



The Intersection of Religion and Politics: A Systematic Literature Review

Saipul Bahri*

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences
Universitas Sumatera Utara

Kota Medan, Sumatera Utara 20155, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: saipulbahri@usu.ac.id

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6056-4786>

Anri Naldi

Faculty of Islamic Studies

Universitas Medan Area

Kabupaten Deli Serdang, Sumatera Utara 20223, Indonesia

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5955-3107>

Nazil Mumtaz al-Mujtahid

Faculty of Da'wah and Communication Sciences

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

Kabupaten Deli Serdang, Sumatera Utara 20371, Indonesia

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1615-5106>

Rahmansyah Fadlul Al Karim Rambe

Faculty of Law and Sharia

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

Kota Medan, Sumatera Utara 20371, Indonesia

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7894-7017>

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Abstract

This article aims to analyse the complex relationship between religion and politics by exploring collective identities in an increasingly polarised global context. The methodology used is qualitative, with a systematic literature review approach. Data collection techniques included a literature review, utilising more than a thousand previous studies related to politics and religion, as well as secondary data sources, including books, scholarly articles, and reportage. Data analysis involved data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results revealed that the interaction between religion and politics is often symbiotic, where religion can strengthen political legitimacy. Conversely, politics can intensify the integration or marginalisation of religion in society. In the context of Qur'anic literature, analyses show that this sacred text provides relevant guidance for political thought and practice in Muslim societies, putting forward principles such as justice, consultation and the protection of human rights. Furthermore, in understanding the characteristics and objectives of Siyasa (politics) in the Qur'an, it is found that Islamic shari'a directs fair and effective governance, strengthening social relations and justice. This research provides important insights for policymakers and religious leaders to formulate strategies that promote cooperation, tolerance and peace among different religious and political groups.

Keywords: Intersection, Religion, Politics, Systematic, Literature Review

Introduction



Politics and religion often overlap, creating complexity in analysing their influence on people's political choices. In the United States, 47% of Catholic voters supported the Democratic Party. In comparison, 46% supported the Republican Party, with 59% of white Catholics voting for Trump and 67% of Hispanic Catholics supporting Clinton in the 2016 presidential election (Smith, 2020). In Indonesia, religion is also a critical factor in political choice (Widi, 2022). This research seeks to systematically dissect this phenomenon, revealing that intermingling religion and politics often makes it difficult to separate the two in everyday political practice. Religion and politics are two entities that have defined social structures and governance for centuries. Both have become critical research topics in an increasingly globalised and multicultural world (Birnbaum, 2023). Politics and religion are often intertwined in determining public policies and social norms, and both also shape individual and group identities. In many cases, religion and politics provide the foundation for forming ideologies and policies that directly impact social dynamics and interactions between groups (Schnabel, 2020). These interactions, which are sometimes symbiotic and in other situations can be conflictual, require in-depth study to reveal the mechanisms of their influence on society.

In the current era, the role of religion in the political arena affects not only elections and domestic policies but also international relations and global strategies. One example is the influence of religious dynamics in the Middle East, where the Sunni-Shiite split between Saudi Arabia and Iran influenced their foreign policies and led to proxy conflicts in countries such as Yemen and Syria, thus impacting global geopolitical strategies (Benito et al., 2022; Tsourapas, 2021). Religious considerations can strengthen transnational solidarity as well as fuelling conflict and division. Conversely, politics can intensify religious integration in society or result in the marginalisation of certain religious groups, depending on the political context and the agenda leaders embrace. Therefore, it is essential to understand how these two domains influence each other in various political and religious scenarios.

Studies focusing on the intersection of religion and politics often find that religion can strengthen political legitimacy (Azizah, 2023). In many societies, leaders who claim divine endorsement or pursue policies aligned with specific religious values tend to gain more excellent public support. This suggests that religion is often used as a political tool to mobilise supporters or marginalise opponents. Therefore, a thorough analysis of the literature on the role of religion in politics can provide essential insights into effective political strategies and their consequences for social justice and inclusion.

