From Caliphate to Civil State: A Philosophical Inquiry into Islamism, Secularism, and Islamic Political Thought in Hasan al-Banna and Ali Abd al-Raziq

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Abstract: *This article examines the ideological and philosophical contest between Islamism and secularism in twentieth-century Islamic political thought, focusing on the ideas of Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Ali Abd al-Raziq. The study is motivated by the persistent tendency to treat Islamism as a monolithic doctrine and to frame secularism as inherently incompatible with Islam, a simplification that obscures important internal distinctions and epistemological tensions within modern Islamic political discourse. This article addresses two main problems: first, how the integrative Islamism of Hasan al-Banna differs fundamentally from the radical concept of sovereignty articulated by Sayyid Qutb through the doctrine of Hakimiyah; and second, how Ali Abd al-Raziq's desacralization of political power can be understood as an ethical form of secularization rather than a rejection of Islamic normativity. This study employs a qualitative library research method with a critical-comparative and ideological-philosophical approach to analyze primary texts and contemporary scholarly interpretations. The findings indicate that al-Banna's Islamism operates primarily as a social-ethical project that remains open to political rationality, whereas Qutb's Hakimiyah represents an ontological rejection of popular sovereignty and modern political institutions. In contrast, Abd al-Raziq's thought preserves Islam as a source of universal public ethics by separating religious authority from political power, thereby protecting religion from instrumentalization by the state. This research contributes an original perspective by synthesizing Islamism and secularism beyond binary opposition, demonstrating that the core debate reflects an epistemological conflict between revelatory ethics and rational-historical political authority. The study thus offers a philosophical framework for rethinking the relationship between Islam, the civil state, and modern governance in contemporary Muslim societies.*

Keywords: *Islamism, Secularism, Hasan Al-Banna, Ali Abd al-Raziq, Hakimiyah*

A. Introduction

20th-century Islamic political thought was marked by intense debate regarding the relationship between religion, state, and modernity. Two figures often placed within the spectrum of Islamism are Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. However, the tendency to unite the two under one conceptual umbrella particularly through the term *Hakimiyah* often obscures the fundamental philosophical differences between al-Banna's integrative Islamism and Qutb's radical-existential Islamism. This article proceeds from the assumption that the failure to distinguish between these

two positions has the potential to give rise to a simplistic and ahistorical understanding of modern Islamism.

On the contrary, Ali Abd al-Raziq emphasized the importance of separating Islam and the state, arguing that the caliphate as a political concept was no longer relevant in the modern context[1]. Abd al-Raziq argued that the Prophet Muhammad's role was more that of a spiritual leader than a political leader, supporting the idea that Islam should be lived as a universal religion that did not need to be regulated politically[2]. His thinking challenges Al-Banna's views and provides a secular alternative that allows for research, analysis, and accommodation of modern ideas in Muslim society.[3]

Hasan al-Banna formulated Islamism as a project of social-ethical integration, not as a rigid metaphysical theory of sovereignty. Islam, in his view, is a comprehensive value system (*niẓām shāmil*) that serves to guide the gradual moral transformation of society and state institutions. The state is not positioned as a theocratic entity that negates human will, but rather as a vehicle for the realization of Sharia values justice, benefit, and social solidarity through contextual social and political processes. Thus, al-Banna's Islamism is more accurately read as a reformist Islamic public ethic, rather than a doctrine of total rejection of political modernity.[4]

In contrast, Sayyid Qutb developed the concept of *Hakimiyah* into a much more radical and ontological framework, especially in his post-prison phase of thinking. In this framework, sovereignty is not merely understood as a normative inspiration for Sharia law, but as the absolute antithesis of human sovereignty. Democracy, positive law, and the modern nation-state are reduced to manifestations of *jahiliyyah* because they depart from non-divine sources of legitimacy. *Qutb's Hakimiyah* thus represents an existential rejection of the epistemological foundations of political modernity, not merely a moral critique of the practice of power.[5]

This difference is philosophical, not merely tactical. While al-Banna still left room for negotiation between revelation and political rationality, Qutb closed off that possibility by placing revelation as the sole source of normative and legal legitimacy. A number of recent studies show that reducing al-Banna's thinking to the framework of Qutbian *Hakimiyah* is not only historically incorrect but also obscures the internal spectrum of Islamism itself—from social Islamism, electoral politics, to revolutionary Islamism.[6]

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[1] Dahrun Sajadi, "Thinking Of 'Ali 'Abd Al-Raziq on Islam and The Country," *Al-Risalah* 14, no. 1 (2022): 32–46, https://doi.org/10.34005/alrisalah.v14i1.2198.

[2] Sajadi, "Thinking Of 'Ali 'Abd Al-Raziq on Islam and The Country."

[3] Lukman Ismail et al., "The Battle of Ideologies: Political Conflict in the Dynamics of Modern Society: Ideology, Politics, Society," *Aksiologi: Journal of Education and Social Sciences,* April 18, 2024, https://aksiologi.pubmedia.id/index.php/aksiologi/article/view/194.

[4] Andrea Mura, "Revisiting Hasan Al-Banna's Political Thought: Ethics, Gradualism and Social Reform," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 28, no. 3 (2023): 312–30.

[5] Hisseine Faradj, "Qutb's Ḥākimiyya through the Lens of Authority and Sovereignty," *Middle Eastern Studies* 57, no. 2 (2021): 372–90.

