

THE IDEOLOGIZATION OF CALIPHATE HADITHS: TEXTUAL CRITICISM AND POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAM

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Abstract : This study examines the ideologization of caliphate-related hadiths in contemporary Islamic political discourse and its implications for the construction of political legitimacy. It argues that the central challenge does not lie in the authenticity of the hadith corpus, but in the interpretive frameworks through which these narrations are selectively appropriated and mobilized. Employing a qualitative library-based research design, the study integrates classical hadith methodology with contemporary political analysis. Primary data consist of hadiths on leadership, obedience, and political authority drawn from major Sunni canonical collections, while secondary sources include classical commentaries and modern scholarship on political Islam. Through sanad evaluation, *matan* criticism, and critical discourse analysis, the research demonstrates that many caliphate-related hadiths, although textually authentic, were articulated within specific historical contexts and primarily convey ethical guidance rather than prescriptive political models. The findings reveal that contemporary ideological readings tend to absolutize selected narrations, marginalize ethical constraints, and conflate textual authenticity with political obligation. This interpretive reduction transforms hadith into instruments of political domination. The study concludes by proposing a methodological repositioning of hadith between ethics and power, reaffirming the Prophetic tradition as a moral framework that guides and constrains political authority rather than legitimizing immutable political forms.

Keywords : Caliphate Discourse; Political Use of Hadith; Ideological Interpretation; *Matan* Criticism; Islamic Political Authority; *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*;

Abstrak : Penelitian ini mengkaji proses ideologisasi hadis-hadis terkait khilafah dalam wacana politik Islam kontemporer serta implikasinya terhadap konstruksi legitimasi politik. Studi ini berargumen bahwa persoalan utama tidak terletak pada otentisitas korpus hadis, melainkan pada kerangka interpretatif yang digunakan untuk mengapropriasi dan memobilisasi riwayat-riwayat tersebut secara selektif. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan metodologi hadis klasik dengan analisis politik kontemporer. Data primer terdiri atas hadis-hadis tentang kepemimpinan, ketaatan, dan otoritas politik yang bersumber dari kitab-kitab hadis kanonik Sunni, sementara data sekunder mencakup karya-karya syarah klasik serta kajian modern tentang Islam politik. Melalui evaluasi sanad, kritik *matan*, dan analisis wacana kritis, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa banyak hadis terkait khilafah—meskipun sahih secara tekstual—lahir dalam konteks historis tertentu dan pada dasarnya menyampaikan panduan etis, bukan model politik yang bersifat preskriptif. Temuan penelitian mengungkap bahwa pembacaan ideologis kontemporer cenderung mengabsolutkan riwayat-riwayat tertentu, memarginalkan batasan-batasan etis, serta menyamakan keabsahan teks dengan kewajiban politik. Reduksi interpretatif semacam ini menjadikan hadis sebagai instrumen dominasi politik. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan dengan mengajukan reposisi metodologis hadis di antara etika dan kekuasaan, dengan menegaskan kembali tradisi kenabian sebagai kerangka moral yang mengarahkan dan membatasi otoritas politik, bukan sebagai sarana legitimasi bagi bentuk-bentuk politik yang bersifat baku dan tidak berubah.

Kata Kunci: Wacana Khilafah; Pemanfaatan Politik Hadis; Interpretasi Ideologis; Kritik *Matan*; Otoritas Politik Islam; *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*;

INTRODUCTION

Hadith occupies a pivotal position within Islamic intellectual and normative traditions. Beyond its function as a source of legal rulings and ritual practices, hadith has historically played a crucial role in shaping Muslim ethical reasoning, social norms, and political imagination. (Siregar & Harahap, 2024) Together with the Qur'an, prophetic traditions have provided reference points for articulating concepts of authority (*sulṭah*), leadership (*imāmah*), and communal order (*nizām al-ummah*). (Bakar, 2020) Yet, the relationship between revelation and political authority in Islam has never been monolithic; rather, it has been mediated through interpretation, historical experience, and scholarly deliberation.

