The Concept of Leader and Leadership in the Qur'an: A Thematic Interpretation Study

Mardian Idris Harahap*[1], Rusiana[2], Bunga Fizria[3], Hafiizhah Mumtaz[4], Nurhalimah[5], Nur Khomisah Hasibuan[6]

[1]mardianidris@uinsu.ac.id, [2]rusianahafizah570@gmail.com, [3]bngafzra10@gmail.com.
[4]Hafiizhahmumtaz1601@gmail.com [5] nurh15521@gmail.com, [6]nurkhomisah142@gmail.com
[123456]Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The Qur'an as the primary source of Islamic teachings not only provides guidance on worship and creed but also establishes fundamental principles governing social, political, and governmental life. One of the central themes emphasized in the Qur'an is leadership (*imāmah*), which is understood not merely as political authority but as a moral and spiritual mandate that entails accountability before both society and Allah. This study aims to analyze the concept of leaders and leadership in the Qur'an through a thematic interpretation approach. Employing qualitative library research, data were collected from classical and contemporary Qur'anic commentaries, scholarly books, and reputable journal articles relevant to Islamic leadership. The study focuses on key Qur'anic leadership terminologies such as *khalīfah*, *imāmah*, and *ulū al-amr*, as well as the ethical principles underlying leadership, including faith, justice, trustworthiness, deliberation (*shūrā*), and responsibility. The findings reveal that Qur'anic leadership is characterized by moral integrity, justice, and accountability, with obedience to leaders being conditional upon their adherence to divine values. The Qur'an positions leaders as role models tasked with safeguarding public welfare and upholding justice. This study concludes that revitalizing Qur'anic leadership principles is essential for addressing contemporary leadership crises and for building governance systems that are ethical, trustworthy, and oriented toward societal welfare.

Keywords: **Qur'anic Leadership; Islamic Governance; Thematic Interpretation**

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an as the main source of Islamic teachings not only contains guidance for worship and creed, but also contains fundamental principles that govern social, political, and governmental life. One of the central concepts that gets serious attention in the Qur'an is leadership (*Imam*). Leadership in the perspective of Islam is not solely understood as political power or formal authority, but as a moral and spiritual mandate that demands accountability not only to humans, but also to Allah SWT. This is in line with the view that (Mawardi, 2020) which affirms that leadership in Islam aims to maintain religion and regulate world affairs based on sharia values.

Theoretically, the concept of Islamic leadership is rooted in Qur'anic values such as *Trust*, *'adl* (justice), *Shurā* (deliberation), and *Mas'uliyyah* (*Responsibilities*). (Khaldun et al., 2005) in *Muqaddimah* emphasizing that power that is not based on morality and justice will lead to social and political destruction. Meanwhile, (Shihab, 1996) explains that the Qur'an positions leaders as an example (*Uswah Hasanah*) that must reflect moral integrity in every policy and action. Thus, leadership in Islam is ethical, participatory, and oriented towards the benefit of the ummah (*maṣlaḥah 'āmmah*). Previous research has shown that the application of Qur'anic leadership values has a positive correlation with the creation of good governance. Study by (Olifiansyah et al., 2020) found that the principles of justice and trust in Islamic leadership have a significant effect on public trust and social stability.

Other research by (Nurhayati & Mahmudi, 2024) reveals that the concept *Shurā* in the Qur'an can be the basis for the development of a democratic and inclusive system of government in Muslim countries. In addition, research by (A. N. Rochim & Muttaqien, 2025) asserts that leadership crises in contemporary Muslim societies are often caused by the neglect of Qur'anic ethical values in the practice of government. In the current context, many Muslim countries and societies face serious challenges in realizing leadership based on Qur'anic values. The phenomenon of moral crisis, abuse of power, and social inequality shows that there is a gap between the ideals of Qur'anic leadership and the reality of government practices. Therefore, the study of leadership and governance from the perspective of the Qur'an becomes very relevant and urgent. This research is expected to be able to re-explore the values of Qur'anic leadership as a normative and practical framework in building a government system that has integrity, fairness, trust, and is oriented towards the welfare of the people.