[6] Usaama Al-Azami, "Locating *Ḥākimiyya* in Global History: The Concept of Sovereignty in Premodern Islam and Its Reception after Mawdūdī and Quṭb," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 32, no. 2 (2022): 355–76.

On the other hand, criticism of Islamism grew stronger through the thinking of Ali Abd al-Raziq, who offered a radical deconstruction of the sacralization of political power in Islam. In *Al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm*, Abd al-Raziq asserted that there is no definitive basis in the Qur'an or Sunnah that requires a specific form of state, including the caliphate. By separating prophethood as a moral-spiritual mission from political power as a historical construct, he shifts the legitimacy of the state from divine claims to rationality, historical experience, and the will of the people.[7]

Rather than treating Islamism as a single, monolithic doctrine, this study differentiates between Hasan al-Banna's integrative Islamism aimed at embedding *sharī'a* ethics into social and state reform and Sayyid Qutb's radical-ontological *ḥākimiyya*, which asserts a more total rejection of human sovereignty as a source of legislation and political legitimacy.

Research conducted by Mohammad Nasih Al Hashas and Alfina Infitahul Mawaddah in 2025 entitled *Correlation of State and Religion from Ali Abdur Raziq's Perspective,* explained that Hasan Al-Banna, as the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, conceptualized that Islam encompasses all aspects of life, including politics. He argued that government should be based on Islamic principles, with the aim of creating a society based on Sharia law. Al-Banna emphasized that the integration of religion and state is important for producing an ideal and just social order. However, the meaning of social justice in the context of Islamic government according to Al-Banna is often debatable.[8]

The research entitled *Comparison of Ushul Al-Hukm with Western Legal Theory* conducted by Latif et al. in 2024 explains that Ali Abd al-Raziq introduced a different view. In his monumental work "*Al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm,*" Abd al-Raziq argues that the caliphate has no strong basis in Islam and is not mandatory in the modern context.[9]

In line with the above research conducted by Azka et al. in 2025 entitled Deconstructing the Caliphate and Islamic Theocracy: A Critical Analysis of Ali Abdul Raziq's Thought in the Context of Modern Islamic Politics, Abd al-Raziq proposed that political power in Islam should be worldly in nature, managed based on rationality and historical experience, rather than bound by absolute religious doctrine. This idea opens up space for the formation of a state based on positive law and democratic values, separating religion from the structure of government.[10]

This differs slightly from the above study conducted by Sajadi and Dahrun entitled *Thinking of 'Ali 'Abd Al-Raziq on Islam and The Country* in 2022, which argues for freedom from the domination of religious dogma in government affairs. This reflects the deep debate among

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[7] Abdessamad Belhaj, "From Divine to Popular Sovereignty: The Civil Shift in Contemporary Islamic Political Thought," *Religions* 16, no. 5 (2025): 622.

[8] Mohammad Nasih Al Hashas and Alfina Infitahul Mawaddah, "Correlation of State and Religion from Ali Abdur Raziq's Perspective," *International Journal of Islamic Thought and Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2025): 130–44.

[9] Muhammad Sabri Latif et al., "Comparison of *Ushul Al-Hukm* with Western Legal Theory," *Jurnal Mediasas: Media Ilmu Syari'ah Dan Ahwal Al-Syakhsiyyah* 6, no. 2 (2024): 201–16.

[10] Ibnu Azka et al., "Deconstructing the Caliphate and IslamicA Critical Analysis of Ali Abdul Raziq's Thought in the Context of Modern Islamic Politics," *PUSAKA* 13, no. 1 (2025): 44–65.

Muslim thinkers about the role of religion in the governance of modern states amid an increasingly complex and pluralistic global context.[11]

This article not only compares two classical Islamic political paradigms but also attempts to explore the possibility of an ideological encounter between Sharia and secular rationality. It then positions itself as a philosophical-political study that comparatively and critically examines the ideological struggle between Islamism and Secularism through an analysis of the thoughts of Hasan Al-Banna and Ali Abd al-Raziq. Unlike previous studies that were more textual, descriptive, or legalistic in nature, this study presents an *ideological philosophical* approach to understanding how these two figures formulated Islam's position on the state, power, law, and modernity.

By placing al-Banna and Qutb in conceptually different positions, this article argues that the debate between Islamism and secularism cannot be reduced to a binary opposition between an "Islamic state" and a "secular state." Instead, the debate reflects a deeper epistemological conflict between revelatory ethics as a source of values and human rationality as a source of political governance. Therefore, the main objective of this article is to reconstruct the internal philosophical differences within Islamism and to evaluate the possibility of conceptual dialogue between ethical Islamism and institutional secularism in the context of contemporary Muslim politics.

B. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a type of *library research* that is analytical-critical and comparative. The focus is to analyze the ideological battle between Islamism and secularism as represented through the thoughts of two important figures of the 20th century: Hasan Al-Banna and Ali Abd al-Raziq.

Within the framework of Islamic political philosophy, this article not only describes the thoughts of these two figures, but also explores and critiques the epistemological, historical, and theological basis of the ideology they espouse. This study also attempts to examine the relevance and implications of these thoughts for contemporary discourse on the state, Islamic law, and secularism in modern Muslim societies.