The Qur'an itself presents a strikingly non-institutional approach to governance. Instead of prescribing a specific political structure, it lays down universal ethical principles that should guide the exercise of power. Among the most fundamental of these principles are justice, trust, and consultation. Allah commands:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ

“Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, to judge with justice.” (Q.S. an-Nisā' [4]: 58)

Similarly, the Qur'an frames political decision-making within a participatory ethical horizon:

وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَىٰ بَيْنَهُمْ

“And their affairs are conducted through consultation among them.” (Q.S. ash-Shūrā [42]: 38)

Classical exegetes such as *al-Ṭabarī* and *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* interpreted these verses as articulating normative values rather than concrete institutional forms. Al-Rāzī, in particular, argued that the Qur'an's silence on a fixed political system reflects divine wisdom, allowing Muslims to adapt governance models in accordance with changing historical and social conditions. (Abu Shareea, 2022) This interpretive openness suggests that political authority in Islam is fundamentally ethical and contextual, not structurally predetermined. Despite this Qur'anic orientation, hadith literature has often been employed to give more concrete shape to political concepts. Numerous prophetic traditions concerning leadership, obedience, unity, and discord have become central references in debates on Islamic governance. Among the most frequently cited is the hadith reported in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*:

كَانَتْ بَنُو إِسْرَائِيلَ تَسُوسُهُمُ الْأَنْبِيَاءُ، كُلَّمَا هَلَكَ نَبِيٌّ خَلَفَهُ نَبِيٌّ، وَإِنَّهُ لَا نَبِيَّ بَعْدِي، وَسَتَكُونُ خُلَفَاءُ فَتَكثُرُ

“The Children of Israel were governed by prophets; whenever a prophet died, another succeeded him. There will be no prophet after me, but there will be caliphs, and they will be many.” (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*)

Classical scholars approached this and similar hadiths with considerable interpretive restraint. Imam al-Nawawī explained that the hadith is primarily descriptive, reporting a historical pattern rather than prescribing a normative political obligation. (Imam Nawawi, 1994) Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, in *Fatḥh al-Bārī*, emphasized that the term *khulafā’* in this narration does not inherently entail a singular, universal political system, but rather refers to successive leaders within particular historical contexts. (Asqalani, 2019) However, in contemporary Islamic discourse, caliphate-related hadiths are frequently rearticulated within ideological frameworks that treat them as unequivocal legal mandates. Modern Islamist thinkers, most notably Taqiyuddin an-Nabhani, argue that the establishment of a caliphate constitutes a binding religious obligation (*farḍ shar‘ī*), derived directly from prophetic traditions. (syekh taqiyuddin An-Nabhani, 2007) In this framework, hadith is elevated from a source of moral and legal reasoning to an instrument of absolute political normativity, through which political legitimacy is exclusively defined.

This shift reflects a broader process that may be described as the ideologization of hadith, wherein selected prophetic traditions are abstracted from their historical circumstances, semantic plurality, and ethical objectives, and redeployed to serve contemporary political projects. Hadiths that emphasize obedience to authority are frequently cited to reinforce this absolutism, such as the well-known narration:

اسْمَعُوا وَأَطِيعُوا، وَإِنْ اسْتُعْمِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَبْدٌ أَحَبَّيْتُمْ

“Listen and obey, even if an Abyssinian slave is appointed over you.” (Shahih al-Bukhari)

Classical jurists, however, did not interpret such hadiths in isolation. Al-Māwardī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Taymiyyah consistently emphasized that obedience is conditional upon justice, public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), and the avoidance of tyranny. Ibn Taymiyyah’s famous assertion “Allah upholds a just state even if it is unbelieving, and does not uphold an unjust state even if it is believing” captures the ethical primacy that undergirds Islamic political thought. (I. Taimiyah, 2002, n.d.) This ethical emphasis resonates strongly with the Qur’anic command:

أَعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَى

“Be just; that is nearer to righteousness.” (Q.S. al-Mā’idah [5]: 8)

