

Religion–state relations in the perspective of Islamic political theology: Implications for democracy and Indonesian civilization

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Abstract

Studies on religion–state relations in Islamic political theology remain dominated by normative debates, while research connecting theological foundations with their implications for democracy and the development of Indonesian civilization is still limited. This study aims to reconstruct religion–state relations from the perspective of Islamic political theology and examine their implications for democracy and the development of Indonesian civilization. A qualitative approach employing library research was adopted through descriptive-analytical analysis and conceptual synthesis of relevant scholarly literature. The findings demonstrate that Islamic political theology is grounded in *tawhīd*, *amānah*, *shūrā*, *al-'adl*, *maṣlahah*, and *ukhuwwah*, which are reconstructed into a conceptual framework of religion–state relations. These values strengthen accountability, participation, the rule of law, the public interest, and social cohesion within democratic governance. This study contributes by proposing an integrative conceptual model linking Islamic political theology, democracy, and the development of Indonesian civilization.

Keywords: Islamic political theology; Religion–state relations; Democracy; Indonesian civilization; Governance.

Abstrak

Relasi agama dan negara dalam perspektif teologi politik Islam masih didominasi oleh perdebatan normatif, sementara kajian yang menghubungkan landasan teologis dengan implikasinya terhadap demokrasi dan pembangunan peradaban Indonesia masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan merekonstruksi relasi agama dan negara dalam perspektif teologi politik Islam serta menganalisis implikasinya terhadap demokrasi dan pembangunan peradaban Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian kepustakaan (*library research*) melalui analisis deskriptif-analitis dan sintesis konseptual terhadap berbagai literatur yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa teologi politik Islam dibangun atas landasan *tawhīd*, *amānah*, *shūrā*, *al-'adl*, *maṣlahah*, dan *ukhuwwah*, yang direkonstruksi menjadi kerangka konseptual relasi agama dan negara. Nilai-nilai tersebut memperkuat akuntabilitas, partisipasi, supremasi hukum, kepentingan publik, dan kohesi sosial dalam demokrasi. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan menawarkan model konseptual yang mengintegrasikan teologi politik Islam, demokrasi, dan pembangunan peradaban Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Teologi politik Islam; Relasi agama dan negara; Demokrasi; Peradaban Indonesia; Tata kelola pemerintahan.

Introduction

Religion–state relations constitute one of the most fundamental issues in the study of Islamic politics, continuously evolving alongside changes in systems of government, democratic dynamics, and the transformation of modern society (Barton et al., 2021). The debate surrounding their relationship is no longer confined to the question of whether Islam advocates a religious state or a secular state. Instead, it has shifted toward examining how theological values can be translated into a system of governance capable of addressing contemporary societal challenges (Houssaini, 2024). This shift indicates that religion functions not only as a source of moral legitimacy but also as an ethical foundation for the exercise of political authority. Consequently, religion–state relations should be examined through the perspective of Islamic political theology to explain how the normative teachings of Islam interact with political practices in contemporary society.

The development of democracy in Muslim-majority countries has further expanded the discourse on the role of religion in the public sphere. On the one hand, democracy places public participation, the rule of law, and accountability at the core of state governance (Firdaus et al., 2024). On the other hand, Islam upholds values such as *amānah*, *shūrā*, *al-'adl*, *maṣlahah*, and *ukhuwwah*, all of which are directed toward the realization of justice and the common good (Hadiz, 2018). Nevertheless, these two systems are frequently portrayed as opposing paradigms, giving rise to a dichotomy between Islam and democracy. Such a perspective is inadequate because it emphasizes institutional forms rather than the substantive values underpinning governance. As a result, the potential of Islamic political theology as an ethical framework for democratic governance has yet to receive adequate scholarly attention.

