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Political Power and the Transformation of the Qur'anic Exegetical Tradition in Islamic History

Kekuasaan Politik dan Transformasi Tradisi Tafsir Al-Qur'an dalam Sejarah Islam

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Abstract

The tradition of Qur'anic exegesis has evolved through a dynamic interaction between religious authority and political power throughout Islamic history. Previous studies have generally examined this relationship from limited historical periods or individual scholars, leaving the broader pattern of its transformation insufficiently explored. This study analyzes the relationship between political power and the transformation of Qur'anic exegesis using a historical-hermeneutical approach based on library research. Data were analyzed thematically by tracing the development of Qur'anic interpretation from the Prophet Muhammad's era to the contemporary period. The findings reveal three major functions of political power: formative authority (*formation*), institutional patronage (*institutionalization*), and ideological instrument (*ideologization*). These findings propose a conceptual model demonstrating that the transformation of Qur'anic exegesis has been shaped by changing configurations of political authority alongside methodological developments in interpretation. This study contributes to Qur'anic studies by providing a historical-hermeneutical synthesis that offers a critical framework for understanding the relationship between political power and Qur'anic interpretation.

Keywords: Political Power; Qur'anic Exegesis; Islamic History; Hermeneutics; Exegetical Transformation

Abstrak

Tradisi tafsir Al-Qur'an berkembang melalui interaksi yang dinamis antara otoritas keagamaan dan kekuasaan politik dalam sejarah Islam. Namun, penelitian sebelumnya umumnya membahas hubungan tersebut secara parsial berdasarkan periode atau tokoh tertentu, sehingga belum menjelaskan pola transformasinya secara komprehensif. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis relasi antara kekuasaan politik dan transformasi tradisi tafsir Al-Qur'an menggunakan pendekatan historis-hermeneutis melalui penelitian kepustakaan. Data dianalisis secara tematik dengan menelusuri perkembangan tafsir sejak era Nabi Muhammad SAW hingga periode kontemporer. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kekuasaan politik mengalami tiga fungsi utama, yaitu sebagai otoritas pembentuk (*formation*), patron institusional (*institutionalization*), dan instrumen ideologisasi (*ideologization*). Temuan ini menghasilkan model konseptual yang menjelaskan bahwa transformasi tradisi tafsir dipengaruhi oleh perubahan konfigurasi kekuasaan sekaligus perkembangan metodologi penafsiran. Penelitian ini berkontribusi memperluas kajian sejarah tafsir melalui sintesis historis-hermeneutis yang menawarkan perspektif kritis dalam memahami hubungan antara politik dan penafsiran Al-Qur'an.

Kata Kunci: Kekuasaan Politik; Tafsir Al-Qur'an; Sejarah Islam; Hermeneutika; Transformasi Tafsir



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INTRODUCTION

Political power and the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis have a complex relationship throughout Islamic history. Qur'anic exegesis emerged not only from the need to explain the sacred text but also developed within an ever-changing socio-political environment. Throughout many historical periods, political authority functioned as an institutional protector that enabled the production of scholarly knowledge, while at the same time serving as a force capable of directing, restricting, and even instrumentalizing interpretation for particular purposes of political legitimacy. Therefore, reading the history of Qur'anic exegesis without considering its political context risks reducing the dynamics of meaning production, which are in fact profoundly shaped by structures of power. This understanding is consistent with the studies of Demichelis (2022) and Ichwan & Salisu (2024), which emphasize that Qur'anic exegesis is always situated within broader networks of history, authority, and social context.¹

A number of studies have demonstrated that the relationship between Qur'anic exegesis and political power has existed since the earliest period of Islam. The standardization of the *muṣḥaf* during the caliphate of Caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān illustrates that political action could function to preserve the integrity of the text while simultaneously shaping the horizon of subsequent interpretation, as discussed in studies on post-Uthmanic re-canonization.² On the other hand, the history of *al-Mihnah* during the Abbasid period reveals another face of political power, namely when the state imposed a particular theological doctrine as official orthodoxy, thereby placing Qur'anic exegesis under strong ideological pressure. This event has been interpreted as a form of intellectual violence that demonstrates the fragility of academic freedom when the state enters the domain of religious interpretation.³ These two examples illustrate that political power has never been neutral toward Qur'anic exegesis.