C. Result and Discussion

Al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm: Between Deconstruction and Heresy

Ali Abd al-Raziq's ideas in *Al-Islam wa Uṣūl al-Ḥukm* are often reduced to a form of Islamic "secularization," and even accused of theological deviation. However, this reading ignores the most fundamental dimension of his argument, namely that the desacralization of political institutions is intended to protect the sanctity of Islam from the instrumentalization of worldly power. Thus, Abd al-Raziq's intellectual project cannot be understood as Western-style

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[11] Sajadi, "Thinking of 'Ali 'Abd Al-Raziq on Islam and The Country."

ideological secularization, but rather as an internal ethical secularization within the Islamic tradition itself.

The desacralization of the caliphate proposed by Abd al-Raziq stems from the conceptual separation between *risālah nabawiyyah* (the spiritual-moral mission of prophethood) and *sulṭah siyāsiyyah* (political power). He asserts that Muhammad's prophethood ﷺ is normative-ethical in nature, not a theological mandate to establish a particular state system. The state of Medina is understood as a historical-contextual solution, not a universal normative model. Thus, the claim that the caliphate is a religious obligation has no definitive basis in the text but is rather the result of the political ijtihad of Muslims after the prophetic era.[12]

Within this framework, Abd al-Raziq did what could be called protective separation: religion was separated from the institutions of power not to weaken Islam, but to protect Islam's universal ethics justice, trustworthiness, and public interest from the corruption of absolute power. Several contemporary studies show that the sacralization of politics actually increases the risk of tyranny in the name of religion, where criticism of the state is easily labeled as rebellion against God.[13] By reducing politics to the realm of human ijtihad, Abd al-Raziq closes the space for theological legitimization of religious authoritarianism.[14]

The deconstruction of Abd al-Raziq's thinking can be seen as a reflective moment to understand secularization in Islam not as an escape from religion, but as an effort to reform and apply Islamic values in a broader context without sacrificing the fundamental principles of the teachings. The approaches proposed by various thinkers in Indonesia and other Muslim countries provide a path for healthy interaction between religion and modernity.

This argument shows that Abd al-Raziq's "internal secularization" is not a rejection of revelation as a source of values, but rather a rejection of the theology of domination. He moves Islam from its position as a state ideology to a source of public ethics that transcends any political regime. From this perspective, Islam is preserved as a universal moral religion, rather than being reduced to a set of positive laws or a symbol of power legitimacy.[15]

Then, many Muslim thinkers and conservative groups considered Abd al-Raziq's views heretical, because his views challenged tradition and opposed the belief that the caliphate was a form of government that had been established in Islam. His rejection of the concept of the caliphate caused dissatisfaction among those who supported the integration of religion into the political system, such as Rashid Rida.[16] Rida, for example, argued that the caliphate was a pillar of legitimacy for the Islamic social order and that political power could not be separated from the

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[12] Abdessamad Belhaj, "From Divine to Popular Sovereignty: The Civil Shift in Contemporary Islamic Political Thought," *Religions* 16, no. 5 (2025): 622.

[13] Haldun Gülalp, "Secularism as a Human Right: Learning from the European Court of Human Rights," *Frontiers in Sociology* 9 (June 2024): 1423747.

[14] Gülalp, "Secularism as a Human Right," June 2024.

[15] Nurullah Ardic, *Islam and the Politics of Secularism*, 0 ed. (Routledge, 2012).

[16] Unsi Andal Bara et al., "A Comparative Study of the Political Philosophy of Ali Abdul Raziq and Rashid Rida Regarding the Caliphate," *Journal of* 2, no. 3 (2022): 166–81, https://doi.org/10.15575/jra.v2i3.19439.

religious dimension. Abd al-Raziq's deconstruction also elicited responses from opposing parties and even further fueled the discussion about how the concept of the caliphate should be valid for the modern era. This becomes even more complicated when considering the political practices of Islamic-based countries that are trying to reinterpret their identities in a broader global context. A question that arises is: how can Islamic countries realize the principles of social justice and good governance without being bound by classical caliphate structuralism?

This places Abd al-Raziq's thinking in a unique and controversial position, where on the one hand he contributes to a more progressive discourse on Islamic thought, but on the other hand is considered a traitor by adherents of more conventional traditions. These ideas interact within a larger intellectual sphere, creating a complex dynamic that influences how Muslim societies understand and respond to changes in the global political and social order.[17]

For him, Islam does not require a specific form of government, including the caliphate system, which has long been considered sacred in classical Islamic political discourse. The caliphate, according to him, is merely the result of the historical-political construction of Muslims, not an institution prescribed by *qat'i* (definite) *nash* (arguments). In other words, he desacralizes political power. Abd al-Raziq emphasized that sacralizing power carries a high risk of tyranny in the name of religion. Therefore, political authority should be seen as a dynamic area of human ijtihad, not as part of a fixed and absolute religious teaching. Equally interesting, Abd al-Raziq interpreted the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad SAW as a moral and spiritual mission, not a mandate to establish a theocratic state. The Prophet's leadership in Medina is considered contextual and temporary, a response to the social needs of the time, not a standard model of statehood that must be emulated in all times and places. In this way, he separates the prophetic role from political legitimacy and opens the possibility that Islam does not require a specific system of government.