The perspective of Islamic political theology offers a more comprehensive framework by positioning religion as the moral foundation, while viewing the state as an instrument for actualizing these values in public life (Jong & Ali, 2023; Zuhri et al., 2023). This approach enables religion–state relations to be understood in a more dynamic manner, as they are not bound to a single model of government but are instead oriented toward the realization of a just, participatory, and civilized political order. From this perspective, the debate on religion–state relations shifts away from the formal implementation of *Shari'a* or the secularization of the state toward the effectiveness of Islamic values in fostering a high-quality democracy. Accordingly, Islamic political theology provides a compelling framework for explaining the relationship between moral legitimacy, governance, and the development of Indonesian civilization.

Studies on religion–state relations from the perspective of Islam have been conducted using a wide range of approaches. Kadivar (2020) demonstrated that Islamic values are compatible with democratic principles, particularly with respect to justice,

consultation, and governmental accountability. However, such studies generally remain confined to normative discussions of Islam and democracy without developing a conceptual framework capable of explaining the systematic interrelationships among these values. Driessen (2018) found that democracy in Muslim-majority countries has evolved through a process of adaptation between Islamic teachings and modern political systems, yet the analysis primarily emphasizes practical political dynamics rather than theoretical reconstruction. Brown (2019) highlighted the importance of civil society, pluralism, and the public sphere within Islamic democracy, but did not integrate theological foundations, political principles, state objectives, and their implications for civilizational development into a comprehensive analytical framework.

Against this background, this study aims to reconstruct religion–state relations from the perspective of Islamic political theology and to examine their implications for democracy and the development of Indonesian civilization. Rather than merely revisiting the conceptual debate on religion and the state, this study proposes an analytical framework that integrates theological foundations, political principles, state objectives, and models of religion–state relations into a coherent conceptual structure. The significance of this study lies in its effort to provide a new perspective that positions Islamic political theology as the ethical foundation for understanding democracy. In doing so, it argues that Islam and democracy should not be regarded as inherently conflicting systems but rather as complementary entities capable of reinforcing one another in promoting governance that is just, inclusive, and oriented toward the realization of the common good.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research to examine religion–state relations from the perspective of Islamic political theology and their implications for democracy and the development of civilization in Indonesia (Connaway & Radford, 2021). This approach was selected because the study focuses on the conceptual analysis of scholarly ideas and perspectives concerning Islamic political theology, democracy, and religion–state relations. The research data were collected through an extensive review of scholarly literature, including books, journal articles, and other academic publications relevant to the research topic. These sources served as the basis for understanding the development of key concepts, comparing diverse scholarly perspectives, and constructing a conceptual framework aligned with the objectives of the study.

The data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical method combined with a conceptual synthesis approach (Laurence & Margolis, 2003). The analytical process began by identifying the principal concepts of Islamic political theology, followed by examining their relationships with theories of democracy and religion–state relations

within contemporary political thought. These concepts were subsequently synthesized to reconstruct the interconnections among theological foundations, political principles, state objectives, and models of religion–state relations. The resulting synthesis was then critically interpreted to explain the implications of Islamic political theology for democracy and the development of Indonesian civilization, ultimately generating a conceptual framework that integratively explains the relationship between Islamic values, democratic practice, and governance.

Results and Discussion

Religion–state relations in the perspective of Islamic political theology

Religion–state relations have long been one of the most enduring issues in the tradition of Islamic political thought, particularly as religious values confront the dynamics of modern political life. In Islam, politics is not understood merely as a struggle for power but as an instrument for realizing divine values in public life. Consequently, religion–state relations cannot be adequately explained solely through an institutional approach; rather, they should be understood through the perspective of Islamic political theology, which regards revelation as the ethical foundation of state governance. Esposito (1998) argued that Islam encompasses both spiritual and socio-political dimensions that are inherently interconnected, whereas Rahman (1982) maintained that the Qur'an emphasizes the moral principles of governance rather than prescribing a specific form of the state. Therefore, the debate over religion–state relations fundamentally centers on how theological values are translated into a political order grounded in justice.