From the standpoint of hadith methodology, the contemporary caliphate discourse reveals a significant imbalance. While sanad authentication is often foregrounded to assert textual authority, systematic matan criticism examining coherence, historical plausibility, and ethical alignment with Qur’anic principles is frequently marginalized. Classical hadith scholars such as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah explicitly warned against such methodological reductionism. Ibn al-Qayyim argued that any text attributed to the Prophet SAW, that contradicts justice, wisdom, or established moral principles must be carefully re-examined in terms of its meaning and application, even if its chain of transmission appears

sound. (Dars, Mughal, & Bhutto, 2025)

Contemporary Muslim thinkers have echoed these concerns. Yusuf al-Qaradawi maintains that political systems in Islam are historically contingent, and that no specific model including the caliphate can claim exclusive religious legitimacy. Wahbah al-Zuhayli similarly stresses that Islam mandates ethical governance rather than a particular institutional form. Meanwhile, critical scholars such as Muhammad ‘Abid al-Jabiri and Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na‘im argue that modern caliphate discourses often conflate revelation with historical experience, transforming interpretive traditions into ideological absolutes that resist contextual reasoning. Studies on the caliphate, political authority, and the use of hadith have received significant attention in both classical and contemporary Islamic discourse. (Masduqi, 2024)

Existing scholarship can be mapped into several strands, one of which focuses on Studies on the caliphate, political authority, and the utilization of hadith have long attracted significant attention in both classical and contemporary Islamic discourse. Existing literature can be mapped through several key scholars. One of them is Muhammad Azhar, in his work entitled “Reconstruction of the Epistemology of Contemporary Indonesian Islamic Political Thought.” (Azhar, 2015) Azhar argues that the epistemological framework of Islamic political thought, which has largely been shaped by classical and medieval paradigms, is in urgent need of reconstruction in order to respond to the socio-political realities of the twenty-first century. In an era characterized by increasingly close interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, Azhar contends that a new form of Islamic political theology is required one that is more tolerant and pluralistic. Such a reconstructed epistemology, he maintains, would enable contemporary political issues such as *ḥudūd*, gender relations, the status of Muslims and non-Muslims, the concept of *dār al-ḥarb*, human rights, citizenship, new patterns of relations between Islam and the West, and philosophical responses to postmodernism to be addressed and implemented in accordance with the ethical principles of Islamic political thought.

Another significant contribution is offered by Marzuki in his study entitled “The Discourse of the Caliphate in Classical and Contemporary Fiqh Siyasaḥ.” (Marzuki, 2021) Marzuki examines the concept of the caliphate and Islamic governance by situating it within the broader ideological contest between Islamic political thought and secular ideology. He finds that the notion of the caliphate represents a distinctive worldview of Islamic governance that stands in opposition to secular political ideology, particularly in its understanding of sovereignty, law, and moral authority. His study highlights the enduring tension between religiously grounded political concepts and modern secular frameworks within contemporary Islamic political discourse.

Furthermore, Muhammad Zaki, in his work “A Critical Study of the Hadiths on Leadership (Imamate) of the Twelve Imams in Sunni Hadith Literature,” conducts a detailed *takhrīj* of hadiths concerning the leadership of the twelve imams. (Zaki, 2017) Zaki finds that these hadiths are widely transmitted within Sunni hadith collections, particularly within the seven well-known canonical books (*al-Kutub al-Sab‘ah*). Regarding the identity of

the twelve figures mentioned in these hadiths, Sunni scholars differ in their interpretations. Some argue that they begin with Caliph Abū Bakr and end with Caliph Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, while others suggest the sequence extends from Abū Bakr to ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, or from Abū Bakr to either Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī or ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Despite these differences, Sunni scholars generally agree that the twelve leaders must originate from the Quraysh tribe, without restricting them exclusively to Banū Hāshim as maintained in Shi‘i doctrine. Moreover, they emphasize that a legitimate caliph must receive the consensus or broad acceptance of the Muslim community.