Nevertheless, existing studies still leave an important gap. Some studies tend to examine the relationship between politics and Qur'anic exegesis separately by focusing on particular historical periods or only highlighting a single specific case, such as the politics of Qur'anic exegesis in modern Indonesia or the hermeneutical reading of the Qur'anic text.⁴ Other studies place greater emphasis on the methodological aspects of hermeneutics but have not sufficiently connected them to the long historical transformation of the exegetical tradition across the trajectory of Islamic political power.⁵ Consequently, there remains no adequate synthesis explaining how political power has shaped, institutionalized, and at times distorted the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis from the classical to the contemporary period through a historical-hermeneutical perspective. This constitutes the literature gap that this article seeks to address.

- 1 Marco Demichelis, "Introduction: The Qur'an in History, the History of the Qur'an," *Religions* 13, no. 11 (November 17, 2022): 1117, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13111117>; Moh. Nor Ichwan and Auwal Salisu, "Reevaluating Qur'anic Hermeneutics: A Comparative Analysis Between Classical Tafsir and Modern Hermeneutical Approaches," *KALAM* 18, no. 2 (December 17, 2024): 107–26, <https://doi.org/10.24042/kalam.v18i2.24213>.
- 2 Muchammad Fariz Maulana Akbar, Dody S. Truna, and Rifki Rosyad, "Post-Uthmanic Qur'anic Re-Canonization: A Historical Reconstruction of the Second Maṣāḥif Project during the Abbasid–Mamluk Era," *FOCUS* 6, no. 2 (October 31, 2025): 165–90, <https://doi.org/10.26593/99bsmj89>.
- 3 Fahrudin Faiz, "Kekerasan Intelektual Dalam Islam (Telaah Terhadap Peristiwa Mihnah Mu'tazilah)," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 13, no. 1 (January 22, 2012): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v13i1.719>.
- 4 Syamsul Wathani, "Tafsir Alquran Dan Kekuasaan Politik Di Indonesia (Perspektif Analisis Wacana Dan Dialektika)," *Nun* 2, no. 1 (2016): 266120; Yuviandze Bafri Zulliandi, Intan Wulansari, and Nurul Aulia, "The Transformation of Qur'an Interpretation and Textual Authority in Indonesia A Critical Analysis," *MIYAH: Jurnal Studi Islam* 21, no. 01 (January 8, 2025): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.33754/miyah.v21i01.1270>.
- 5 Warsito Hadi, "Menimbang Paradigma Hermeneutika Dalam Menafsirkan Al-Qur'an," *El-Banat* 6, no. 1 (2016): 27–39, <https://doi.org/10.54180/elbanat.2016.6.1.27-39>.

Another gap is evident in the tendency of existing studies to regard politics merely as an external background rather than as an epistemic factor that also shapes the nature of exegetical knowledge. In the tradition of contextual hermeneutics, however, the meaning of a text is always understood through the relationship between the text, the reader, and its historical horizon.⁶ Demichelis (2022) argues that the Qur'an must be understood within history,⁷ while Ichwan (2024) demonstrates that the differences between classical Qur'anic exegesis and modern hermeneutical approaches are not merely methodological but are also related to authority and the operation of knowledge.⁸ These studies provide an important foundation but have not specifically positioned political power as the central variable in the transformation of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition across historical periods.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the relationship between political power and the transformation of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition throughout Islamic history using a historical-hermeneutical approach. More specifically, this article seeks to identify the patterns of relationship between political authority and the production of Qur'anic exegesis during key periods of Islamic history, explain how political power functions both as a patron and as an instrument of control, and formulate its epistemological implications for a critical and contextual reading of Qur'anic exegesis in the contemporary era. Accordingly, this study does not stop at providing a historical description but moves toward a conceptual mapping of how Qur'anic exegesis has been shaped by configurations of political power.

The central assumption of this study is that the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis has never developed in a vacuum but has always existed at the intersection of the text, religious authority, and the political structures surrounding it. Accordingly, political power can be understood through three principal functions: as a protector that enables the development of Qur'anic exegesis, as a regulator that institutionalizes orthodoxy, and as a source of distortion that has the potential to direct Qur'anic exegesis toward ideological legitimization. This framework is further supported by studies demonstrating that the dynamics of textual authority in Islam are always the result of interactions among tradition, innovation, and socio-political forces.⁹ On this basis, this article argues that a responsible reading of Qur'anic exegesis must be historical, critical, and contextually aware.