METHOD

The design of this research is a literature research, literature review, which is a research method whose purpose is to collect and extract the essence of previous research (Sugiyono, 2022). This type of research looks at various theories and concepts based on existing literature, as well as explanations of a discovery so that it can be used as an example of a research study in compiling or discussing problems related to research topics (Fayrus & Slamet, 2022).

The author collects data or literature material from articles or journals so that it can be used as a strong basis in content or discussion. Google Scholar is a database used, and the subjects are leaders, leadership and Qur'anic verses about leadership (Arianto, 2024). The results of this research are expected to contribute to explaining the concept of leadership and leadership in the Qur'an chronologically and thematically.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
THE CONCEPT OF LEADER AND LEADERSHIP IN THE QUR'AN: A THEMATIC INTERPRETATION STUDY

Leader comes from the word "lead" (in English) meaning to guide and guide. Thus, in it there are two parties involved, namely the "led" and the "leading". After adding the prefix "pe" to "leader" (in English, *leader*) means the person who leads or who guides. Etymologically, a leader is a person who is able to influence and persuade other parties to take actions to achieve common goals, so that the person concerned becomes the beginning of the structure and center of the group process. Then terminologically, many definitions of leaders were found.

Management experts usually define leaders according to their personal views, and the aspects of the phenomenon of best interest to the expert in question. So Stogdil concluded

that "*there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attemptted to define the concept*" (The definition of leadership is in accordance with and as much as the views of each one that defines it(A. Rochim & Muttaqien, 2025). Despite the fact that the world has undergone many transformations since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, but in the perspective of the Qur'an, the term leader can refer to the terms *caliph, imamah* and *ulu al-Amr*.

a. *Caliph*

وَاِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓىِٕكَةِ اِنِّيْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةًۗ قَالُوْٓا اَتَجْعَلُ فِيْهَا مَنْ يُّفْسِدُ فِيْهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَۚ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَۗ قَالَ اِنِّيْٓ اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Translation: *(Remember) when your Lord said to the angels, "I am going to make a caliph on earth." They said, "Do you want to make the one who destroys and sheds blood there, while we praise You and sanctify Your name?" He said, "Surely I know what you do not know."* (QS. Al-Baqarah: 30)

The term caliph is expressed, among others, in QS. al-Baqarah (2): 30 as an affirmation of Allah swt about the creation of man to become a leader. The plural form of the term caliph is *khalaif* as in QS. Fāthir (35): 39. Etymologically, the word caliph is rooted in the letters *kha, lam,* and *fa'*, and has three main meanings, namely replacing, backward, and changing. With this meaning, the verb *khalafa-yakhlufu khalifah* is used in the sense that the caliph is the one who replaces the position of the Prophet (saw) as a leader, the caliph is the leader behind (after) the Prophet saw, the caliph is a person who is able to bring about changes to be more advanced and prosperous the person he leads. In another sense terminology, the caliph is the supreme leader in the Islamic world who replaces the position of the Prophet (saw) in managing the religion and government of Islam.

The first four caliphs, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, each played a role in resolving various religious problems in their time, and played a role in expanding the territory of Islamic rule. They also have a high spiritual role as seen from their efforts when serving as caliphs. Hence they received honorary degrees *Khalifah al-Rasyidun* (upright caliph). Some Muslim leaders after them, still used the title of caliph.(Dan & Dalam, 1999)

b. *Imamah*

The Arabic term Imamah comes from the word *Priest*. The term imam was initially more synonymous with the imam of prayer (prayer leader). Imam is also defined as a person who follows in his footsteps and puts his affairs first. In the Qur'an, the term imam (singular form) is used 7 times. While the word *A'immah* (plural) is mentioned 5 times with variations in the meaning of something with its context. These various meanings are, meaning public roads (QS. Yasin: 12), guidelines (QS. Hud: 7), follow (QS al-Furqan: 74), meaning guidance (QS. Al-Ahqaf: 12). And there are many more meanings that refer to the context of the leader who is followed by his people, up to QS. Al-isra': 71 as a picture of leaders who are accountable for their deeds before God. This concept of thinking about the imamah is more developed among the Shi'a than among the Sunni.(Dahlan, 2022) For Sunnis and Shiites, there is a different understanding of this term.