Despite the growing scholarly attention to political Islam and caliphate revivalism, a substantial research gap remains. Many studies focus on ideological movements and political agendas without interrogating the textual strategies through which hadith is mobilized. Conversely, hadith studies often remain confined to technical authentication, detached from the socio-political contexts in which prophetic traditions are reinterpreted and instrumentalized.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to critically examine the ideologization of caliphate hadiths in contemporary Islam through a rigorous textual criticism approach, with particular emphasis on matan analysis. By engaging classical hadith scholarship alongside modern political thought, this article aims to illuminate how prophetic traditions are transformed into tools of political authority, and to reaffirm the ethical depth, interpretive plurality, and methodological integrity of hadith within the broader landscape of Islamic intellectual history.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative library-based research design to examine the ideologization of caliphate-related hadiths and their function in legitimizing political authority in contemporary Islamic discourse. It integrates hadith studies and Islamic political thought through a normative-textual and contextual approach. Primary data consist of hadiths on leadership, caliphate, and political obedience drawn from major Sunni canonical collections, including *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, and the four *Sunan*, selected based on their frequent use in modern caliphate-oriented narratives. Secondary sources include classical hadith commentaries, works of Islamic political jurisprudence, and contemporary studies on political Islam.

Data are collected through a systematic literature review and analyzed in three stages: (1) sanad evaluation to assess hadith authenticity, (2) matan criticism focusing on linguistic features, historical context, and coherence with Qur’anic ethical principles such as justice, consultation, and public welfare, and (3) critical discourse analysis to identify patterns of selective interpretation and ideological instrumentalization. Analytical validity is ensured through source triangulation, enabling this study to distinguish between prophetic guidance and ideological construction in contemporary Islamic political discourse.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Centrality of Caliphate Hadiths in Contemporary Political Discourse

This study finds that a relatively limited corpus of hadiths related to leadership (imāmah), obedience (ṭā‘ah), and political succession (khilāfah) occupies a disproportionately central position in contemporary caliphate-oriented discourse. Among the most frequently cited traditions are hadiths that associate political authority with the Quraysh tribe, emphasize unconditional obedience to rulers, and describe the succession of caliphs after the Prophet. These narrations are often treated as definitive textual foundations for political legitimacy, rather than as context-bound prophetic statements. One of the most prominent examples is the hadith:

الْأئِمَّةُ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ

“The leaders are from Quraysh.” (Shahih al-Bukhārī)

In contemporary caliphate discourse, this hadith is frequently interpreted as a normative rule that permanently binds political leadership to a specific lineage and, by extension, to a particular political structure. However, classical scholars such as Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī understood this narration as descriptive of early Arab socio-political realities, in which Quraysh held social authority and cohesion, rather than as a timeless legal stipulation. When removed from this historical context, the hadith is transformed into an ideological claim that legitimizes exclusivist political authority. (Asqalani & al-Din, 1934)

Similarly, hadiths emphasizing obedience (ṭā‘ah) are widely mobilized, such as the Prophet’s statement:

اسْمَعُوا وَأَطِيعُوا، وَإِنْ اسْتُعْمِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَبْدٌ أَحَبَّ إِلَيْكُمْ

“Listen and obey, even if an Abyssinian slave is appointed over you.” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī)

In contemporary ideological readings, this hadith is often cited to promote unconditional political obedience and to delegitimize dissent. Yet, classical jurists such as al-Nawawī and Ibn Taymiyyah consistently restricted obedience to what is just and lawful, emphasizing that obedience does not extend to injustice or violation of divine principles. The selective use of this hadith thus reflects a reductionist reading that prioritizes political stability over ethical accountability. (I. Taimiyah, 2002, n.d.)

Another central narration concerns the succession of political authority after the Prophet:

ثُمَّ تَكُونُ خِلَافَةٌ عَلَى مَنَاجِ التُّبُوَّةِ

“Then there will be a caliphate upon the prophetic model.” (Musnad Aḥmad)

This hadith is frequently invoked to argue that the caliphate

constitutes an enduring religious obligation that must be restored. However, classical and modern scholars alike have debated its scope and application, with many interpreting it as an eschatological or descriptive statement rather than a binding constitutional command. When treated as a definitive political blueprint, the hadith is detached from broader Qur'anic principles such as justice ('adl), consultation (shūrā), and public welfare (maṣlaḥah). (Al-Mawardi, 2016) The repeated citation of these hadiths while marginalizing other prophetic traditions that stress accountability, justice, and resistance to oppression reveals a selective hermeneutical pattern. Hadiths become ideological instruments that reinforce a singular political vision, rather than components of an ethical-prophetic framework open to contextual interpretation.