Method

This study employed a qualitative library research approach that integrates historical and hermeneutical perspectives to analyze the relationship between political power and the transformation of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition throughout Islamic history. The historical approach was employed to reconstruct the development of the exegetical tradition across various periods, ranging from the era of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn*, the Umayyad Dynasty, and the Abbasid Dynasty to the modern and contemporary periods. Meanwhile, the hermeneutical approach was employed to understand how changes in political contexts influenced the orientation, methodology, and construction of Qur'anic interpretation in each of these periods. The research data consisted of primary sources in the form of representative works of Qur'anic exegesis from different historical periods, including *Jāmi' al-Bayān* by al-Ṭabarī, *Al-Kashshāf* by al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Azīm* by Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*

6 Abdullah Saeed and Ali Akbar, "Contextualist Approaches and the Interpretation of the Qur'an," *Religions* 12, no. 7 (July 13, 2021): 527, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070527>.

7 Demichelis, "Introduction: The Qur'an in History, the History of the Qur'an."

8 Ichwan and Salisu, "Reevaluating Qur'anic Hermeneutics: A Comparative Analysis Between Classical Tafsir and Modern Hermeneutical Approaches."

9 Zulliandi, Intan Wulansari, and Nurul Aulia, "The Transformation of Qur'an Interpretation and Textual Authority in Indonesia A Critical Analysis."

al-Manār by Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā, and *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* by Sayyid Quṭb. Secondary sources were obtained from academic books, reputable journal articles, and previous studies discussing the history of Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic politics, Qur'anic hermeneutics, and the relationship between religion and power.

Data were analyzed through three interrelated stages: data reduction, thematic-historical analysis, and hermeneutical interpretation. The data reduction stage was conducted by selecting the literature based on its relevance to the theme of the relationship between political power and the Qur'anic exegetical tradition. Subsequently, the data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in the relationship between political power and the development of Qur'anic exegesis during each historical period and were then compared historically to identify both continuities and changes in their characteristics. In the final stage, hermeneutical interpretation was employed to explain the meaning underlying each historical dynamic by considering the socio-political context in which a particular exegetical work emerged. Through these stages, this study not only describes the historical development of Qur'anic exegesis but also constructs a conceptual synthesis of the transformation of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition as the result of a dynamic interaction among religious authority, intellectual development, and the structures of political power throughout Islamic history.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political Authority as the Foundation of the Qur'anic Exegetical Tradition

During the early phase of Islam, the relationship between political authority and the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis could not yet be clearly separated because the Prophet Muhammad SAW simultaneously exercised spiritual, social, and political authority. Within the context of Medina, revelation was understood not only as theological guidance but also as the foundation for establishing the social and political order of the Muslim community. Accordingly, the interpretation of Qur'anic verses took place within a unified sphere of authority, whereby the Prophet's explanation of revelation functioned simultaneously as a source of normative legitimacy and as practical guidance for the early Muslim community. This situation demonstrates that the embryonic form of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition emerged from the close interconnection between the sacred text and politico-religious leadership. A number of recent studies likewise affirm that the Prophetic period constituted a phase during which the Qur'an was interpreted contextually in relation to the dynamics of the early Muslim community rather than as a text detached from its historical setting.¹⁰ Therefore, the foundation of Qur'anic exegesis in Islam was established through a unified authority that bridged revelation, society, and political power.

Following the death of the Prophet, the relationship between political power and Qur'anic exegesis entered a new phase during the period of the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn*. During this period, the authority of interpretation was no longer concentrated in the person of the Prophet; nevertheless, the early Islamic state continued to play an important role in preserving the unity of the community and ensuring the continuity of religious authority. The policy of compiling the *muṣḥaf* during the caliphate of Abū Bakr and its standardization during the caliphate of 'Uthmān demonstrates that political action could serve as a means of safeguarding the continuity of the text that constituted the object of Qur'anic exegesis. From the perspective of textual history, these efforts were not merely administrative projects but epistemic decisions that determined the boundaries of legitimate readings within the Islamic tradition. The standardization of the *muṣḥaf* contributed to the formation of a more stable interpretive space

10 Yassine Yahyaoui, "Qur'anic Exegesis and the Reshaping of Early Islamic History: A Case Study of Sura Q 107," *Religions* 15, no. 11 (October 24, 2024): 1301, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15111301>.

amid the expansion of the Islamic world and the increasing diversity of dialects and *qirā'āt*. Accordingly, politics during the early Islamic period was not an adversary of Qur'anic exegesis but rather a prerequisite for the orderly transmission of religious knowledge. This interpretation is consistent with studies emphasizing the importance of post-Uthmanic canonization as a formative factor in the development of textual authority in early Islam.¹¹