However, the potential for religion to fuel political conflict is also significant, especially in areas of high religious diversity or where religion has long been associated with national identity (Borup, 2020; Morrissey, 2020; Nelwan, 2022). In many regions, political actors often exploit tensions between religious groups to strengthen their power base, fuel conflict and manipulate public opinion. An in-depth literature review on this topic can reveal how religion promotes exclusivity to the detriment and hindrance of democracy and social integration. Moreover, in examining the interaction between religion and politics, it is essential to consider the diversity of religious interpretations and practices in various political contexts. Religion is often interpreted and adapted to meet political needs, which can differ significantly from place to place. Therefore, systematic and comprehensive research needs to accommodate this diversity to provide a more holistic and inclusive analysis of the influence of religion in politics.

The aim of this research is to uncover and analyse how religion and politics influence each other in shaping contemporary social and political dynamics, as well as offer insights for strategies that promote cooperation, tolerance and peace among different religious and political groups. The urgency of this research lies in the ability to identify and understand how these two domains influence each other in shaping contemporary social and political dynamics. In the context of globalisation and increasing ideological polarisation, this study is crucial to explore how religious values and political policies can contribute to or hinder inclusive and democratic social development processes.



Through this deeper understanding, the study can provide important insights for policymakers and religious leaders in directing strategies that promote cooperation, tolerance and peace among different religious and political groups and offer practical solutions to address the challenges that arise from these interactions.

Literature Review

Research on the intersection of religion and politics is also necessary to understand its influence on public policy and political decision-making at the national and global levels (Ambrosius, 2015; Septiadi, 2023). By reviewing related literature, researchers can discover how religious norms are embedded in public policy and vice versa and how politics can influence religious interpretations and practices. This approach adds academic insight and assists policymakers and practitioners in formulating strategies that consider these two dimensions in governance and public life.

The previous research offers profound insights into the interaction between religion and politics from various regional and theoretical perspectives. First, Kratochvíl (2023) examines the global interaction between religion and politics, emphasising the need to broaden the scope of theory to accommodate the global influence of religion on politics. Smith and Boas (2023), investigating the relationship between religion and sexual politics in Latin America, reveal how religious identity influences political views on issues of sexuality. This aspect is less discussed in other studies. Tinambunan (2023) explores the relationship between religion and politics in the context of Indonesian democracy, emphasising how religion influences politics in an emerging democratic context.

Zrinščak (2022), meanwhile, discusses methodological challenges in the social scientific study of religion and politics in Central and Eastern Europe, highlighting regional specificities in religio-political interactions. Compared to previous studies, this article takes a broader approach by integrating secularisation theory and rational choice theory to analyse the interaction of religion and politics globally. While Kratochvíl focuses on theoretical frameworks without specific empirical engagement, this article attempts to apply and test these theories in various concrete political and religious contexts. In contrast to Smith and Boas, who limit the study to the politics of sexuality, or Tinambunan, who is limited to the Indonesian context, as well as Zrinščak, who focuses on methodology, this article seeks to combine theoretical and empirical analyses to offer a comprehensive perspective on how religion and politics influence each other in various aspects and contexts, providing a more dynamic and multifaceted understanding of the complexities involved.

Method

This article uses a qualitative method with a literature review approach. The data collection technique used in this research was a literature study with an intense literature review (Dekkers et al., 2022; Flick, 2022). In literature studies, researchers compile and evaluate existing information, identify knowledge gaps, and provide the context for future research (Culler, 2023; Devadas Pillai, 2019; Hermans, 2014). Primary data sources in this study are books of tafsir (elucidating and explaining the commentary for a clear understanding and conviction of God's will according to Islam) and 1,000 previous studies on da'wah (inviting people to Islam) messages.

At the same time, the secondary data in this article comprised of books, previous scientific articles and reportage. In this research, data analysis involved data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2020). This process helped identify and understand patterns in the collected data. Data validity testing was conducted through source triangulation, verifying results by comparing information from various sources, such as

commentaries and previous research, increasing the reliability and validity of research findings (Flick, 2020).