This selective elevation of caliphate-related hadiths demonstrates how contemporary discourse reconfigures the epistemic function of hadith. Prophetic traditions are no longer approached as historically situated moral guidance but are transformed into absolute political imperatives, thereby narrowing interpretive plurality and legitimizing a fixed conception of political authority. A key finding of this study lies in the sharp contrast between classical scholarly interpretations of caliphate-related hadiths and their modern ideological readings. Classical hadith scholars and jurists consistently approached these narrations with methodological caution, distinguishing between textual authenticity, contextual meaning, and normative applicability. In contrast, modern ideological approaches tend to collapse these distinctions, treating hadiths as direct and binding political commands.

Regarding the hadith “The leaders are from Quraysh” (الأئمة من قريش), classical scholars such as Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī interpreted the narration as a reflection of socio-political realities in the early Islamic period, where Quraysh possessed symbolic authority and social cohesion capable of maintaining unity. (Asqalani & al-Din, 1934) Ibn Ḥajar explicitly notes that the hadith addresses maṣlaḥah (public interest) rather than establishing an eternal legal requirement. By contrast, modern ideological readings often interpret this hadith as a permanent constitutional rule, reinforcing exclusivist claims to political legitimacy and lineage-based authority.

A similar divergence appears in interpretations of hadiths on obedience (ṭā‘ah), such as “Listen and obey, even if an Abyssinian slave is appointed over you.” Classical scholars including al-Nawawī and Ibn Taymiyyah consistently emphasized that obedience is conditional upon justice and conformity with Islamic ethical principles. Al-Nawawī explicitly limits obedience to ma‘rūf (that which is morally right), while Ibn Taymiyyah stresses that obedience does not apply when authority commands injustice or sin. (Imam Nawawī, 1994) In contrast, modern ideological discourse frequently deploys this hadith to promote political absolutism, framing obedience as unconditional and dissent as inherently illegitimate. The divergence is most evident in the interpretation of hadiths concerning the caliphate itself, such as “There will be a caliphate upon the prophetic model.” Classical scholars differed on whether this narration should be read descriptively, eschatologically, or normatively, and many refrained from deriving concrete political obligations

from it. Contemporary ideological readings, however, often present this hadith as definitive proof of the religious obligation to reestablish the caliphate, bypassing both historical context and juristic debate.

This comparison highlights a fundamental methodological shift: while classical scholarship treated hadith as ethically oriented, context-sensitive texts open to interpretive plurality, modern ideological readings tend to transform them into fixed political doctrines. Such transformation not only narrows the interpretive horizon of the Prophetic tradition but also reconfigures hadith from a source of moral guidance into an instrument of political legitimation. This finding underscores that the tension in contemporary caliphate discourse lies less in the textual corpus itself than in the epistemological frameworks through which the texts are interpreted.

Sanad Authenticity versus Normative Claims

The findings indicate that most caliphate-related hadiths cited in contemporary political discourse meet classical standards of sanad authenticity. These narrations are widely recognized in authoritative Sunni collections and are generally classified as reliable in terms of transmission. However, classical Islamic scholarship consistently emphasized that the authenticity of transmission (*ṣiḥḥat al-sanad*) does not, by itself, establish binding normative or political obligation. (Ahmed & Anas, 2025) Classical hadith commentators such as al-Nawawī and Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī clearly distinguished between the verification of a report and the scope of its normative application. (Imam Nawawi, 1994) From an *uṣūl al-fiqh* perspective, many hadiths related to leadership and political authority are understood as descriptive accounts of historical circumstances rather than prescriptive legal commands. In terms of *dalālah*, these narrations lack explicit imperatival forms (*ṣiḥḥat al-amr*) that would warrant their elevation to unconditional political obligations.