In the Sunni world the Imamah is indistinguishable from the caliph. Meanwhile, the context of Shia Imamah is not only in the connotation of government institutions, but includes all aspects. Because for the Shia Imamah includes everything not only in the political realm, but religion in a complex understanding. An Imam must also be from those of the ahl bait (descendants of Ali bin Abi Talib). There are at least three conditions that a priest must have: first, to be chosen and appointed by Allah and not chosen by the general public, second, to have knowledge that includes all knowledge obtained in accordance with God, third, ma'shum (awakening) from all errors, mistakes and sins. (At-tahfizh et al., 2021)

c. *Ulu al-Amr*

Ulul amri in Arabic is a phrase consisting of two words, namely *grow* and *Al-Amri* When Put Together to Read *Ulu Al-Amri* or *From Al-Amri* (Dan & Dalam, 1999). The first means owner, and the second means "the command, the guidance of doing something, and the condition or dealing". Paying attention to the second word pattern, the word is the mashdar form of the verb *amara-ya'muru* (ordering or demanding that something be done).

From this, the word ulu al-amr is translated as *"owner of affairs"* and *"owner of power"* or *"right to give orders"*. These two meanings are in line, because whoever has the right to give orders means that he also has the power to regulate affairs in controlling the situation. It is this kind of understanding, so ulu al-amr is presented in the sense of "leader". Fakhruddin al-Razi in his commentary noted that there are four opinions on the meaning of ulu al-amr, namely (1) *al-khulafa al-rasyidun*; (2) the leader of the war (*sariyyah*); (3) scholars who give fatwas in sharia law and teach people about religion (Islam); (4) Imams who are righteous. Meanwhile, Ibn Katsir in his commentary concluded that ulu al-amr is, according to his zhahir, a scholar. Meanwhile, in general, ulu al-amr is umara and ulama.

The definition of a leader with the term ulu al-mar above, is broader because it includes every person who is in control of the affairs of life, big or small, such as the head of the state, or the leader of the family, and even the leader himself is also included in it. The above description can be affirmed that Islamic leadership is a process or ability of people to direct and motivate the behavior of others, and there is an effort to cooperate in accordance with the Qur'an and hadith to achieve common desired goals. Leaders and leadership in Islam have references *Naqliyah*, meaning that there are Qur'anic cues that reinforce the need and importance of leadership in the social system. In this leadership there are principles that must be done. The Qur'an states about the basic principles of leadership such as trust and justice as implied in the interpretation of QS. an-Nisa verse 58 and its reasonableness(Madaniyah & Leadership, 2019) namely QS. An-Nisa verse 59.

Leadership (*al-imāmah or al-riyāsah*) in the perspective of Islam is a great mandate that must be carried out with justice and responsibility. The Qur'an itself contains various principles that are the ethical and moral foundation of leadership. One of them is the command to fulfill the mandate and establish the law justly as stated in Surah An-Nisa verses 58–59. (Hanif & Lubis, 2025)

اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ اَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْاَمٰنٰتِ اِلٰٓى اَهْلِهَاۙ وَاِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ اَنْ تَحْكُمُوْا بِالْعَدْلِۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُمْ بِهٖۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ كَانَ سَمِيْعًاۢ بَصِيْرًا ⁤ يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْٓا اَطِيْعُوا اللّٰهَ وَاَطِيْعُوا الرَّسُوْلَ وَاُولِى الْاَمْرِ مِنْكُمْۚ فَاِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِيْ شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوْهُ اِلَى اللّٰهِ وَالرَّسُوْلِ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُوْنَ بِاللّٰهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْاٰخِرِۗ ذٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَّاَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيْلًا ⁤