This is where Abd al-Raziq's thinking is most relevant in responding to accusations of heresy directed at him. Criticism from traditionalists especially those who consider the caliphate to be a pillar of Islamic politics stems from the assumption that religion and the state must be institutionally united. Abd al-Raziq, on the other hand, reverses this assumption: the institutional union of religion and the state is the source of the destruction of religion itself. When power is sacralised, political mistakes cannot be criticized without theological risk. Conversely, by separating religion from the state, Islam remains a moral authority that can correct power, rather than being absorbed by it.[18]

It also explicitly shifts the source of political legitimacy from divine rights to the authority of the ummah. He proposes that the source of power is the people (*ummah*), not claims of

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[17] Kamaruzzaman Bustamam Ahmad and Fitri Zulfidar, "Reinterpreting the Concept of Khilāfah in Global History," *At-Tafkir* 14, no. 1 (2021): 1–16.

[18] Usaama Al-Azami, "Locating *Ḥākimiyya* in Global History: The Concept of Sovereignty in Premodern Islam and Its Reception after Mawdūdī and Quṭb," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 32, no. 2 (2022): 355–76.

revelation. He also proposes that the mechanisms of shura, social contract, and the principle of maslahah are the basis of governmental legitimacy. A legitimate state is a just state, not one that uses the label "caliphate." This idea leads to the recognition of the modern state, civil law, and the principles of Islamic democracy, if Islamic moral values (justice, trustworthiness, public interest) are upheld.

Abd al-Raziq's thinking did not actually intend to remove the sacredness of Islam, but rather to place religion in a moral position that is autonomous from power. In this context, the secularism he offered can be read as ethical secularization, not Western-style ideological secularism. He emphasized that the main goal of politics is justice and benefit, not the symbolic domination of religion in the state. In his view, forms of government may vary according to time and place, if the goal is to create a just, effective, and accountable society. Thus, Abd al-Raziq's thinking cannot be categorized as Western ideological secularism that removes religion from the public sphere. What he offers is ethical secularism, namely the institutional separation of religion and state, which aims to preserve the purity of religion while opening space for political rationality, accountability, and social justice. In the context of contemporary Muslim politics, this approach allows Islam to function as a source of transcendent values without being trapped in political absolutism.

Accusations of Heresy and Responses from Al-Azhar Scholars: Divine Sovereignty, Popular Authority, and the Limits of Political Theology

The controversy surrounding the publication of Ali Abd al-Raziq's *Al-Islam wa Uṣūl al-Ḥukm* cannot be separated from the intellectual and institutional context of Al-Azhar after the abolition of the caliphate in 1924. The accusations of heresy against Abd al-Raziq were mainly rooted in concerns that the desacralization of political power would erode the normative foundations of Islam as a way of life.[19] However, this harsh response also reflected a broader epistemological tension between the theology of power and modern political rationality.

In contrast, the *Hakimiyah* paradigm which was later systematically developed by Sayyid Qutb represents an effort to uphold divine sovereignty as the absolute foundation of political order. Within this framework, God's law functions not only as a source of ethical values, but also as a source of formal legality that negates claims of human sovereignty. Democracy, positive law, and the concept of the modern state are viewed as problematic because they shift normative authority from revelation to the will of the people.[20]

On the contrary, Abd al-Raziq shifted the locus of political legitimacy from divine claims to popular authority without negating revelation as a source of moral values. He made a clear distinction between the source of ethics, namely religion, and the mechanism of power, namely

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[19] Agung Prawoto, "Studi Kritis Pemikiran Politik Ali Abdul Raziq," *KALIMAH* 16, no. 1 (2018): 1, https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v16i1.2510.

[20] Al-Azami, "Locating *Ḥākimiyya* in Global History: The Concept of Sovereignty in Premodern Islam and Its Reception after Mawdūdī and Quṭb."

politics. In his view, popular sovereignty is not intended to rival the sovereignty of God, but rather to prevent the misuse of religion as a tool of political domination. This is where the crucial philosophical difference lies: *Hakimiyah* emphasizes normative absolutism, while Abd al-Raziq emphasizes human political accountability.[21]

This debate also explains why Al-Azhar scholars responded so harshly to Abd al-Raziq. His critics including Rashid Rida started from the assumption that the separation of religion and state would lead to moral relativism and the disintegration of the ummah.[22] However, this argument presupposes that only a sacred state can preserve Islamic values. Abd al-Raziq, on the other hand, proposed the opposite thesis: that the sacralization of the state is the main source of religious distortion, because political mistakes will gain theological legitimacy and become immune to criticism.[23]

Furthermore, these responses and criticisms reflect a struggle between two paradigms: one that seeks to preserve traditional structures on the one hand, and another that attempts to adapt Islamic thought to the increasingly complex realities of modernity on the other.[24] To maintain a balanced critical-comparative analysis, it is important to note that Qutb's *Hakimiyah* also faces serious philosophical problems. By rejecting the sovereignty of the people in principle, this paradigm struggles to explain the concrete mechanisms of accountability of power, pluralism, and differences of opinion in modern Muslim societies. Several recent studies show that the absolutization of divine sovereignty in political form has the potential to give rise to religious authoritarianism, in which political opposition is easily labeled as rebellion against God.[25]

On the other hand, secularization can be seen as an implication of Abd al-Raziq's further thinking. He proposed the belief that government should not be based on the caliphate, which led to the idea of separation between religion and state. This reflects a broader transformation in addressing governance issues in the Muslim context, which seeks to minimize the influence of religious dogma in the practical aspects of governance. Secularization in this context does not necessarily mean the elimination of religion in public life, but rather the regulation of social and political life that is not directly tied to religious doctrine.[26]

Thus, the accusation of heresy against Abd al-Raziq cannot be separated from the conflict between two major paradigms in modern Islamic politics: the paradigm of the sacralization of power versus the paradigm of Islamic public ethics. The former places religion as the ideology of

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[21] Belhaj, "From Divine to Popular Sovereignty," 2025.

