although Abu Bakr succeeded a messenger of Allah, the caliph of the Prophet Muhammad can be viewed in terms of government.

Allah told Prophet Dawud, "*O Dawud, we have elevated you to the position of caliph on earth.*" This may imply serving as Allah's vicegerent, a substitute, or an instrument of God charged with carrying out His law in his governance. Additionally, it is possible to take this passage to mean that God chose David to succeed the previous king, leader, or Prophet of the children of Israel.

The term caliph can also refer to descendants or offspring who succeed their forefathers or mothers. This conforms to QS. Yunus verse 14 appears in several other surah. An-Naml highlighted that all persons on earth are caliphs.

In Al-Baqarah verse 30, Allah says: "*And (mention, O Muhammad), when your Lord stated to the angels, "Indeed, I will establish a successive government on the earth." "Will You seat someone on it who brings corruption and sheds blood while we glorify You with praise and reveal Your perfection?" they asked. "Indeed," he (Allah) stated, "I am aware of what you are unaware*



of.” This passage refers to Allah’s caliph. Among the numerous species, Allah picked humans, specifically Adam and his descendants, to be His caliph. Allah bestowed upon humans His laws and regulations to govern the earth and disclose hidden mysteries inside it via the use of a given mind. Indeed, Allah does not impart this vast knowledge all at once but rather through further in-depth examination and analysis.

Then, in An-Naml verse 62, Hamka connects it to Al-Baqarah verse 30 and Shad verse 26, which read: “(We said), “O David, indeed We have made you a successor on the earth; therefore, judge between the people in truth and do not follow (your own) desire, for it will lead you astray from the path of Allah.” Indeed, those who deviate from Allah’s path will face terrible retribution for forgetting the Day of Judgment.” The distinction in this verse is that the word “khalaiḥ” is used instead of “khulafa’”, which refers to caliphs. This term is also found in verses 69 and 74 of QS. Al-A’raf. The term khulafa’ in this context refers to generation after generation.

The caliph is the guy who exists today as the successor to the preceding generation’s caliph. Each will arrive in turn, but humanity’s fairy will not perish until the Day of Judgment. It is transmitted from one generation to the next (Hamka, 2015).

Allah states in An-Nisaa verse 59, “O you who believe, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in power among you.” If you disagree about something, bring it to Allah and the Messenger to determine whether you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best method and the best result.” According to Hamka, this verse highlights the importance of all individuals, particularly believers, adhering to the laws. The supreme order is Allah’s rule. This is the first commandment to be obeyed; this is where humanity’s safety and pleasure originate. Then, in this verse, believers are also obligated to obey the Apostle, as the Apostle is Allah’s Messenger, charged with conveying His message. You are then followed by “ulil amriminkum,” which refers to leaders or rulers who exercise authority over human labor. In this verse, the term “minkum” has two interpretations: “among you” and “than you.” the word “minkum” has two possible meanings in this verse: “among you” and “than you.” Either you climb or are elected to his position, or you accept his power as a given (Rahmat & Fahrudin, 2018).



Several areas of power development in Islam are mentioned here, including allegiance to Allah, obedience to the Apostle, and Ulil Amri. It should be explored in order to account for obedience to Ulil amri on a worldly scale.

For a while, the country in which Muslims lived had to defend itself against hostile attacks. Ulil amri is responsible for devising tactics to defend the country. If Ulil amri then issues an order to take arms in defense of the country, obeying that order is equivalent to obeying religion (as long as it falls within the scope of the correct Shari'a). Even if a Muslim country is attacked, it becomes fardhu ain to fight for everyone, men and women alike (Kholid et al., 2021).

The supreme ruler, the caliph or amir al-mu'minin, did not appear during the prophet's lifetime, but only in the khulafaur rasyidin. The leaders who take part in their deliberations are referred to as "Ahlul halli wal' aqdi," which translates as "experts in binding" and "unraveling the knot," according to Hamka. This demonstrates that there was no people representative at the time. Rather than that, a committee of notable individuals was constituted to hold deliberations. Until the time of Muawiyah, this notion vanished and was replaced by the concept of ashabiyah, which compelled the will to choose a leader to take precedence over the people's will, with deliberation taking place only in secret among them. When the Umayyads' influence waned, the Abbasids stepped forward to seize control. Thus, the longer the concept of ahlul halli wal' aqdi exists, the further it drifts from the head of state, referred to as the amirul believer or the caliph (Hamka, 2015).

Islam provides an in-depth study of the significance of ulil amri and who should be included in the decision. Additionally, the head of government can designate someone deserving, who is then acknowledged and obeyed by many people. Thus, it is determined that observing Ulil amri is a universal responsibility as long as it is not in disobedience to Allah (Kosim, 2019). Compiling Ulil amri (*ahlu halli wal' aqdi*) returns it to the domain of the finest ijihad. Hamka concurs with Ibn Khaldun that each country is free to choose its kind of governance (Ibn, 1992).