Results and Discussion

Politics and Religion in Qur'anic Literature

In exploring the relationship between politics and religion in Qur'ānic literature, we are confronted with historically and theologically intertwined aspects. The Qur'ān is not only a sacred text for Muslims but also a source of law and a guide to life that includes political aspects. In this section, we will study how Qur'ānic verses direct political thought and practice and the role of religion in shaping governance and leadership in the context of Muslim societies. This analysis aims to understand better how Islamic principles are applied to political life and how this is reflected in literature and everyday practice. The Qur'an provides a relevant level in the context of politics. Some of the words or terms that appear in Islamic studies on politics are *Siyasah*. Although the Qur'anic verses do not specifically use the term *Siyasah*, several verses deal with politics. In Q.S. al-Ma'idah verse 44 Allah says:

“Indeed We have sent down the Torah. In it are guidance and light. With it, the prophets, who surrendered themselves (to Allah), gave judgment on the matter of the Jews. Likewise, their rabbis and scholars (also give judgment), because they are commanded (by Allah to), guard the book of Allah and witness it. Therefore, fear not men, (but) fear Me. Do not exchange My verses for a cheap price. Whoever does not judge according to what Allah has revealed is a disbeliever”.

Tafsir by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and Zamakhshari on Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:44): Al-Razi discusses how the Torah guided the prophets in judging the Jews, emphasising the importance of ruling according to God's revelation (Al-Razi, 2012). Zamakhshari adds that ruling by God's law is the key to achieving social justice and harmony (Al-Zamakhshari, 1995).

Then, Q.S. al-Baqarah verse 30 states the political context in defending the state's rights. Allah says as follows:

“Remember when your Lord said to the Angels: 'Indeed I want to make a caliph on earth'. They said: 'Why do you want to make one who will make mischief and shed blood on the earth while we praise and sanctify you?' God said: 'I know what you do not know'”.

Tafsir by Al-Maraghi and Jalalayn on Surah Al-Baqarah (2:30): Al-Maraghi elaborates on how God chose human beings as caliphs on earth, who bear the great responsibility of maintaining order and justice (Maraghi, 1910). Jalalayn comments on how the angels were initially concerned about the potential for corruption and chaos, but Allah wisely confirmed His more excellent knowledge (As-Suyuthi & Al-Mahally, 2015). On the other hand, in Q.S. al-Baqarah verses 190-193, Allah says as follows:

“And fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not exceed the limits. Verily, Allah loves not those who transgress the limits. And slay them wherever you find them, and drive them out from where they drove you out (Mecca); fitnah is more cruel than murder. And do not fight them in the Sacred Mosque, unless they fight you there. If they fight you there, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers. But if they cease (from fighting), then surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. And fight them until there is no more fitnah and (until) religion is for Allah alone. If they cease, then there is no enmity except against the wrongdoers”.

Tafsir by Thabatabai and Ibn Kathir on Surah Al-Baqarah (2:190-193): Thabatabai explains how these verses command Muslims to act in self-defence, but with an explicit restriction not to go beyond the limits (Thabathaba'i, 1991). Ibn Katsir emphasises that the command to fight is in the context of defence and against oppression, maintaining the principles of justice and not committing aggression (Katsir, 2018).



The concept of politics in Islam, or *Siyasah*, is a system governed by values and laws derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. In the Islamic view, politics is not only a tool to manage the affairs of the state but also a means to realise justice, welfare and a moral order that is in harmony with Islamic teachings. Hence, *Siyasah* in Islam involves a complex interplay of law, ethics, and governance practices aimed at achieving the *Maslahat* (sound) of the people.

Within the Islamic framework, power and authority are considered a trust (responsibility) that must be exercised by Islamic law. Leaders in Islam must be just, trustworthy and competent in leading their people. Leaders must uphold the principle of justice as stated in Surah An-Nisa (4:58), which emphasises the importance of giving the mandate to the rightful person and judging people fairly. Specifically, in this verse, Allah says:

“Indeed, Allah has enjoined you to deliver the trust to those who are entitled to it, and when you make judgement among men, you should do so with justice. Indeed, Allah is the best of those who instruct you.