However, the political foundation that supported the emergence of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition also began to reveal its problematic dimension when political authority became an arena of contestation. The *Fitnah al-Kubrā* that emerged toward the end of the caliphate of 'Uthmān and continued during the caliphate of 'Alī marked a significant turning point, as Qur'anic verses began to be employed by competing factions to reinforce their respective positions. At this point, Qur'anic exegesis no longer functioned solely to explain the meaning of revelation but also became an instrument for defending political identity. For the Shi'ah, the Khawārij, and the faction of Mu'āwiyah alike, the sacred text was positioned as a source of legitimacy for competing claims to political authority. This situation demonstrates that, from its earliest phase, the Qur'anic exegetical tradition had already existed within the tension between normative authority and practical political interests. In the language of historical hermeneutics, the meaning of Qur'anic verses never emerged in a vacuum but rather within a social arena marked by conflict. Therefore, the formation of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition during the early Islamic period also established a precedent for the politicization of interpretation in subsequent periods.¹²

From the perspective of intellectual development, the early phase of Islam demonstrates that political authority functioned as a regulator of the interpretive sphere, both through the stabilization of the text and through the containment of conflicts over meaning. As long as leadership remained united within a single politico-religious framework, exegetical authority was relatively homogeneous and more readily accepted by the Muslim community. However, once that authority became fragmented, Qur'anic exegesis began to develop as an arena for the differentiation of viewpoints. This is evident in the changing ways Muslims interpreted Qur'anic verses concerning leadership, justice, and rebellion. Qur'anic exegesis during the early period was not merely the product of the scholarly diligence of the Companions but also the product of a structure of political power that provided legitimacy, stability, and, at the same time, the boundaries that had to be observed. In this sense, political power constituted the foundation that determined whether Qur'anic exegesis developed as a form of collective knowledge or became an instrument of ideological conflict. This finding reinforces the argument that the history of Qur'anic exegesis should be understood as a history of authority rather than merely a history of textual explanation.¹³

Based on the foregoing discussion, it can be affirmed that political authority during the early phase of Islam played a dual role in the formation of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition. On the one hand, it created stability, safeguarded the transmission of the *muṣṣḥaf*, and enabled the establishment of legitimate exegetical authority. On the other hand, it opened the way for the use of the sacred text as a means of political legitimization when struggles for power intensified. Accordingly, this early phase is significant not only as the historical origin of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition but also as the initial model of the relationship between authority and interpretation that continued to recur throughout Islamic history. From an epistemological

11 Akbar, Truna, and Rosyad, "Post-Uthmanic Qur'anic Re-Canonization: A Historical Reconstruction of the Second Maṣāḥif Project during the Abbasid–Mamluk Era."

12 Saeed and Akbar, "Contextualist Approaches and the Interpretation of the Qur'ān."

13 Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "The Shi'is and the Qur'an: Between Apocalypse, Civil Wars, and Empire," *Religions* 13, no. 1 (December 21, 2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010001>.

perspective, this reading suggests that the Qur'anic exegetical tradition was, from the very beginning, shaped by the interaction among revelation, the community, and structures of power. Therefore, understanding the political foundation of the formation of Qur'anic exegesis constitutes an essential step toward examining the subsequent development of the exegetical tradition in a more critical and comprehensive manner. Contemporary studies on Qur'anic exegesis in Islamic history likewise demonstrate that the continuity and transformation of this tradition can only be fully understood when its political context is taken into serious consideration.¹⁴

Political Patronage and the Institutionalization of the Qur'anic Exegetical Tradition

The development of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition following the period of the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn* demonstrates a fundamental transformation in the relationship between political power and the production of Islamic knowledge. Whereas during the early period political power functioned to preserve the authority of revelation and the stability of the Muslim community, during the era of the Islamic dynasties, particularly the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, it began to assume the role of a patron that provided the infrastructure necessary for the advancement of intellectual activities. The expansion of the Islamic world resulted in an increasing demand for explanations of the Qur'an capable of addressing the growing linguistic, cultural, and social diversity of Muslim societies. Under such circumstances, political stability and state support became prerequisites for the establishment of educational centers, scholarly networks, libraries, and literary traditions that subsequently gave rise to the discipline of Qur'anic exegesis in a more systematic form. In other words, the development of Qur'anic exegesis was not merely the product of the intellectual dynamism of Muslim scholars but was also influenced by the state's political capacity to build a scholarly ecosystem that supported the transmission and advancement of the Qur'anic sciences.¹⁵