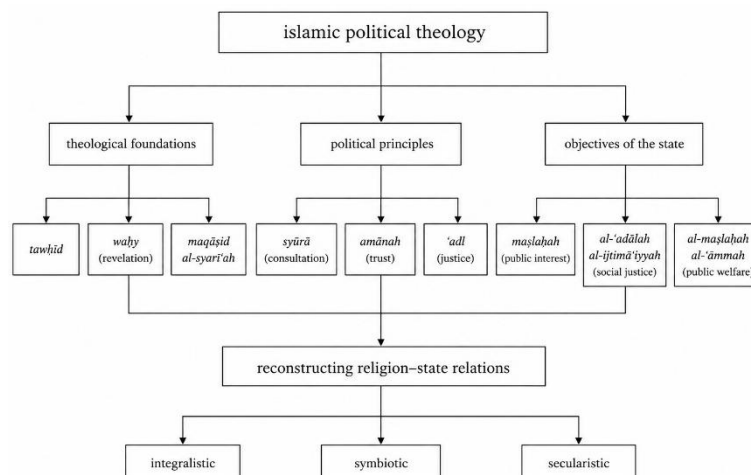


Figure 1. Conceptual reconstruction of religion–state relations in Islamic political theology

Source: Author's conceptual reconstruction.

Figure 1 presents a conceptual reconstruction of religion–state relations from the perspective of Islamic political theology. The framework is structured around three principal dimensions: theological foundations, political principles, and state objectives. These three dimensions interact to construct a model of religion–state

relations that is subsequently manifested in three patterns of interaction, namely the integralistic, symbiotic, and secularistic models. Unlike conceptual models derived from the thought of a single scholar, this framework represents a synthesis of diverse perspectives drawn from both classical and contemporary Islamic intellectual traditions. Accordingly, it serves as an analytical instrument for demonstrating that differences among models of religion–state relations do not arise from divergent sources of Islamic teachings, but rather from differing interpretations of theological foundations, political principles, and the orientation of state governance.

Theological foundations constitute the cornerstone of Islamic political theology because they determine both the legitimacy and the direction of political authority. From the Islamic perspective, ultimate sovereignty belongs to Allah SWT, while human beings are entrusted with the responsibility of serving as *khalifah* to establish justice on earth. This principle is affirmed in the following verse of the Qur'an:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعًا ۙ بَصِيرًا ﴿٥٨﴾

“Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, judge with justice. Excellent is that which Allah instructs you. Indeed, Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.” (Qur'an, al-Nisā' [4]: 58)

The verse demonstrates that *amānah* and justice constitute two inseparable principles in the administration of the state. Accordingly, Islamic political theology does not ground political legitimacy in the will of the ruler but in the state's ability to uphold *amānah* and establish justice as a divine mandate. The state, therefore, is not regarded as an end in itself but as an ethical instrument for actualizing the values of divine revelation in public life. Rahman (1982) argued that the Qur'an does not prescribe a fixed political system; rather, it provides a set of normative principles to guide governance. Likewise, Esposito (1998) viewed the political dimension of Islam as a manifestation of a commitment to moral values derived from revelation and directed toward the realization of the public good.

The concept of the state in Islam cannot be separated from the historical experience of the Madinan community established by the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) as a political community founded upon the principles of justice, equality, and collective responsibility. This experience demonstrates that the primary objective of the state is not the formal establishment of religious institutions but the creation of a social order capable of ensuring the public good for all citizens regardless of their religious or ethnic backgrounds. This argument suggests that Islam places greater emphasis on the substance of values than on any particular institutional form of the state. Azra (2003) explained that the Constitution of Medina constitutes historical evidence that the Islamic state was founded upon social consensus and respect for diversity. This view is consistent with Rahman (1982), who argued that the flexibility

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of state forms reflects the universal character of Islamic teachings, allowing any system of government to be accepted as long as it realizes justice, *amānah*, and the public good as the primary objectives of the *Sharī'a*.