[22] "A Religion, Not a State."

[23] Sami E. Baroudi, "Ideas That Travel: The Influence of Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi on the Political Thought of Two Contemporary Arab Islamists: Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Sayyid Qutb," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 24, no. 3 (2023): 377–97.

[24] Latif et al., "Comparison of Ushul Al-Hukm With Western Legal Theory."

[25] Marilie Coetsee, "Against Insular Liberalism: Sayyid Qutb, Illiberal Islam and the Forceless Force of the Better Argument," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 51, no. 2 (2025): 208–41.

[26] Ahmad Nabil Amir and Tasnim Abdul Rahman, "Pergerakan Islam di Malaysia: Konteks dan Faktor Sejarah," *Muâṣarah: Jurnal Kajian Islam Kontemporer* 5, no. 1 (2023): 41–50, https://doi.org/10.18592/msr.v5i1.9335.

the state, while the latter places religion as a source of moral criticism of the state. This debate shows that the main issue at stake is not between faith and secularism, but between religion as a legitimization of power and religion as a guardian of universal ethics.

Hakimiyah Sayyid Qutb vs Civil State: From Revelatory Ontology to Rational Historical Ijtihad

The debate between the *Hakimiyah* and civil state paradigms does not merely reflect differences in political views but rather indicates a fundamental epistemological shift in modern Islamic political philosophy. At this point, the contrast between the thinking of Sayyid Qutb and Ali Abd al-Raziq becomes very significant. If Abd al-Raziq relied on historical-rational ijtihad as the basis for political legitimacy, then Qutb continuing but at the same time radicalizing the legacy of Hasan al-Banna relied on the ontology of revelation as the absolute foundation of social and political order.

The concept of *Hakimiyah* has its roots in pre-modern Islamic legal tradition, but it was significantly elaborated in modern times by thinkers such as Abū al-A'lā Mawdūdī and Sayyid Qutb.[27] Mawdūdī and Qutb's interpretations have had a significant influence on contemporary Islamic thought. As such, this concept is intertwined with Islamic law (*sharia and fiqh*), emphasizing that Islamic law should govern all aspects of life, including political power.[28]

The concept of *Hakimiyah* in Qutb's thinking cannot be understood merely as a theological slogan about "God's sovereignty," but as an ontological framework that positions revelation as the sole source of normative reality. In this view, God's law is not only the source of ethics, but also the ontological structure that determines the legitimacy of the entire political order. Thus, all forms of human sovereignty whether through democracy, positive law, or social contract are seen as forms of modern *jahiliyyah* because they displace God's position as the ultimate legislator.[29]

Subsequently, *Hakimiyah* has become the main foundation of Islamist ideology, which advocates a political structure derived from divine will rather than human sovereignty. This is particularly evident in the works of Sayyid Qutb, who views any deviation from divine law as a rebellion against Islam.[30] Moreover, historical examples, such as the application of Islamic law in Islamic Jerusalem during the first Muslim conquest, demonstrate how *Hakimiyah* was implemented in practice by enforcing Islamic law and appointing qualified judges.[31]

On the contrary, Abd al-Raziq shifted the discourse from ontology to epistemology. He did not reject revelation as a source of values, but rejected the claim that revelation provides a fixed and trans-historical political model. In *Al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm*, political legitimacy is not

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[27] Usaama Al-Azami, "Locating *Ḥākimiyya* in Global History: The Concept of Sovereignty in Premodern Islam and Its Reception after Mawdūdī and Quṭb," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 32, no. 2 (2022): 355–76.

[28] Massimo Campanini, "Elementi di una concettualizzazione del politico nell'Islam," *Storia del pensiero politico*, no. 2 (2020): 313–26.

[29] Al-Azami, "Locating *Ḥākimiyya* in Global History: The Concept of Sovereignty in Premodern Islam and Its Reception after Mawdūdī and Quṭb."

[30] Hisseine Faradj, "Qutb's *Hakimiyyah* through the Lens of Arendtian Authority," *Middle Eastern Studies* 57, no. 2 (2021): 372–90.