During the Umayyad Dynasty, political patronage of the scholarly tradition was not yet as fully organized as it would become under the Abbasids; nevertheless, its institutional foundations began to emerge through the development of schools of Qur'anic exegesis in Mecca, Medina, Kufa, and Basra. The relatively stable political environment following the period of territorial expansion enabled the Companions and the *tabi'in* to establish more enduring networks for the transmission of knowledge. The school of Ibn 'Abbās in Mecca, for example, developed into one of the principal centers of Qur'anic interpretation, emphasizing transmitted reports (*riwāyah*), *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and linguistic explanation. In Kufa and Basra, approaches to Qur'anic interpretation emerged that were more receptive to linguistic and rational analysis as a consequence of interaction with multicultural societies. Although these developments were not entirely the result of official state programs, the political stability of the Umayyad government provided the socio-political conditions necessary for the establishment of a sustainable academic tradition. This demonstrates that political patronage does not always take the form of direct intervention but may also operate through the creation of a social environment conducive to the advancement of knowledge.¹⁶

The institutionalization of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition reached its peak during the Abbasid Dynasty, when the state deliberately made the advancement of knowledge an integral part of

14 Yahyaoui, "Qur'anic Exegesis and the Reshaping of Early Islamic History: A Case Study of Sura Q 107.," Demichelis, "Introduction: The Qur'an in History, the History of the Qur'an."

15 Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant* (BRILL, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004153868.i-355>.

16 J D McAuliffe, *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge University Press, 2006), https://books.google.co.id/books?id=F2oLiXT_66EC.

the Islamic civilizational project. Caliph al-Manṣūr, Hārūn al-Rashīd, and especially al-Ma'mūn provided extensive support for scholarly activities through the establishment of *Bayt al-Hikmah*, the development of libraries, the provision of patronage to scholars, and the translation of Greek, Persian, and Indian works into Arabic. The intellectual environment that emerged during this period stimulated the development of various disciplines of Islamic scholarship, including Qur'anic exegesis, ḥadīth, fiqh, linguistics, and theology. Within this context, Qur'anic exegesis no longer developed merely as an oral tradition dependent upon personal transmission but evolved into an academic discipline characterized by increasingly mature methodologies, systematic organization, and epistemological frameworks. These conditions made possible the emergence of monumental works that have remained the foundation of the classical Qur'anic exegetical tradition to the present day.¹⁷

The emergence of *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī represents the clearest illustration of the productive relationship between political patronage and the development of Qur'anic exegesis. Al-Ṭabarī lived within an Abbasid intellectual environment that was relatively open to scholarly debate, enabling him to compile thousands of transmitted reports, conduct *isnād* criticism, compare the opinions of various scholars, and systematically develop the method of *tarjīḥ*. This work became not only the first comprehensive encyclopedia of Qur'anic exegesis but also the methodological model for nearly the entire subsequent Sunni exegetical tradition. Such an achievement is difficult to separate from the availability of access to libraries, networks of scholars across different regions, and the institutional support provided by the state. Accordingly, the history of al-Ṭabarī demonstrates that political patronage can make a positive contribution to the advancement of knowledge when the state functions as a facilitator of intellectual development without intervening in the scholarly independence of religious scholars.¹⁸

Nevertheless, political patronage cannot be understood as an entirely ideal relationship. State support for the advancement of knowledge frequently operated alongside the political interests of maintaining stability and legitimizing power. Consequently, the institutionalization of Qur'anic exegesis during the Abbasid era also established particular standards of orthodoxy that subsequently influenced the development of Islamic thought in later periods. Even so, this historical period clearly demonstrates that the advancement of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition depended greatly upon the existence of educational institutions, a culture of literacy, academic freedom, and political support for scholarly activities. This finding demonstrates that the relationship between politics and Qur'anic exegesis is not always repressive, as is often perceived in many studies. On the contrary, politics may also function as a constructive force that accelerates the formation of scholarly disciplines, expands networks for the transmission of knowledge, and produces monumental exegetical works that continue to serve as authoritative references to the present day. Accordingly, political patronage constitutes one of the key factors in the process of institutionalizing the Qur'anic exegetical tradition throughout Islamic history.