Translation:

58. *Indeed, Allah has commanded you to entrust its owner. When you establish the law among men, you shall establish it justly. Indeed, Allah has given you the best teaching. Indeed, Allah is All-Hearing and All-Seeing.*

59. *O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) and the ululamri (rulers) among you. If you have a difference of opinion about something, return it to Allah (the Qur'an) and the Messenger (his sunnah) if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is better (for you) and better as a result (in this world and in the Hereafter).*

This verse is part of Surah an-Nisa which in the previous verses explains the demand for humans to do good and fair to women and orphans in terms of inheritance, law, property, way of communication, and behavior. As well as promises and threats, and guidance for the existence of law in society. While the verse after that talks about ulil amri and obedience to the leader (QS. an-Nisa: 59). According to Ibn Kathir, Surah An-Nisa Verse 58 contains a

command to uphold justice in the rule of law among humans. As narrated by Muhammad bin Ka'ab, Zaid bin Aslam, and Sahru bin Jaushib, this verse is related to *umara'* (ruler) to treat the law fairly.

So there are two lessons that Allah commands in this verse, namely to convey the mandate to those who have the right to receive it and to do justice to fellow humans. Therefore, let no man betray him, for Allah hears all words and sees all deeds. As for the asbab al-nuzul of this verse according to the narration of Ibn Marduwaih from the Caliph of Salih from Ibn Abbas, namely: After the city of Mecca fell into the hands of the Muslims in the Fathu of Makkah, the Prophet called Uthman bin Talhah to ask for the key to the Kaaba. Abbas stood up and said: "O Messenger of Allah, by Allah, hand over the keys of the Kaaba to me, so that I may share the position that I have been holding as the holder of irrigation (*siqayah*)".

Hearing these words, Uthman bin Talhah withdrew his hand, did not hand the key to the Prophet PBUH, then the Messenger said: "This is the mandate from Allah". Then the Prophet stood up to open the door of the Kaaba and then continued to go out to perform tawaf in Baitullah. In connection with that, the angel Gabriel descended with a command from Allah SWT to return the key to Uthman bin Talhah. The Prophet immediately carried out the command of Allah SWT after the angel Jibril read the 58th verse as a reinforcement of the command.(Madaniyah & Leadership, 2019)

In Surah an-Nisa' verse 59 Ibn Kathir interprets that in relation to the words of Allah above, "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey (his) Messenger, and ulil amri among you" al-Bukharidari Ibn Abbas, he said, "This verse was revealed in connection with Abdullah bin Hudzaifah bin Qais bin Adi when he was sent by the Prophet PBUH in an army." Similarly, according to the history of the congregation, except for Ibn Majah. Meanwhile, according to Shaykh Abdurrahman bin Nashir as-Sa'di in *Tafsir al-Karim ar-Rahman fi Tafsir Kalam al-Mannan.* That Allah commands to obey Him and obey His Messenger, that is, by carrying out the commands of both those who are obligatory and sunnah and stay away from the prohibitions of both.