[31] Aminurraasyid Yatiban et al., "Translating Concept of *Al-Hakimiyya* (Sovereignty) Into Practice: A Study on the Implementation of Islamic Law During the First Muslim Conquest of Islamicjerusalem (Bayt Al-Maqdis)," *Advanced Science Letters* 22, no. 9 (2016): 2231–34.

derived from a metaphysical structure, but rather from human ijtihad based on historical experience, rationality, and public interest. Here, the fundamental difference is not between faith and secularism, but between revelation as a source of ethics and revelation as a source of power systems.[32]

For example, in recent decades, there has been a shift towards popular sovereignty in Islamic political thought, especially after the Arab Spring. This shift reflects a shift from strict application of *Hakimiyah* towards a more democratic and human rights-oriented approach.[33] Scholars such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd have challenged the concept of *Hakimiyah*, arguing that Islam should be separated from politics, where the state remains neutral towards religious orientation and laws are not always based on religious principles.[34] Furthermore, some interpretations suggest that *Hakimiyah* can coexist with democratic principles, as seen in the work of Rached Ghannouchi, who advocates a synthesis between Western liberal democracy and Islamic governance.[35]

Qutb's *Hakimiyah* paradigm has broad philosophical implications. By placing God's law as the sole normative reality, Qutb developed a radical critique of democracy and the civil state. Democracy is seen as problematic not only because of its majoritarian practices, but also because of its epistemological assumption: that humans have the right to produce laws. Within this framework, popular sovereignty is considered a form of ontological rebellion against God. Several recent studies show that the absolutization of *Hakimiyah* creates serious tensions with the principles of pluralism, difference of opinion (*ikhtilaf*), and mechanisms of political accountability.[36]

However, it is important to note that Qutb's *Hakimiyah* is not a linear continuation of al-Banna's thinking. Al-Banna understood Islamism as a transformative social ethic that still left room for pragmatic compromise with modern political realities. Qutb, especially in the later phase of his thinking, transformed Islamism into an ontological-revolutionary project that rejected the legitimacy of modern political systems on principle. This shift marks a change from integrative Islamism to exclusive Islamism, from moral reformism to an existential critique of modernity.[37]

On the other hand, the concept of the civil state that has developed in contemporary Islamic discourse and can be implicitly traced back to Abd al-Raziq stems from a different epistemological assumption. The civil state is not understood as a secular state that removes religion, but rather as a state that separates the institutional authority of religion from political

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[32] Belhaj, "From Divine to Popular Sovereignty," 2025.

[33] Abdessamad Belhaj, "From Divine to Popular Sovereignty: The Civil Shift in Contemporary Islamic Political Thought," *Religions* 16, no. 5 (2025): 622.

[34] Ali Akbar and Abdullah Saeed, "A Critique of the Concept of Ḥākimiyya: Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's Approach," *Religions* 13, no. 11 (2022): 1100.

[35] Fisher Zulkarnain et al., "When the East Meets the West: Analysing Rached Ghannouci's Synthesis of Democracy in Islam," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 17, no. 2 (2022): 127–41.

[36] Coetsee, "Against Insular Liberalism," 2025.

[37] Saer El-Jaichi, "Ignorance or Sovereignty: The de-Territorialization of Jihad in Sayyid Qutb's Theo-Political Vision," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 27, no. 1 (2022): 112–26.

power, while still recognizing the role of religious values in the public sphere. Within this framework, Islam functions as a source of public ethics, not as a state ideology.[38]

The tension between *Hakimiyah* and the civil state thus reflects the conflict between two regimes of knowledge, revelation-centered epistemology versus rational-historical epistemology. Qutb rejected the possibility of synthesis because he considered modern political rationality to be a form of human domination over God. Conversely, Abd al-Raziq saw rationality as an instrument that enabled Islam to remain universal and relevant across space and time. A few contemporary thinkers argue that Abd al-Raziq's approach is more consistent with *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, as it prevents religion from being reduced to a tool of legitimizing power.[39] In the context of contemporary Muslim politics, this debate has real implications. The state model that departs from *Hakimiyah* tends to reject the principles of the nation state, positive law, and citizenship pluralism. Conversely, the civil state approach opens space for procedural democracy, human rights, and political participation, without having to sacrifice Islamic identity. Recent studies on Tunisia, Indonesia, and Malaysia show that a synthesis between Islamic values and the civil state is more politically sustainable than an ideological state model based on absolute divine sovereignty.[40]

Thus, the debate between *Hakimiyah* and civil state is not merely a difference in political policy, but an epistemological battle over the sources of knowledge, legitimacy, and authority in Islam. Placing this debate explicitly within a philosophical framework allows this article to go beyond a political summary and contribute more deeply to the discourse of contemporary Islamic political philosophy.

Sayyid Qutb's criticism of democracy, liberalism, and secularism

Qutb's criticism of democracy is rooted in his concept of divine sovereignty (*hakimiyya*), which states that only Allah's law, as revealed in the Quran, should govern society. He argues that democracy, which is based on popular sovereignty, is inherently contrary to this principle by placing human authority above divine authority.[41] In this view, democracy can also lead to moral chaos where political decisions can be determined by majority vote without regard for religious norms.[42] Qutb viewed the democratic system as a form of *jahiliyya* because it does not recognize the primacy of God's law and instead relies on man-made laws.[43]

Another of Qutb's views on liberalism, his condemnation of liberalism, is closely related to his experiences and observations of Western society, especially during his stay in the United

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[38] Kalijunjung Hasibuan et al., "Pemberlakuan Hukum Syariah Dalam Sistem Hukum Nasional: Studi Kasus Tentang Penegakan Hukum Syariah Di Negara Asia," *Jurnal Hukum Dan HAM Wara Sains* 2, no. 10 (2023): 942–51, https://doi.org/10.58812/jhhws.v2i10.707.

[39] Gülalp, "Secularism as a Human Right," June 2024.

[40] Fisher Zulkarnain et al., "When the East Meets the West: Analysing Rached Ghannouci's Synthesis of Democracy in Islam," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 17, no. 2 (2022): 127–41.