Political Contestation and the Ideologization of Qur'anic Interpretation

The transformation of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition throughout Islamic history has been marked not only by the development of scholarly institutions but also by the intensification of political contestation that turned Qur'anic interpretation into an arena for the legitimization of

17 Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society* (Taylor & Francis, 2012), https://www.google.co.id/books/edition/Greek_Thought_Arabic_Culture/39wqBgAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

18 Walid Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition* (BRILL, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047412564>.

ideology and power. As the structure of Islamic governance became increasingly complex, the relationship between religious scholars and political rulers underwent significant changes. Qur'anic exegesis was no longer positioned merely as a scholarly endeavor to understand the meaning of revelation but also became an instrument capable of establishing, maintaining, or challenging political authority. Within this context, the process of interpreting the Qur'an gradually came to be influenced by political interests, theological orientations, and the social dynamics characteristic of each historical period. This condition demonstrates that Qur'anic exegesis is an intellectual product that continually interacts with the realities of power and therefore cannot be understood solely through philological or normative approaches. As explained by Abu Zayd (2006), religious texts always interact with the historical circumstances of their readers, such that the meanings they generate emerge from a dialogue among the text, the reader, and the surrounding social structure.¹⁹ Therefore, the subsequent development of Qur'anic exegesis demonstrates how political contestation gradually shaped the orientation of Qur'anic interpretation in various ideological forms.

The phenomenon of the ideologization of Qur'anic exegesis became increasingly evident following the political conflicts that emerged after the period of the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn*, giving rise to various theological schools within Islam. Differences in views concerning leadership, the legitimacy of political authority, and the concept of justice evolved into methodological differences in interpreting Qur'anic verses. The Shī'ah placed the concept of *imāmah* at the foundation of their interpretation of a number of verses related to the leadership of the Muslim community, whereas the Khawārij interpreted legal verses through a highly literal approach in support of the idea of religious exclusivism. On the other hand, some scholars operating within the sphere of government sought to preserve political stability through interpretations that reinforced the legitimacy of the ruling authority. This situation demonstrates that differences in Qur'anic exegesis were often driven not only by methodological variation but also by differing political orientations and social interests within Muslim society. As argued by Crone (2005), the formation of the various schools of Islamic thought during the classical period cannot be separated from the political conflicts that shaped the structures of religious authority.²⁰ Accordingly, political contestation became one of the principal factors accelerating the differentiation of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition throughout Islamic history.

The relationship between political power and Qur'anic exegesis assumed a more complex form during the Abbasid period through the event of *al-Mihnah*. The policy of Caliph al-Ma'mūn requiring acceptance of the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an demonstrated that the state was no longer merely a patron of knowledge but had begun to determine the boundaries of religious orthodoxy through political authority. This intervention shifted the position of Qur'anic exegesis from the sphere of scholarly dialogue to an instrument of the state's ideological control. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's rejection of this policy reflected the emergence of a new awareness of the importance of the scholarly independence of the *'ulamā'* in preserving the integrity of Islamic scholarship. The event of *al-Mihnah* subsequently became a turning point in the history of the relationship between religion and the state because it demonstrated that political patronage has its limits when it transforms into epistemological domination over the production of knowledge. According to Faiz (2012), *al-Mihnah* was not merely a theological conflict but a manifestation of intellectual violence that illustrates how the state can employ political authority to impose religious truth coercively.²¹ This historical experience demonstrates

19 Nasr Ḥamid Abu Zayd et al., *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis*, WRR Verkenningen Series (Amsterdam University Press, 2006), https://books.google.co.id/books?id=0UZc_Yvle_AC.

20 Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

21 Faiz, "Kekerasan Intelektual Dalam Islam (Telaah Terhadap Peristiwa Mihnah Mu'tazilah)."

that the development of Qur'anic exegesis requires a space of academic freedom in order to develop objectively and responsibly.

The ideologization of Qur'anic exegesis assumed new forms in the modern era as the Islamic world confronted colonialism, nationalism, and the emergence of various Islamic reform movements. Within this context, Qur'anic exegesis developed into a medium for articulating the political identity of the Muslim community in response to the challenges of modernity. Through *Tafsir al-Manār*, Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā sought to interpret the Qur'an as the foundation for social reform and the rationalization of Islamic thought in order to respond to the advancement of modern knowledge. In contrast, through *Fi Zilāl al-Qur'an*, Sayyid Quṭb developed a more ideological reading by positioning the concepts of *ḥākimiyyah*, *jābiliyyah*, and political struggle as the central themes of his interpretation. These differences demonstrate that modern Qur'anic exegesis not only offers different methodological approaches but also reflects different political responses to the social realities confronting Muslim societies. According to Esack (2005), contemporary Qur'anic exegesis constitutes an arena of negotiation among the sacred text, historical experience, and the socio-political interests of Muslim communities, making it impossible to detach it from its historical context.²²