The political principles of Islamic political theology are embodied in the values of *shūrā*, *amānah*, and justice (*al-'adl*), which serve as ethical guidelines for the exercise of political authority. These principles affirm that political power is not a privilege to be exercised arbitrarily but a trust for which leaders are accountable before Allah SWT and society. Among these principles, *shūrā* occupies a central position because it functions as the ethical mechanism for public decision-making. This principle is explicitly affirmed in the Qur'an as follows.

وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

“And those who respond to their Lord, establish prayer, conduct their affairs through mutual consultation among themselves, and spend out of what We have provided for them.” (Qur'an, al-Shūrā [42]: 38)

The verse demonstrates that decision-making in Islam is founded upon participation, dialogue, and collective responsibility rather than the domination of power by individuals or particular groups. The principle of *shūrā* is further reinforced by the saying of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him):

كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ

“Every one of you is a shepherd, and every one of you will be held accountable for those under your care.”

(Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, No. 893; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, No. 1829)

This ḥadīth emphasizes that leadership in Islam is a trust carrying both moral and spiritual responsibilities. Consequently, political legitimacy is determined not only by political procedures but also by the ability of leaders to uphold *amānah*, establish justice, and remain accountable to both Allah SWT and society for every public decision. In this regard, Abou El Fadl (2004) argued that political legitimacy in Islam rests upon justice, accountability, and respect for human dignity. Similarly, Madjid (1987) maintained that these values enable Islam to engage constructively with modern political systems without compromising its theological identity.

The orientation of state governance in Islamic political theology is directed not toward preserving political power but toward realizing the public good (*maṣlaḥah*) for society as a whole. The state is viewed as an instrument for safeguarding justice, protecting citizens' rights, and promoting public welfare in accordance with the objectives of the *Sharī'a*. This perspective affirms that the success of a state should not be measured by its formal identity but by its capacity to generate social benefit and guarantee a dignified life for its citizens. Al-Qaraḍāwī (1997) explained that the concept of *fiqh al-*

dawlah accommodates various forms of the state, provided that they realize the public good and remain consistent with Islamic principles. Likewise, An-Na‘im (2008) argued that the modern state can serve as a space for implementing Islamic values without necessarily becoming a theocratic state. Therefore, the primary orientation of Islamic political theology is to establish a state that functions as an instrument of public service rather than an ideological end in itself.

The synthesis of theological foundations, political principles, and state objectives demonstrates that religion–state relations in the perspective of Islamic political theology are not constructed through a dichotomous approach that places religion and the state in opposition. Rather, they are understood as a complementary relationship in which religion provides the moral and ethical foundations for political authority, while the state serves as the instrument through which these values are actualized in public life. This conceptual reconstruction shifts the debate from the question of what constitutes an Islamic state to the more substantive question of the extent to which the state is capable of realizing *amānah*, justice, consultation, and the public good. Accordingly, Islamic political theology does not prescribe a single institutional model but instead offers a normative framework that can be applied across different political systems as long as they remain oriented toward the universal values of Islam.

The implementation of religion–state relations throughout the Muslim world has subsequently developed into three principal models: the integralistic, the symbiotic, and the secularistic models. The integralistic model regards religion and the state as an inseparable unity in which religious law constitutes the primary foundation of state governance. In contrast, the secularistic model separates religion from the structure of the state in order to preserve political neutrality toward diverse religious beliefs. Positioned between these two approaches, the symbiotic model views religion and the state as mutually supportive institutions without making religion the formal basis of the state. Abdillah (1999) explained that these three models represent the spectrum of religion–state relations that has evolved across the Muslim world in accordance with different historical and social contexts.

Implications of Islamic political theology for democracy and Indonesian civilization

The debate over the relationship between Islam and democracy is no longer relevant if it is framed merely as a conflict between religion and the modern political system. The more fundamental question is whether democracy is capable of accommodating the moral values that constitute the foundation of public life. In this context, Islamic political theology offers a different perspective by positioning democracy as an instrument for realizing the normative values of Islam rather than as an ideology that must be either fully accepted or rejected. This perspective shifts the focus of discussion from the form of the state to the quality of governance. Through the concept of *Twin*

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Tolerations, Stepan (2000) argued that religion and democracy can develop simultaneously, provided that each respects the other's sphere of legitimacy. Accordingly, the relationship between Islam and democracy should be assessed based on its capacity to produce governance that is just, participatory, and oriented toward the public good.