[41] Sami E. Baroudi, "Ideas That Travel: The Influence of Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi on the Political Thought of Two Contemporary Arab Islamists: Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Sayyid Qutb," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 24, no. 3 (2023): 377–97.

[42] Marilie Coetsee, "Against Insular Liberalism: Sayyid Qutb, Illiberal Islam and the Forceless Force of the Better Argument," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 51, no. 2 (2025): 208–41.

[43] Saer El-Jaichi, "Ignorance or Sovereignty: The de-Territorialization of Jihad in Sayyid Qutb's Theo-Political Vision," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 27, no. 1 (2022): 112–26.

States. He viewed liberalism as a doctrine that promotes godless materialism that destroys moral and spiritual values.[44] Qutb believed that liberalism's emphasis on individual freedom and secular government led to moral decline and social disintegration.[45] He saw liberalism as part of a broader Western cultural and ideological influence that undermines Islamic values and society. Furthermore, according to him, liberalism encourages individualism and neglects collective values in society. He considered that liberalism diminishes human spiritual values and leads to violations of fundamental moral principles in Islam. By prioritizing individual freedom over the common good, Qutb considers liberalism to be an ideology that will result in a fragmented and nihilistic society.[46] He argues that liberalism does not provide a solution to social injustice but rather increases the gap between individuals and communities.

Qutb's criticism of secularism did not stop there. According to him, secularism advocates the separation of religion and state, which Qutb fundamentally opposed. He argued that secularism sidelines religion and makes it a private matter, thereby eliminating its social and political significance. Qutb believed that secularism led to the degradation of Islamic values and the domination of Western ideology, which he considered morally and spiritually bankrupt.[47] He believed that only a society governed by *Sharia* (Islamic law) could achieve true justice and moral integrity. In response to modernization and secularization, Qutb emphasized the need to return to the original teachings of Islam and the establishment of a purely Islamic order. He believed that the solution to the social and political problems facing the Muslim world lay in the total application of sharia in all aspects of life, including business, politics, and society.[48]

Sayyid Qutb's criticism of democracy, liberalism, and secularism offers a profound perspective on the challenges faced by Muslim societies in the modern era. Through his arguments, Qutb emphasizes that God's sovereignty as legislator is a fundamental necessity for achieving justice and morality in society. His various criticisms reflect a contemporary view of social and political issues in the Islamic world and provide a foundation for more radical and intellectual Islamic movements in the future.[49] This approach remains relevant in modern discussions about the relationship between religion, politics, and society.

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[44] Hussein Solomon and Arno Tausch, "'The Age of Ignorance' and the Civic Culture of Democracy: A Multivariate Analysis Based on World Values Survey Data," in *Islamism, Crisis and Democratization,* by Hussein Solomon and Arno Tausch, Perspectives on Development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region (Springer International Publishing, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22849-1_3.

[45] Solomon and Tausch, "'The Age of Ignorance' and the Civic Culture of Democracy."

[46] Badarussyamsi, "Reframing Occidentalism: Purpose, Construction of Scientific Paradigms, and Reconstruction of Post-Orientalism Knowledge," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, no. 1 (2023), https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/JITC/article/view/4058.

[47] Solomon and Tausch, "'The Age of Ignorance' and the Civic Culture of Democracy."

[48] Badarussyamsi, "Reframing Occidentalism."

[49] Muhamad Soleh et al., "Principles of Radicalism Sayyid Qutb Perspective in Tafsir Fi Zhilalil Quran:" paper presented at International Conference on Islamic and Muhammadiyah Studies (ICIMS 2022), Surakarta, Indonesia, 2022, https://www.atlantis-press.com/article/125976419.

Secularism and Compatibility with Islam

Secularism is often defined as the separation of religion from state affairs, promoting neutrality in the public sphere, and guaranteeing freedom of religion and equality.[50] This concept emerged from Enlightenment thinking and revolutionary movements, which advocated individual autonomy and the relegation of religion to the private sphere.[51] However, the application of secularism varies across cultures and political systems, resulting in different outcomes and tensions. Nevertheless, there is a view that secularism and secularization are not necessarily incompatible with Islam. In this context, secularism can serve as a tool for better social construction, providing space for pluralism and harmony among different beliefs in society.[52]

The relationship between secularism and Islam is complex and multifaceted. Historically, secularism in Muslim-majority countries has been influenced by colonial legacies and modernization processes.[53] For example, the secularization of the Ottoman Empire involved the transformation of the Caliphate into a spiritual institution before it was eventually abolished.[54] In Indonesia, secularism has coexisted with Islamic principles, with Sharia treated as a philosophical reference as well as a strict legal code.[55]

Thus, modern debates often center on the compatibility of Islam with democracy and secularism. Some scholars advocate a pluralistic approach that respects religious diversity while maintaining secular government.[56] Others emphasize the importance of ongoing dialogue and adaptation to reconcile religious beliefs with the principles of the modern state.[57]

Epistemological secularism refers to the view that rejects revelation as a valid source of knowledge. In this context, knowledge is considered to originate solely from empiricism, rational inquiry, and human experience, a position that reflects the epistemological foundations of secular modernity which prioritize reason and empirical verification over revelation as a source of knowledge.[58] This means that discussions about truth, morality, and life values are based more on logic or observation, and do not consider or accept revelation as a valid and important form of knowledge. Meanwhile, Institutional Secularism focuses on the separation of religious

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[50] Haldun Gülalp, "Secularism as a Human Right: Learning from the European Court of Human Rights," *Frontiers in Sociology* 9 (June 2024): 1423747.