Based on these historical developments, it can be concluded that the ideologization of Qur'anic exegesis is a consequence of the increasingly intensive interaction between religious knowledge and political power. The greater the political interests at stake, the greater the tendency to employ Qur'anic exegesis as an instrument for the legitimization of ideology, whether by the state or by religious groups. Nevertheless, history also demonstrates that the Qur'anic exegetical tradition has consistently generated mechanisms of correction through the emergence of independent scholars who have defended intellectual autonomy amid political pressure. Therefore, ideologization should not be understood as an inherent characteristic of Qur'anic exegesis but rather as a historical condition that emerges when the process of interpretation is shaped by particular configurations of political power. This finding reinforces the argument that the relationship between politics and Qur'anic exegesis is dynamic, evolving from patronage to contestation and subsequently into an arena for the struggle over interpretive authority. Accordingly, understanding the ideological dimension in the history of Qur'anic exegesis constitutes an essential prerequisite for developing a more critical, contextual, and politically independent reading of the Qur'an, free from the dominance of short-term political interests.

Toward a Critical and Contextual Reading of the Qur'anic Exegetical Tradition

The findings of this study demonstrate that the relationship between political power and the Qur'anic exegetical tradition cannot be understood through a simple dichotomy of positive and negative influence. Rather, history reveals a dialectical relationship in which political power functions dynamically in accordance with changing social, political, and intellectual configurations in each historical period. During the early phase of Islam, political power served as the foundation for the formation of interpretive authority through the unification of religious and political leadership. In the subsequent phase, the state evolved into a patron that provided the institutions, resources, and intellectual environment necessary for the emergence of the discipline of Qur'anic exegesis. However, when political interests began to dominate the sphere of interpretation, Qur'anic exegesis underwent a process of ideologization that shifted the orientation of interpretation from the pursuit of meaning toward the legitimization of political power. Accordingly, the relationship between politics and Qur'anic exegesis should be understood as a spectrum that progresses from formation, to institutionalization, and ultimately to ideologization, rather than as a singular or linear relationship. This finding demonstrates that

22 Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: A User's Guide* (Oneworld, 2005).

changes in the character of Qur'anic exegesis are consistently associated with changes in the structures of authority that surround it.²³

Based on this historical pattern, this article proposes a conceptual framework for understanding the transformation of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition built upon three principal functions of political power. First, political power functions as formative authority, creating the initial legitimacy that enables the collective formation of the tradition of interpretation and the transmission of revelation. Second, political power functions as institutional patronage, providing the intellectual ecosystem that facilitates the development of exegetical methodologies, literature, and scholarly networks. Third, political power functions as an ideological instrument, whereby the process of interpretation is directed toward sustaining particular political interests, thus rendering the boundary between scholarly argumentation and political legitimization increasingly indistinct. These three functions do not always emerge sequentially or replace one another; rather, they frequently coexist with varying degrees of intensity throughout different periods of Islamic history. This conceptual framework demonstrates that the development of Qur'anic exegesis is shaped not only by the evolution of interpretive methodologies but also by the dynamic relationship between religious authority and political power that structures the sphere of Islamic knowledge production.²⁴

The epistemological implication of these findings is the necessity of positioning historical context as an integral component in reading both classical and contemporary works of Qur'anic exegesis. To date, many readings of the exegetical literature have tended to adopt a predominantly textual orientation, thereby treating the works of exegetes as the sole representation of the meaning of the Qur'an. In reality, however, every exegetical work emerges through a complex dialogue among the revealed text, the intellectual experience of the exegete, the development of Islamic scholarly methodologies, and the surrounding socio-political realities. Recognition of this historical dimension is not intended to relativize the authority of the Qur'an as divine revelation but rather to distinguish proportionately between the sacredness of the text and the historicity of its interpretive products. From the perspective of contemporary hermeneutics, acknowledging context is precisely the prerequisite for producing interpretations that are more objective, open, and responsible, as it enables readers to understand why a particular interpretation emerged within a specific historical situation.²⁵ Accordingly, criticism of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition is directed not at the Qur'an itself but at the historical process through which interpretation has been formed, a process that is invariably shaped by time and place.