*In connection with the following verse "... And if you disagree on anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger..."*, there are times when resolving a problem in deliberation results in a dispute; if the dispute becomes more difficult to resolve, it should be returned to Allah and the Messenger, with the text of the Qur'an Hadith or by examining the

opinions of previous scholars through the use of qiyas. Furthermore, assume there is still a distinction only due to lust. In that circumstance, the supreme authority, or Imam A'dzam, can assume the role of making choices based on his ijihad, which is thought to be closer to Allah's and the Messenger's intention (Glaser, 1998).

## **2. Tabataba'i's Interpretation**

The caliph mentioned in this passage is the prophet, Adam, as *khalifatullah*, not the caliph in general who has previously replaced other existences on earth or other humans to prosper the planet. Then Allah did not refute the angel's assessment that the creation of humans as caliphs on earth may result in violence and ruin in response to the angels' questioning "... *Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we exalt You with praise and declare Your perfection? ...*" Allah does not refute the angels' remark; instead, Allah wishes to underline that there is a severe responsibility that even the angels are incapable of carrying as a caliph. Allah declares, "*Indeed, I know that which you do not know.*"

Another aspect of the caliphate's function is stated in Shaad verse 26: "*We instruct him: "O David! We have undoubtedly elevated you to authority in the land; therefore, judge people fairly..."*" This passage reveals that Allah empowered the caliph to maintain the truth by endowing him with a particular character and the ability to resolve disputes between humanity appropriately (Tabataba'i, 1958).

Tabataba'i added an argument on avoiding sin, or ma'sum, on the prophet. According to him, the prophet Dawud was a person who could face punishment for disobeying Allah due to his status as a mukallaf. However, as a ma'sum, the prophet Dawud did not commit immorality.

In the passage of Al-Baqarah verse 128: "*I will certainly make you into a role model for the people..."*" An Imam is a person whom humans obey. Because some commentators say that what is meant by Imamah here is prophecy because the prophet is a person whom his people in their religion imitate.

However, this kind of interpretation is weak and incorrect because: First, the word "*imam*" is the second *maf'ul* of the '*amil*, namely "*jaailuka*" in the form of *isim fa'il* not doing charity if it is in the meaning of *madhi* and nothing else he has done if it is with the present meaning. or the future. So the meaning of the above verse is that



Allah will make Imamah station for Prophet Ibrahim in the future. Know that there is no revelation except with prophecy, while the prophet Abraham was a prophet before he was given the station of Imamah. So the meaning of Imamah in this verse is not prophecy as described by some commentators (Tabataba'i, 1958).

Some people interpret the word Imamah as prophethood, progress, and authority. Others interpret the meaning of Khalifah, wishayah, or ri'asah in religious and world affairs. However, all of this is not true. The meaning of prophecy is to receive news from Allah SWT, while the meaning of risalah is to receive news from Allah that must be conveyed to humans. Authority is human acceptance of others, which is a must in prophecies and treatises. As for ri'asah, it is like authority, namely as a source of law in an agreement. All this differs from the true meaning of Imamah. Imamah is the existence of a human being who is imitated by others in his words, attitudes, and actions because he has an intrinsic quality of self.

Important content in the above verse: First, the prophet is the station determined by revelation. Second, the prophet must be consummated with divine *ishmah*. Third, the earth will not be in order without a truth-bearing prophet as long as there are humans. Fourth, the prophet is God's choice. Fifth, human actions are not veiled by the knowledge of the prophet. Sixth, the prophet must know all what is needed by humans in life and spiritually. Seventh, no one can match the primacy of the prophet (Alwajeeh, 2021).

Thus, morality must be held by *Ulil amri* in addition to the Prophet Muhammad's *ishmah* power. When making the *'aqli* and *naqli* arguments, Tabataba'i offers two perspectives on the various interpretations of *Ulil Amri's* absolute obedience or submission.

Tabataba'i claims in An-Nisaa verse 59 that the verse unites the Messenger of Allah. Additionally, *Ulil Amri*, in addition to addressing the second in a single order for obedience. Even though the Apostle is not permitted to order disobedience or to commit an error in establishing the rule, if this is permitted on *Ulil Amri*, there is nothing left but to mention the restrictions. While no single reason can be used to limit the entire verse, the necessity of *ishmah* for *Ulil amri* is identical to that of the Messenger of Allah. Without distinction.