[51] Ram Puniyani, "Secularism, Secularization and Human Rights," in *Secularism Under Siege,* 1st ed., by Zaheer Ali (Routledge, 2023), https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781032667348/chapters/10.4324/9781032667348-3.

[52] Haikal Al Fiqri, "Transformation of Secularization in Islam; The Perspective of Muslim Scholars," *AT-THARIQ: Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture* 4, no. 02 (2024): 22–31.

[53] Nurullah Ardic, *Islam and the Politics of Secularism,* 0 ed. (Routledge, 2012), https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781136489853.

[54] Ardic, *Islam and the Politics of Secularism.*

[55] Yasid Yasid, "The Islamic Perspective of Changes in Government Administration and Law: With Special Reference to the Development of Legal Political System in Post-Reformasi Indonesia," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 6, no. 1 (2012): 76.

[56] Rawaa El Ayoubi Gebara, "Islamic Law and Modernity," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 6, no. 2 (2017): 323–46.

[57] Michael Bohlander, "Sisters in Law—Using *Maqāṣid al-Shari'ah* to Advance the Conversation between Islamic and Secular Legal Thinking," *Arab Law Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2014): 257–77.

[58] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford University Press, 2003), https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804783095.

authority from political power. This means that government institutions are not bound to or directly influenced by religion or religious organizations.

Thus, the relationship between secularism and Islam shows the potential to create inclusiveness and increase Muslim society's understanding of modern values. In a broader context, secularism need not be seen as a threat to Islam, but as an opportunity for dialogue and flexibility that can lead to justice and prosperity in society. As times change, the challenge for Muslims is to find a balance between preserving tradition and responding to the needs of modernization. In the contemporary context, the compatibility of Islam and secularism depends on the level: ontologically, Islam rejects the separation of values from God's law, but sociologically, Islam can accept political secularism that guarantees freedom, pluralism, and social justice.

D. Conclusion

This study shows that the debate between Islamism and secularism in 20th-century Islamic political thought cannot be understood in a monolithic or reductive manner. By conceptually distinguishing between Hasan al-Banna's integrative Islamism and Sayyid Qutb's radical-ontological sovereignty, this article asserts that Islamism itself is a spectrum of layered thought. Al-Banna viewed Islam as a *niẓām shāmil* that functions as public ethics and a gradual social reform project, which still leaves room for negotiation between revelation and political rationality. In contrast, Qutb developed the concept of *Hakimiyah* into an ontological framework that rejects the legitimacy of human sovereignty in principle, giving rise to an existential critique of democracy, the nation-state, and the modern civil state. This distinction is crucial to avoid simplifying Islamism as a single ahistorical ideology.

On the other hand, Ali Abd al-Raziq's thinking does not merely represent a "secular" position in the Western sense but offers what this article asserts as ethical secularization. Through the desacralization of political institutions particularly the caliphate Abd al-Raziq does not intend to remove Islam from the public sphere, but rather to protect religion from the corruption of power. By separating the prophetic message as a moral-spiritual authority from political power as a historical construct, he positions Islam as a source of universal ethics capable of correcting the state, rather than being absorbed into it. This argument reinforces the position that Abd al-Raziq's ethical secularism is a preservative, not a destructive, mechanism for Islam.

However, this article also emphasizes that the civil state model inspired by Abd al-Raziq's approach is not without contemporary problems. The experiences of modern Muslim countries show that the institutional separation of religion and state often faces serious challenges: superficial formalization of law, marginalization of religious ethics in political practice, and co-optation of Islamic values by secular and populist elites. In some contexts, the civil state fails to deliver substantive justice because religion is reduced to a mere cultural symbol or a tool for electoral legitimacy. This shows that ethical secularism requires the internalization of values, not just structural separation.

Thus, both the Islamist and secularist paradigms have inherent limitations. Radical Islamism based on *Hakimiyah* faces problems of accountability, pluralism, and the risk of religious authoritarianism due to the absolutization of divine sovereignty in the form of politics. Conversely, a civil state that fails to substantively integrate Islamic ethics risks being trapped in a procedural secularism that is devoid of values. Therefore, the synthesis offered in this article is

not an ideological compromise, but rather a creative dialectic between revelatory ethics and rational-historical ijtihad.

The main contribution of this article lies in balancing the analysis between the paradigms of Islamism and secularism through an ideological-philosophical approach. By placing al-Banna, Qutb, and Abd al-Raziq in different epistemological frameworks between the ontology of revelation and the rationality of ijtihad this article transcends the binary opposition of "Islamic state versus secular state." The debate is understood as a conflict over the sources of legitimacy, knowledge, and authority in modern Islam.

Ultimately, the findings of this study confirm that the future of Islamic politics does not lie in the sacralization of the state or in the total neutralization of religion, but rather in the ability to present Islam as a source of transcendent public ethics capable of guiding power without becoming its tool. In an increasingly pluralistic and complex global context, the intellectual legacy of Hasan al-Banna and Ali Abd al-Raziq with all its tensions and differences remains relevant as a conceptual foundation for the development of a fair, rational, and humane Islamic political paradigm.

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