A critical reading of the history of Qur'anic exegesis also holds profound relevance for the development of Qur'anic studies in the contemporary era. Amid increasing political polarization and the growing use of religious symbols within the public sphere, Qur'anic exegesis continues to serve as a means of legitimizing various ideological interests, whether by the state or by particular social groups. This phenomenon demonstrates that issues which emerged during the classical period continue to persist today, albeit in different forms. Therefore, the Qur'anic exegetical tradition should be developed through an approach that not only masters linguistic analysis, *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, and the Qur'anic sciences but is also capable of examining social structures, power relations, and cultural dynamics that shape the process of interpretation. The historical-hermeneutical approach offers a framework that facilitates dialogue between the authority of the text and changing historical contexts, thereby enabling Qur'anic exegesis to continue evolving without losing its normative foundation. This perspective is consistent with the view

23 Demichelis, "Introduction: The Qur'an in History, the History of the Qur'an."

24 McAuliffe, *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*.

25 Zayd et al., *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis*.

that the interpretation of the Qur'an must always take into account the relationship among the text, history, and the needs of society in order to remain relevant to changing times.²⁶

Overall, this study demonstrates that the transformation of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition is the result of a continuous interaction among revelation, religious authority, intellectual development, and configurations of political power. The principal contribution of this study lies not only in explaining the historical development of Qur'anic exegesis but also in proposing an analytical model that demonstrates how political power has functioned as a formative, developmental, and directive force in the tradition of Qur'anic interpretation throughout Islamic history. This model extends previous studies, which have generally focused only on the relationship between Qur'anic exegesis and politics within particular historical periods or geographical regions, by offering a historical synthesis capable of explaining the changing functions of political power throughout the course of Islamic history in a more comprehensive manner. On this basis, this article argues that future studies of Qur'anic exegesis should move beyond purely textual readings toward a more interdisciplinary approach by integrating history, hermeneutics, the sociology of knowledge, and Islamic political studies as analytical frameworks. Such an approach is expected to foster a Qur'anic exegetical tradition that is more reflective, critical, and contextual while preserving the normative authority of the Qur'an as the primary source of Islamic teachings.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the relationship between political power and the transformation of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition throughout Islamic history has developed in a dynamic and dialectical manner rather than as a singular or deterministic relationship. Based on the historical-hermeneutical approach, it is found that political power performs three principal functions in the development of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition. First, political power functions as formative authority (formation) by providing the initial legitimacy for the emergence of the interpretive tradition through the unification of religious and political authority during the era of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, as well as through the policies of compiling and standardizing the *muṣḥaf* during the period of the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn*. Second, political power functions as institutional patronage (institutionalization) by supporting the development of centers of learning, literary traditions, and exegetical methodologies, particularly during the Abbasid Dynasty. Third, political power develops into an instrument of ideologization (ideologization) when political interests begin to shape the orientation of Qur'anic interpretation, both through the establishment of state orthodoxy and through the use of Qur'anic exegesis as a means of ideological legitimization across different historical periods. These findings confirm that changes in the character of Qur'anic exegesis are shaped not only by developments in scholarly methodologies but also by the configurations of power that structure the sphere of Islamic knowledge production.

The principal contribution of this study lies in the formulation of a conceptual model that explains the transformation of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition through three dimensions of the relationship between political power and Qur'anic interpretation, namely formation, institutionalization, and ideologization. This model extends previous studies, which have generally concentrated on particular historical periods, individual figures, or specific political cases, by providing a historical synthesis capable of explaining the changing functions of political

26 Saeed and Akbar, "Contextualist Approaches and the Interpretation of the Qur'ān."

power throughout the course of Islamic history in a more comprehensive manner. Through a historical-hermeneutical perspective, this study also demonstrates that the Qur'anic exegetical tradition should be understood as the product of an ongoing dialogue among revelation, religious authority, intellectual development, and socio-political dynamics. Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations because it is based entirely on library research and therefore has not examined in depth the dynamics of local politics that have influenced the development of Qur'anic exegesis in specific regions, such as Southeast Asia, Africa, or the contemporary Muslim world. Furthermore, this study focuses primarily on the conceptual development of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition and has not undertaken a detailed comparative analysis of the interpretive methodologies employed by individual exegetes.

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to further develop the study of the relationship between political power and Qur'anic exegesis through a more interdisciplinary approach by integrating intellectual history, the sociology of knowledge, Islamic political studies, discourse analysis, and contemporary hermeneutics. Future studies may also be directed toward comparative analyses of the influence of political configurations on interpretive methodologies across different regions of the Islamic world as well as on the works of modern and contemporary exegetes. In addition, empirical studies on the use of Qur'anic exegesis in state policies, religious social movements, and digital spaces would enrich our understanding of the transformation of interpretive authority in the modern era. Accordingly, the study of the relationship between political power and the Qur'anic exegetical tradition contributes not only to the advancement of Qur'anic exegetical studies but also offers a more critical perspective for understanding how the Qur'an continues to be interpreted, negotiated, and actualized amid the ongoing social and political transformations throughout Islamic history.

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