Table 1. Implications of Islamic political theology for democratic governance and civilization

Islamic political values	Democratic principles	Implications for civilization
<i>Amānah</i>	Accountability	Good governance
<i>Shūrā</i>	Participation	Deliberative governance
<i>Al-'adl</i>	Rule of law	Social justice
<i>Maṣlaḥah</i>	Public interest	Sustainable civilization
<i>Ukhuwwah</i>	Social inclusion	Social cohesion

Source: Author's conceptual synthesis.

Table 1 illustrates that Islamic political theology has practical implications for democratic practice and civilizational development rather than merely offering a set of abstract normative values. The table is structured around three interrelated components. The first column presents the core values of Islamic political theology as the ethical foundations of state governance. The second column identifies their conceptual equivalents within the principles of modern democracy, demonstrating the substantive convergence between the two traditions. The third column outlines their practical implications for civilizational development through good governance, social justice, sustainable development, and social cohesion. This framework serves as the analytical basis for demonstrating that democracy and Islamic political theology are not inherently contradictory but can reinforce one another when both are oriented toward the realization of the public good.

Accountability represents the clearest point of convergence between Islamic political theology and modern democracy. From the Islamic perspective, *amānah* is understood not merely as an individual moral obligation but also as a constitutional principle that determines the legitimacy of political authority. Consequently, democracy should not be evaluated solely by its ability to conduct periodic elections but also by its capacity to establish transparent, responsible, and public-oriented governance. Diamond (1999) identified accountability as a fundamental prerequisite for democratic consolidation because it prevents the abuse of power through mechanisms of public oversight. Similarly, Hall (2018) emphasized the importance of leadership integrity in democratic governance. Building upon this argument, the present study contends that the concept of *amānah* provides a moral dimension that has not been fully addressed in liberal democratic theory. Political legitimacy, therefore, derives not only from majority

support but also from leaders' ability to maintain public trust through ethical governance.

Consultation cannot be reduced to a mere mechanism of political participation, as is commonly understood in procedural democracy. Within Islamic political theology, *shūrā* constitutes a deliberative process that links freedom of expression with collective responsibility in pursuit of the public good. Consequently, the quality of democracy is determined not by the extent of political participation alone but by its capacity to foster rational, inclusive dialogue that leads to just decisions. Through the concept of the *post-secular society*, Habermas (2006) argued that religion retains legitimate standing within the public sphere insofar as religious values can be translated into arguments accessible to all citizens. In contrast to Whyte (2019), who viewed *shūrā* primarily as a tradition of Islamic politics, this study argues that *shūrā* constitutes the normative foundation of deliberative governance by strengthening democratic quality through dialogue oriented toward the common good rather than political competition.

The principle of *al-'adl* introduces a dimension that distinguishes Islamic political theology from forms of democracy that are concerned solely with procedural arrangements. In Islam, justice extends beyond the enforcement of the rule of law; it constitutes the primary objective of state governance and must be realized through policies that safeguard the rights of all citizens. A democracy that emphasizes electoral procedures while neglecting substantive justice risks losing its moral legitimacy. Through the concept of *public reason*, Rawls (1997) argued that public policies should be grounded in reasons acceptable to all members of a pluralistic society. Likewise, Maurya (2026) regarded justice as a key indicator of democratic quality. Expanding upon this perspective, the present study argues that *al-'adl* broadens the meaning of justice beyond legal compliance by emphasizing the state's responsibility to uphold human dignity, equality, and the comprehensive protection of citizens' rights.