Furthermore, classical jurists limited the general wording of leadership and obedience narrations through principles such as *‘ām-khāṣṣ* and ethical qualification. Although these hadiths appear general in formulation, their application was historically restricted to conditions that ensured justice, social order, and the prevention of harm. Obedience to authority, therefore, was never treated as absolute but remained contingent upon conformity with moral and legal standards. The principle of *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* further underscores this distinction. Classical scholars interpreted leadership-related hadiths in light of overarching objectives such as justice (*‘adl*), public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), and communal unity (*ḥifẓ al-jamā‘ah*). (HANIF, 2022) Institutional forms of governance were viewed as secondary and historically contingent, while ethical outcomes remained primary.

This study demonstrates that contemporary ideological readings often collapse these methodological distinctions by equating *ṣiḥḥat al-sanad* with *ilzām siyāsī*. As a result, hadiths that were historically contextual and ethically oriented are transformed into rigid political doctrines. Such an approach exceeds the interpretive boundaries of classical hadith and legal theory, replacing methodological reasoning with textual absolutism. This study has shown that contemporary caliphate-oriented discourse relies heavily on a

narrow selection of hadiths related to leadership, obedience, and political succession, positioning them as definitive foundations of political legitimacy. (T. An-Nabhani, 2011) While these narrations generally satisfy classical standards of transmission authenticity, their ideological use frequently neglects the distinction between textual reliability and normative obligation. Through engagement with classical hadith scholarship and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, this research demonstrates that caliphate-related hadiths were traditionally interpreted as context-sensitive and ethically oriented, rather than as binding prescriptions for a fixed political system. Classical scholars employed interpretive tools such as *dalālah*, *‘ām-khāṣṣ*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* to limit their normative scope and to prioritize justice, public welfare, and moral accountability over institutional form.

By contrast, modern ideological readings tend to absolutize transmission authenticity while bypassing interpretive reasoning and ethical evaluation. This process transforms prophetic guidance into instruments of political legitimation and narrows the interpretive plurality that has long characterized Islamic intellectual tradition. The study concludes that the central challenge in contemporary caliphate discourse lies not in the hadith corpus itself, but in the epistemological frameworks governing its interpretation. Reintegrating classical methodologies of hadith criticism with *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* provides a more balanced and context-sensitive approach to understanding political authority in Islam, one that preserves the ethical depth of the Prophetic tradition while resisting its ideological reduction.

Matan Analysis, Context, and Ideological Reduction

Through *matan* criticism, this research demonstrates that hadiths concerning the caliphate, leadership, and political obedience were articulated within concrete historical and socio-political contexts. These narrations responded to immediate challenges faced by the early Muslim community, including leadership transitions, internal disputes, and the urgent need to prevent social fragmentation (*fitnah*). (Funk & Said, 2004) When read within their original contexts, the primary function of these hadiths is ethical and stabilizing, emphasizing social order, communal cohesion, and moral responsibility rather than prescribing a fixed or timeless political system.

Linguistic and contextual analysis further indicates that these narrations operate within a pragmatic moral framework. Their language does not outline institutional blueprints but addresses situational concerns related to authority and unity. When evaluated against Qur’anic ethical principles such as justice (*‘adl*), consultation (*shūrā*), and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*) these hadiths reinforce normative constraints on political power rather than mandate specific forms of governance. Authority, in this framework, derives its legitimacy from ethical performance rather than institutional designation. (Zaki, 2017) This contextual and ethical orientation stands in clear contrast to contemporary ideological readings, which often abstract these hadiths from their historical settings and reduce their semantic complexity. Ideological reduction occurs when context-bound prophetic guidance is transformed into ahistorical political doctrine. Through selective

citation and interpretive narrowing, contemporary caliphate-oriented discourse prioritizes narrations that can be framed as endorsing political continuity, obedience, and institutional uniformity, while marginalizing prophetic teachings that emphasize accountability, justice, and resistance to oppression.