Shihab (2015) emphasises that Allah commands the delivery of trust to those entitled to it and the establishment of laws with justice among people. This fundamental principle in Islam reflects how every action and decision should be based on justice and integrity. The deliberation (consultation) concept also occupies an important position in Islamic politics. It is based on Surah Ash-Shura (42:38), which indicates that community affairs should be decided through discussion and consensus. Deliberation aims to obtain the most equitable and practical solutions, respect the opinions of every community member, and reinforce the principles of togetherness and transparency in decision-making. In this verse, Allah says as follows:

“And (for) those who accept (obey) the call of their Lord and establish prayer, while their affairs (are) decided by deliberation between them; and they spend some of the sustenance We give them”.

This verse in Hamka's tafsir highlights the importance of deliberation in decision-making as a manifestation of the principle of democracy in Islam (Hamka, 2012). Al-Muyassar by Aidh Al-Qarni also underlines that consultation in important matters shows wisdom and avoids tyranny (Al-Qarni, 2008).

The application of *Siyasah* in Islam also pays attention to relations with non-Muslims. The Qur'an calls for a just and kind attitude to those who are not hostile to Muslims in matters of religion or do not expel them from their homeland, as stated in Surah Al-Mumtahanah (60:8-9). This shows the importance of cooperation and peaceful coexistence with different religious and ethnic groups within a state.

Overall, politics in Islam emphasises the importance of integrity, accountability, and public service. Every political action and policy follows legal principles and touches on deep spiritual and moral aspects, leading to the welfare and harmony of mankind in accordance with Islamic guidance.

Characteristics and Objectives of *Siyasah* in the Qur'an

Understanding the characteristics and objectives of *Siyasah* (politics) in the Qur'an reveals a deep understanding of how Islam sees the role and function of government and community governance. The Qur'an, as the holy book of Muslims, directs worship and personal ethics and prescribes the basic principles of exercising power and administration.

Characteristics	Explanation
Based on Tawhid	All acts of government must recognise the sovereignty of God as the ultimate foundation, reflecting the concept of the oneness of God (Tawhid).
Fairness and Balance	Justice must be upheld in all aspects of life, including the administration of law, distribution of resources and opportunities.
Consultation (Shura)	Encourage consultative practices in decision-making, demonstrating the principles of democracy and public participation.
Accountability and Transparency	Leaders should be accountable and transparent in their decisions and actions, supporting clean and honest governance.
Protection of Human Rights	Human rights such as life, liberty, and property must be protected without discrimination.
People Empowerment	Orientation towards improving the quality of life, education, and economic opportunities for all.
Prevention of Injustice and Corruption	Prohibition against practices that harm individuals or society, such as abuse of power or resources.
Promoting Peace and Avoiding Conflict	Political action should promote peace and avoid conflict, maintain good relations with other countries and use war only as a defence.

Table 1. Characteristics of Politics (Siyasah) in the Qur'an (Author)

In the context of Siyasah outlined by the Qur'an, the principle of tawhid emerges as the primary foundation of every governmental action. Tawhid, or the recognition of God's oneness, guides all governmental policies and practices, so all actions and policies must reflect this principle of faith. It affirms that all power and authority come from Allah, and leaders must carry out their duties as a mandate from Him (Sahri, 2021; Yusuf et al., 2022). The Qur'an also emphasises justice and balance as essential principles in the exercise of Siyasah. Justice should manifest in all dimensions of social life, from law enforcement to resource distribution. Balance is necessary to ensure that no individual or group feels disadvantaged. This creates a harmonious environment and supports mutual growth and progress (Rosyada, 2021).