The meaning of the word “*amr*” in “*ulil amr*” is a matter that refers to the religion of the believers who are the object of this command or their world as confirmed by Allah in another verse “*wasaya wirhum fil amri*” and the word of Allah when praising people. Fearing “*wa amrubum shura bainabum*” although it is permissible to give the meaning of “*amr*” as a command, this meaning is far from what is intended.

In verse above, the term “*ulil amri*” is qualified by the term “*minkum*,” and there is a *dzaraf* that translates as “*Ulil amri who is in your midst*.” Tabataba’i also attacks Ar-Razi and Rashid Rida’s opinions on *Ulil Amri*’s interpretation of “*minkum*” as a barrier, especially regular people in their midst, such as ourselves. Simultaneously, we are believers who lack *‘ishmah* (Nasiri et al., 2018).

Warlords, ulama’, state leaders, and national personalities are all considered *Ulil amri* by some schools of thought.

Tabataba’i said, if the institution’s leaders possess the *‘ishmah* character, then each of them is *ma’sum*, making them all *ma’sum*? There was never a gathering of *ahlul halli wal ‘aqdi*, and they were *ma’sum*.

As previously stated, *Ulil amri* refers to the *ummah*’s priests, the nature of *‘ishmah* for one of them, and the responsibility to observe it as the law applicable to the Prophet Muhammad. This does not negate the generic and linguistic meaning of the term “*ulil amri*.”

### ***3. Analysis***

From their interpretation, it is known that the caliphate can also be associated with political leadership. According to Hamka, the caliphate politically can be used to maintain Islamic law and uphold justice as long as it does not follow lust, as happened to the *Khulafaur Rasyidin* after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. However, Tabataba’i considers it not the Caliph.

As with the preceding view, Tabataba’i believes that the priest is not appointed but determined by revelation. The Shi’a belief, in general, promotes ‘Ali bin Abi Talib as a substitute for the Prophet who has the most right because he has been appointed directly by the Prophet himself.





At the moment, the Imamah revealed through texts or revelations is concealed. There can be no government if there is an imam vacancy. As a result, Shia scholars devised a way to keep the government running by substituting a faqih for the imam; this is referred to as wilayatul faqih. The concept of wilayatul faqih is clearly defined in Ayatullah al-book Khumainy's al-Hukumah al-Islamiyyah (Gholami et al., 2017).

As a result, Tabataba'i stated that obeying Ulil amri is an absolute obligation, as he regards Ulil amri as a ma'sum Imam. In contrast to Hamka's view, which states that Ulil amri is ahlul halli wal 'aqdi, obedience to Ulil amri is mandatory if it contradicts Allah and His Messenger.

Meanwhile, Hamka appears to emphasize the importance of the community having a truthful leader, in addition to enforcing God's laws and promoting justice and peace in society. He disagreed that religion was distinct from the state and that religion could not function in the absence of the state.

Although Hamka does not discuss the term imamatul a'dzam in his commentary, it demonstrates Hamka's concern for establishing the caliph 'udzma. This is also supported by Hamka's assessment of 'Ali Abdurraziq, whom Hamka views as a radical for refusing to re-establish the previously established caliphate system. He is also a stalwart defender of Indonesia's establishment of Islamic law.

While Hamka does not necessitate the annihilation of current reality, the Islamic world has developed into a society of nations and nations. Hamka also did not entirely reject the concept of the Indonesian state as a possible alternative to Imamatul 'udzma's leadership.

Upholding Imamah for all Muslims is fard kifayah; if the ummah has established it by being led by one caliph or imam, then countries and nations throughout the world have given their loyalty to that leader. The fardhu kifayah Imamah has been perfectly established.

The role of the caliph is to maintain the order of the purity of Islamic teachings so that they continue to run. Every individual is expected to have the awareness that humans are made to be caliphs on this earth. They felt uncomfortable if his actions were not by what He had ordered and a social life that must continue to



be harmonized with God's will. All of this is a manifestation of the concept of the caliphate in Islam.

### C. Concluding Remarks

The meaning of the caliphate of the two commentators found many striking differences in several aspects, although there are some similarities. This is natural and logical because both have different schools of thought. Hamka assessed that there were similarities between the imam, the caliph, and the Amir, and also considered what Ulil amrimeant in the QS. An Nisa' verse 59 is ahlul halli wal 'aqdi, even though Tabataba'i criticized this meaning.

In this study, we attempted to examine the Qur'an's interpretation of the caliph from the perspective of two widely divergent scholars. Additional research from other studies is required to delve deeper into the essence. It can be done in the context of historical studies, Islamic dates, shari'ah, literature, and aqidah.

Other developments come from a different space. Further research can focus on appointing a caliph in Islam from the Hamka and Tabataba'i perspectives or on a critical examination of the current Shia Imamah concept.

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