The findings show that such ideological readings operate through a process of decontextualization and textual absolutization. By isolating individual narrations from the broader ethical and interpretive tradition, hadiths are repositioned as closed and final political commands. This approach effectively suspends *matan* criticism, suppresses interpretive plurality, and replaces ethical reasoning with textual literalism. As a result, the dynamic relationship between text, context, and moral purpose central to classical hadith interpretation is significantly weakened. By integrating *matan* analysis with critical discourse analysis, this study reveals that the ideological use of caliphate-related hadiths is less concerned with prophetic intent than with political legitimation. The problem, therefore, does not lie in the hadith corpus itself, but in the epistemological shift that redefines hadith from ethically oriented guidance into instruments of ideological authority.

This finding unifies the analytical trajectory of this study, demonstrating how the neglect of context and ethics facilitates the transformation of prophetic traditions into rigid political constructs. Taken together, the findings of this study demonstrate a consistent pattern across contemporary caliphate discourse, authentic hadiths are selectively cited, stripped of historical context, and endowed with normative claims that exceed their original ethical scope. *Sanad* authenticity is conflated with political obligation, *matan* context is marginalized, and interpretive plurality is replaced by ideological certainty. This integrated analysis underscores that the central issue is not textual authenticity, but methodological displacement. By re-centering hadith interpretation within classical methodologies *matan* criticism, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* this study restores a coherent analytical voice that views prophetic traditions as moral guides rather than constitutional blueprints. Such an approach offers a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of political authority in Islam, capable of engaging contemporary realities without reducing the Prophetic legacy to ideological absolutism.

Ideological Reduction and Selective Interpretation

This study further reveals that the ideologization of caliphate-related hadiths operates primarily through processes of selective citation and interpretive reduction. Within contemporary caliphate-oriented discourse, hadiths that emphasize obedience, political continuity, and the avoidance of dissent are consistently foregrounded. At the same time, other prophetic traditions that stress ethical accountability, justice, consultation, and resistance to oppression are systematically marginalized or omitted. This selective hermeneutic strategy narrows the ethical horizon of the Prophetic tradition and reconfigures hadith into instruments of political absolutism. Such reductionism does not merely privilege certain texts over others, but actively restructures the interpretive field. Hadiths are detached from their

broader textual networks and ethical objectives, then reframed to support a singular political narrative. As a result, the moral complexity and internal balance of the Prophetic message between order and justice, obedience and accountability are significantly diminished. Political stability is elevated as the supreme value, often at the expense of moral evaluation and public welfare. (Hallaq, 2012)

Critical discourse analysis further demonstrates that contemporary caliphate advocacy frequently presents its interpretation of hadith as closed, self-evident, and final. Interpretive authority is centralized, and methodological critique is framed as deviation or illegitimacy. This discursive strategy effectively forecloses alternative readings and delegitimizes classical tools of interpretation such as *matan* criticism, contextual reasoning, and ethical qualification. This approach stands in stark contrast to the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, which consistently accommodated interpretive plurality, debate, and contextual judgment—particularly in matters of governance and public interest. Classical scholars recognized political authority as a domain of *ijtihad*, shaped by historical circumstance and ethical consideration, rather than a fixed doctrinal category. (Asad, 2003) By contrast, ideological readings seek to stabilize meaning by suppressing interpretive diversity, thereby transforming historically contingent prophetic guidance into rigid political doctrine.

Ultimately, this study finds that ideological reduction does not stem from the hadith corpus itself, but from a methodological displacement that prioritizes political certainty over ethical reasoning. By isolating selected narrations and absolutizing their meanings, contemporary ideological discourse reshapes hadith into a legitimizing mechanism for political authority. This finding reinforces the central argument of this research: that the challenge in contemporary caliphate discourse lies not in the authenticity of prophetic traditions, but in the interpretive frameworks through which they are mobilized and constrained.