The concept of consultation or shura in the Qur'an shows the importance of community participation in decision-making (Badrus Zaman, 2019; Muslimin et al., 2020). Through this mechanism, leaders listen to the voices and inputs of various community groups, enriching the policy process with multiple perspectives and increasing police accountability. Consultation allows people to be directly involved in determining the direction and policies that affect their lives. Responsibility and transparency are essential pillars of Islamic Siyasah. Leaders must always be accountable for their decisions and actions, and there must be precise mechanisms to monitor and evaluate government actions (Assya'bani, 2019; Piraino, 2023). This transparency is essential to prevent corruption and ensure power is used for the public good, not private interests or particular groups. The protection of human rights is a clear mandate in the Qur'an. Everyone is entitled to life, liberty and personal safety, and governments must protect these rights. This protection includes not only Muslims but also minorities and people under state power, demonstrating the universality of Islamic values in justice and humanity.

Ummah empowerment is also a focus in Islamic Siyasah, which aims to uplift the lives of all members of society (Basyirah et al., 2022; Ramdayani et al., 2021). Through education, economic development, and social programmes, the government strives to provide equal opportunities for all people to thrive and contribute to the general welfare. This helps build an empowered society where everyone can reach their full potential.

According to the Qur'an, promoting peace and avoiding conflict is the essence of governance. Governments are expected to establish good relations with other countries and abstain from conflict unless it is necessary for defence (Ilhamni et al., 2022; Schvarcz & Billig, 2022). Peace

is a sought-after ideal condition, allowing societies to flourish in a stable and harmonious atmosphere. This emphasises the importance of diplomacy and dialogue in international politics and managing diversity within societies.

At this level, the author will explore how the Qur'an guides leaders and communities in realising a just and prosperous social order. This analysis will include an understanding of the role of Siyasaḥ in strengthening religious ties, maintaining social stability, and directing people towards collective welfare imbued with the values of faith and piety. The following is a tabulated description of the objectives of Siyasaḥ in the Qur'an:

No.	Purpose of Siyasaḥ in Islam	Short Description
1	Realising Justice	Ensure social, economic and political justice based on Islamic teachings.
2	Practising Islamic Law	Implementation of Islamic law in state and community governance.
3	Maintaining the Unity of the Ummah	Avoid divisions and promote solidarity and co-operation between groups.
4	Protecting Fundamental Rights	Protection of the rights to life, property, religious freedom and honour as a Qur'anic mandate.
5	Securing the Welfare of the People	Develop adequate infrastructure and provide basic needs such as health and education for all.
6	Realising Da'wah and Defence of Religion	Protection and promotion of Islamic teachings at home and abroad through ethical diplomacy and interfaith dialogue.

Table 2. The Purpose of Politics (Siyasaḥ) in the Qur'an

Within the framework of Islamic thought, Siyasaḥ, or politics, is an instrument that aims to realise social justice by the values and laws contained in Islamic law. Justice is considered the central pillar of social life, where everyone should reasonably get their rights without discrimination. Justice also includes equitable resource distribution and equal opportunities for everyone to develop their potential.

Practising Islamic law in society is one of the main objectives of Siyasaḥ in Islam. Sharia is considered a complete guideline regulating aspects of life ranging from personal worship to state governance. Implementing sharia is intended to create a harmonious society where every aspect of life rests on established ethical and moral values (Mahmood, 2011; Maliki et al., 2022).

Maintaining the unity of the ummah is another critical component of Siyasaḥ in Islam. This unity is sought through understanding and accepting the diversity within the ummah. This is important given that Islam is a religion followed by billions of people with diverse cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Unity is sought to avoid conflict and strengthen the strength of the ummah in the face of challenges. Furthermore, protecting the fundamental rights of every individual is also a priority in Islamic Siyasaḥ (Bhojani & Clarke, 2023; Noor, 2016). These protections include the right to life, freedom of religion, and the right to personal security. The protection of these fundamental rights is not only limited to Muslims but also to non-Muslims under the rule of the Islamic state.