Allah also commands to obey the leaders, they are the ones who hold power over mankind, namely the rulers, the judges, and the fatwa (mufti), indeed there will be no good in the affairs of religion and the human world except by obeying and submitting to them, as an act of obedience to Allah and hoping for what is beside Him. but on the condition that if they do not command the disobedience of Allah, and if they command the disobedience of Allah, then they do not obey the creatures in disobedience to Allah, and this may be the secret of the omission of the verb "obedience" in the command to obey them and its mention together with obedience to the Messenger, for indeed the Messenger does not command except obedience to Allah. and whoever obeys him has obeyed Allah, as for the leaders, then the condition of obedience to them is that what is commanded is not disobedience.(Jamal & Kadarusman Kadarusman, 2014) The criteria of a leader can be understood through the verses of the Qur'an based on the approach of tafsir maudhu'iy. The criteria are as follows.(Dan & Dalam, 1999)

a. Faith

The criteria of faith are understood from QS. al-Anbiyā' (21): 73 which uses the term الأئمة and QS. Stuart (35): 39 and QS. al-Hadīd (57): 7 which uses the derivation of the term خليفة. Strictly after the word khalā'if in QS. Fātir (35): 39 followed by an explanation of the threat of disbelief. If it is related to the issue of the criteria for leaders, it is clear that an infidel should not be appointed as a leader. This paganism is the antithesis of faith which means that faith alone is the criterion and at the same time the main condition of a leader. This contains a

guideline, so that people should not choose unbelieving leaders, but instead they should choose leaders who are believers

b. Fair and Trustworthy

One of the main characteristics of an ideal leader in Islam is justice. The Quran repeatedly emphasizes the importance of justice in leadership.(Arifin, 2023) For example, in QS. Shād (38): 26. As a good leader, he must also have the nature of trust, and this is called along with the term fair in QS. al-Nisā (4):58 which has been quoted above. Amanah in Al-Maragi's view is a responsibility that is divided into three, namely (1) man's responsibility to God, (2) man's responsibility to his fellow man, and (3) man's responsibility to himself.

c. Prophet

Rasuliy means having a personality like the Apostle of Allah, which is the criteria for a leader who meets the requirements like the Apostle of Allah in carrying out leadership.

As for the other criteria for a leader according to the provisions of the Qur'an, they are very broad in addition to what has been stated earlier. Other criteria in question for example*Siddīq, Sabar, Fathanah,* and *tablīgh*. Meanwhile, according to the Sunnah, the hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) is اَلْأَئِمَّةُ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ (*The leader was from the tribe of Quraysh*). The Quraysh tribe in the time of the Prophet (saw) was highly respected and respected, strong, insightful, influential and had a strong mass. This means that the criteria for a leader must be authoritative, physically and spiritually healthy, not physically disabled, knowledgeable, have solidarity, and have a great influence in the midst of society.(Islam, 2018)

CONCLUSION

Leadership in Islam is a great mandate that must be carried out with full responsibility, justice, and example. The Qur'an emphasizes that the leader is the caliph on earth who is obliged to uphold the laws of Allah and protect the interests of the people. The Qur'an uses several leadership terminologies such as *caliph*, *imamah*, and *ulu al-amr* , each of which shows a leadership dimension that includes the management of human affairs, example, and obedience to divine values. The Qur'an emphasizes that the main principles of leadership are faith, justice, and trust as reflected in the Qur'an. An-Nisa vv. 58–59. A leader is required to fulfill his mandate to those who are right, establish the law fairly, and carry out his leadership in the corridor of obedience to Allah and His Messenger. Obedience to the leader is conditional, that is, as long as it does not contradict the teachings of God. In addition, the criteria for an ideal leader according to the Qur'an include the qualities of faith, justice, trustworthiness, and apostolic personality, and supported by moral and intellectual skills. Thus, leadership in accordance with the principles of the Qur'an will give birth to a just, prosperous, moral, and pleasing society of Allah SWT.

REFERENCES

Arianto, B. (2024). *Triangulasi Metoda Penelitian Kualitatif.* https://doi.org/10.70310/q81zdh33

Arifin, M. (2023). KONSEP KEPEMIMPINAN DALAM ISLAM: Karakteristik Pemimpin Ideal Menurut Al-Quran. *AKADEMIK: Jurnal Mahasiswa Humanis*, *3*(3), 151–160. https://doi.org/10.37481/jmh.v3i3.616

At-tahfizh, J., Ilmu, J., & Al-qur, I. (2021). *Jurnal AT-TAHFIZH. 2*(02), 1–16.