The orientation of *maṣlaḥah* demonstrates that the ultimate objective of the state in Islam is not the preservation of political power but the realization of sustainable public welfare. This perspective rejects political practices driven solely by elite interests because they contradict the fundamental objectives of the *Sharī'a*. A successful state is therefore not one that maintains control through political authority but one that promotes welfare, stability, and the protection of the public interest. Tibi (2008) explained that democracy in Muslim societies can flourish when Islamic values are translated into political governance that respects pluralism and the common good. In contrast to Riza and Bilhaq (2025), who treated *maṣlaḥah* primarily as a concept of Islamic jurisprudence, this study argues that *maṣlaḥah* should be understood as a strategic orientation for civilizational development that links political legitimacy with sustainable social welfare.

Civilizational development cannot be achieved without social cohesion capable of uniting diversity within a shared national community. In this regard, the concept of *ukhuwwah* occupies a strategic position because it fosters social solidarity that transcends religious, ethnic, and political differences. Such social cohesion constitutes a prerequisite for a stable and inclusive democracy. Through the concept of *Civil Islam*, Hefner (2000) demonstrated that the Indonesian experience illustrates how Islamic values can strengthen civil society, expand public participation, and support democratization. These findings reinforce those of Prayitno (2025), who identified Islamic civil society organizations as important actors in democratic development. Going beyond this perspective, the present study argues that *ukhuwwah* should be understood as a form of social capital that not only strengthens democracy but also serves as the foundation for the development of a pluralistic and civilized Indonesian society.

The implications of Islamic political theology for democracy demonstrate that religion–state relations cannot be reduced to the dichotomy between an Islamic state and a secular state. Such a dichotomy obscures the more fundamental question of how theological values can be translated into political practices that promote justice, accountability, participation, and the public good. By synthesizing the values of *amānah*, *shūrā*, *al-'adl*, *maṣlahah*, and *ukhuwwah* with the principles of modern democracy, this study proposes a conceptual framework that positions Islamic political theology as the ethical foundation of Indonesian civilizational development. Azra (2006) argued that Indonesia's democratic experience demonstrates Islam's capacity to adapt to modern political systems without compromising its normative identity. This finding reinforces the argument that the success of democracy is determined not by the formal institutionalization of religion within the state but by the successful internalization of Islamic values into governance and public life. Accordingly, democracy should not be viewed as being in opposition to Islam; rather, it should be reconstructed as a political mechanism that derives its legitimacy from its ability to realize the universal values of Islam in national and civic life.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that religion–state relations from the perspective of Islamic political theology cannot be understood through the dichotomy between an Islamic state and a secular state but should instead be viewed through the construction of theological values that shape the orientation of political authority. Through a conceptual reconstruction based on theological foundations, political principles, and state objectives, this study argues that *tawhīd*, *amānah*, *shūrā*, *al-'adl*, *maṣlahah*, and *ukhuwwah* constitute the ethical foundations with direct implications for democracy and the development of Indonesian civilization. These values are transformed into the democratic principles of accountability, participation, the rule of law, the public

interest, and social cohesion, thereby strengthening governance. Accordingly, democracy, from the perspective of Islamic political theology, should not be regarded as a system that conflicts with religion but as a political mechanism that derives its legitimacy from its capacity to realize the universal values of Islam within national and civic life.

The principal contribution of this study lies in the development of a conceptual framework that links Islamic political theology with democratic principles and their implications for the development of Indonesian civilization through the conceptual reconstruction presented in Figure 1 and Table 1. This framework enriches the discourse on religion–state relations by positioning democracy as a space for the actualization of theological values rather than merely an arena of political competition. Nevertheless, this study remains conceptual in nature and is based on library research; therefore, it has not examined the implementation of the proposed framework within democratic practice in Indonesia. Future research is therefore encouraged to adopt empirical approaches, such as case studies, comparative research, or mixed methods, to investigate how the values of Islamic political theology are implemented in public policy, governance, and democratic practices across different social and institutional contexts in Indonesia.

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