Securing the welfare of the ummah is another equally important objective. In this context, the government is expected to implement policies that support job creation, health, education and infrastructure. The government is also expected to address poverty and inequality so that every strata of society can enjoy a decent standard of living. Delivering da'wah and defence of religion is another vital function of Siyasaḥ in Islam. Da'wah is defined as an attempt to spread the teachings of Islam through wise and compassionate means. The aim is to introduce Islamic values closer to non-Muslims and deepen Islamic understanding among Muslims themselves. This process involves interfaith dialogue and social activities to build bridges of

Discussion

Discussing the intersection of religion and politics offers an in-depth look at how these two domains interact and influence social order and policy. Religion is often regarded as the force that defines moral values, ethics and collective identity. In contrast, politics is often regarded as the arena for applying and negotiating such power in practice. In many parts of the world, religion and politics intersect and are closely intertwined, influencing policy formation and the ideological orientation of governments (Choirunnisak & Mahriadi, 2022; Miftah, 2019). This is especially important in countries where religion is explicitly integrated into the structure and function of the state, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

In this context, Durkheim's theory of secularisation presents a critical perspective on the interaction between religion and politics (Durkheim, 2023). This theory proposes that as modern societies develop, the presence and influence of religion in public and political affairs will decline. This secularisation process is claimed to result from modernisation, rationalisation and differentiation of social institutions that separate religion from formal power structures and public life. However, the reality in many countries shows that religion still plays a vital role in politics, indicating that secularisation may not be uniform or universal.

Meanwhile, Becker's rational choice theory offers another lens through which to understand this interaction (Becker, 2019). According to this theory, individuals and groups make decisions based on calculating benefits and costs to maximise personal or group gains. In the context of religion and politics, religious considerations could influence political decisions taken by individuals or groups if they believe they will bring maximum benefits or gains, both materially and non-materially. This interaction also raises the question of how religion can influence political policy. For example, in debates about law and policy, religious principles are often advocated in favour of or against specific legislation. This suggests that religion, although perhaps suppressed by secularisation in some aspects, still has significant power in shaping political agendas and social norms.

This study also highlights the tension between the concept of secularism and the reality of religious power in politics (Baker et al., 2015; Maula, 2016). Although many modern societies have adopted secular principles in their constitutions and governments, the presence and influence of religion in the public sphere remain strong. The consideration of religion in political decision-making suggests that the separation between religion and state is often more theoretical than practical.

In conjunction with secularisation and rational choice theories, it is clear that the dynamic between religion and politics is complex and multifaceted. Secularisation theory can help understand macro trends in the relationship between religion and politics, while rational choice theory provides a framework for understanding individual and group actions in this context. When used together, these two theories provide a robust tool for analysing and understanding the way religion and politics interact and shape contemporary society (Yong, 2009; Kalkan, 2023; Fauzan et al., 2024).

Conclusions

The novelty of this study lies in the integrative application of secularisation theory and rational choice theory in analysing the interaction between religion and politics, providing a new perspective to dynamics often perceived as contradictory. The analysis reveals that while secularisation theory predicts a decline in the role of religion in public affairs, religion still plays a vital role in shaping policy and political orientation in many countries. The research also demonstrates how rational choice theory can explain political behaviour influenced by calculations of benefits associated with religious identity, thus providing a broader and more



nuanced understanding of how religion and politics influence each other in diverse global scenarios. This approach challenges familiar assumptions and offers strategic insights to address the tension between secularism and the presence of religion in the public sphere, with significant implications for policymaking and socio-political practice.

The conclusions of this study confirm that the interaction between religion and politics is a complex and mutually influential relationship which challenges common assumptions surrounding the process of secularisation and the dominance of political rationality. Although secularisation theory proposes a decline in the role of religion in the public sphere, empirical reality shows that religion continues to play an essential role in shaping political policies and practices in many countries. On the other hand, rational choice theory provides insights into how faith-based benefit calculations can influence political decisions, suggesting that religion and politics are intertwined and often function synergistically to shape political decisions and social dynamics. As such, this research contributes to understanding religio-political dynamics and guides policymakers and religious leaders in formulating strategies that accommodate diversity of views and support social cooperation.

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