Repositioning Hadith between Ethics and Power

The discussion of this study suggests that the central issue in contemporary caliphate discourse lies not in the hadith corpus itself, but in the ideological modes through which hadiths are appropriated, framed, and deployed. Caliphate-related narrations, when disengaged from established methodological controls such as *matan* criticism, historical contextualization, and ethical reasoning grounded in *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* are vulnerable to reinterpretation as instruments of political domination. In such interpretive environments, textual authority ceases to function as a moral regulator of power and is instead mobilized to sanctify political claims and institutional arrangements. (Asad, 2003)

This ideological deployment reflects a broader epistemological shift in contemporary Islamic political discourse. Hadiths are increasingly treated as politically determinative texts that prescribe binding political outcomes, rather than as morally directive references that orient political reasoning. The ethical orientation of the Prophetic tradition—rooted in principles such as

justice, accountability, consultation, and public welfare is subordinated to the pursuit of political certainty, uniformity, and institutional absolutism. Consequently, the normative function of hadith is redefined, from providing ethical guidance that constrains authority to legitimizing specific political configurations as divinely sanctioned. Such a shift not only narrows the semantic and ethical scope of hadith interpretation but also marginalizes classical interpretive practices that emphasized deliberation, contextual sensitivity, and juristic plurality. Classical Islamic scholarship consistently approached political authority as a contingent and evaluative domain, subject to *ijtihād* and ethical scrutiny. Hadiths related to leadership and governance were interpreted alongside Qur'anic values and broader moral objectives, rather than isolated as standalone political commands. The ideological reading, by contrast, suspends this interpretive complexity and replaces ethical reasoning with textual certainty.

By reintegrating classical hadith methodology with contemporary political analysis, this study proposes an alternative interpretive posture that resists both textual literalism and political instrumentalization. Within this framework, caliphate-related hadiths are repositioned according to their proper epistemological function—as ethical-prophetic references that inform political reasoning and critique authority, rather than prescribe immutable political forms. This repositioning restores the dynamic relationship between text, context, and moral purpose that characterized the classical hadith tradition and preserves the normative flexibility required to address evolving political realities. (Abou El Fadl, 2014)

Moreover, this approach reopens interpretive space for plurality and critical engagement within Islamic political thought. Recognizing political authority as a domain of *ijtihād* shaped by historical contingency, social conditions, and ethical evaluation allows for diverse political arrangements to be assessed on moral grounds rather than textual conformity. (Auda, 2008) Legitimacy, in this sense, is not derived from adherence to a specific institutional model, but from the capacity of political structures to realize justice, uphold human dignity, ensure accountability, and serve the public good. Ultimately, repositioning hadith between ethics and power enables the Prophetic tradition to reclaim its critical and normative function within political discourse. Hadith emerges not as a constitutional blueprint that freezes political imagination, but as a moral compass that guides the exercise of power and restrains its excesses. This synthesis clarifies the findings of the study and prepares the conceptual ground for concluding reflections on prophetic authority, political legitimacy, and the ethical responsibilities of interpretation in contemporary Islamic thought.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the contemporary use of caliphate-related hadiths is characterized less by textual deficiency than by methodological and epistemological displacement. While many hadiths cited in caliphate-oriented discourse meet classical standards of sanad authenticity, their ideological deployment often extends beyond the limits of normative application

established in classical hadith scholarship. The conflation of textual authenticity with political obligation results in the transformation of context-bound prophetic guidance into rigid political doctrine. Through an integrated analysis of sanad evaluation, matan criticism, and critical discourse analysis, this research demonstrates that hadiths concerning leadership, obedience, and political authority were historically articulated to address specific social and political circumstances. When interpreted within their ethical and historical contexts, these narrations emphasize moral governance, social cohesion, and accountability rather than prescribing a fixed political system. This finding aligns with classical juristic perspectives that treated political arrangements as contingent and subject to ethical evaluation through *ijtihād*. The study further shows that contemporary ideological readings selectively narrow the semantic and ethical scope of hadith, privileging political certainty over interpretive plurality and moral reasoning. In response, this research proposes a repositioning of hadith between ethics and power by reintegrating classical hadith methodology with contemporary political analysis. Such an approach restores the prophetic tradition as a moral resource that guides and constrains political authority, rather than legitimizing immutable political forms. Ultimately, this study contributes to a more nuanced and responsible engagement with hadith in contemporary Islamic political thought, reaffirming the ethical foundations of prophetic authority and interpretive responsibility.

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