Dahlan, U. A. (2022). *1 , 2 , 3 . 4. 1*(2), 45–47.

Dan, P., & Dalam, K. (1999). *Pemimpin dan kepemimpinan dalam al-qur'an*. 29–35.

Fayrus, & Slamet, A. (2022). *Model Penelitian Pengembangan (R n D)*.

Hanif, M., & Lubis, A. (2025). *Jurnal Studi Islam Indonesia (JSII) Konsep Kepemimpinan dalam Surah An-Nisa Ayat 58-59 Pada Tafsir Al Kasysyaf Karya Al-Zamakhsyari. 3*(1), 177–186.

Islam, J. K. (2018). *AL-QALAM AL-QALAM. 10*(2), 13–28.

Jamal, K., & Kadarusman Kadarusman. (2014). Terminologi Pemimpin Dalam Alqur'an. *An -NIda*, *39*(1), 11.

Khald\=un, I., Rosenthal, F., Dawood, N. J., & Lawrence, B. B. (2005). *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Princeton University Press. https://books.google.co.id/books?id=YkH2twAACAAJ

Madaniyah, J., & Kepemimpinan, P. (2019). *PRINSIP KEPEMIMPINAN DALAM PERSPEKTIF QS. AN-NISA: 58-59 Srifariyati,Afsya Septa Nugraha 1. 9*, 58–59.

Mawardi, I. A. (2020). *Al-Ahkam As-Sulthaniyyah: Hukum-Hukum Penyelenggaraan Negara dalam Syariat Islam*. Darul Falah. https://books.google.co.id/books?id=C9UJEAAAQBAJ

Nurhayati, N., & Mahmudi. (2024). Tafsir Al-Qur'an dan Pemahaman tentang Kepemimpinan: Integrasi Nilai-Nilai Islam dalam Konteks Kontemporer. *Reslaj: Religion Education Social Laa Roiba Journal*, *6*. https://doi.org/10.47467/reslaj.v6i5.1220

Olifiansyah, M., Hidayat, W., Dianying, B., & Dzulfiqar, M. (2020). Kepemimpinan dalam Perspektif Islam. *EL-HIKMAH: Jurnal Kajian Dan Penelitian Pendidikan Islam*, *14*, 98–111. https://doi.org/10.20414/elhikmah.v14i1.2123

Rochim, A., & Muttaqien, M. (2025). Keadilan, Amanah, dan Musyawarah: Integrasi Nilai Kepemimpinan Islam dalam Manajemen Pendidikan Modern. *Jurnal Visi Manajemen*, *11*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.56910/jvm.v11i2.513

Rochim, A. N., & Muttaqien, M. I. (2025). *Keadilan , Amanah , dan Musyawarah : Integrasi Nilai Kepemimpinan Islam dalam Manajemen Pendidikan Modern* ب ساْ ىفُ حاَ وْ عَ كَ نْ لِ خَّ لِ ضْ رَّ نْ الْ عجِ ً ةَ ف يْ ْ لْ اَ مِ رَ كِ يَ ف ى ىَ و اُ ه واَ ه لاَ اَّ ن رِ اُ دواَ د يِ ْ كَ لاِ حَ ق اللْ بِ ه ّ َ لِ س) *A llah berfirman ,) " Wahai Daud , sesungguhnya Kami menjadikanmu khalifah. 11*(2).

Shihab, M. Q. (1996). *Wawasan Al-Quran: Tafsir Tematik atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat*. Mizan. https://books.google.co.id/books?id=TN5t2bXmqZ4C

Sugiyono. (2022). Metode Penelitian Kualitatif (Untuk penelitian yang bersifat: eksploratif, enterpretif, interaktif dan konstruktif). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, 5. http://belajarpsikologi.com/metode-penelitian-kualitatif/