The Concept of Ulil Amri in Al-Sunnah: Theological and Social Implications in Nationhood

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ABSTRACT

Keyword: Ulil Amri, Obedience, Government, Islamic Politics	**Abstract**
	This research aims to examine the concept of Ulil Amri as described in the Quran and Sunnah, and how obedience to Ulil Amri is applied in the context of nationhood, particularly within modern political systems. The research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach, focusing on the interpretation of religious texts and related literature. Primary data sources include the Quran, Hadith, and the commentaries of classical and contemporary scholars, such as Ibn Qayyim, Al-Tabari, and Yusuf Al-Qaradawi. The main findings indicate that obedience to Ulil Amri has clear limitations, particularly when leaders do not govern in accordance with Islamic law. Additionally, the concept of Ulil Amri faces challenges in the modern era, especially in countries that do not fully implement Sharia law. The role of scholars in ensuring that leaders' policies remain aligned with Islamic values has become increasingly significant. The research concludes that obedience to Ulil Amri remains relevant; however, Muslims must balance this obedience with constructive criticism through the principle of Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar when necessary. Consequently, this study suggests that the concept of Ulil Amri in Islam can be dynamically applied within the framework of modern governance.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Ulil Amri has long been a subject of discussion in Islamic discourse, both in theological and political contexts. In the Quran, Ulil Amri refers to those who hold authority within society, and who must be obeyed by Muslims as stated in Surah An-Nisa [4]: 59, "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you." This concept has continued to evolve in response to the social and political changes within Muslim societies. The importance of Ulil Amri is not only limited to the classical Islamic period but is also relevant in the modern era, particularly in the context of nationhood and statehood.

Over time, governance and authority in the Islamic world have undergone various transformations. In the modern era, Muslim-majority countries face the challenge of how to apply Islamic values in governance, including the concept of obedience to Ulil Amri

(Denny, 2017). In some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan, political leaders also serve as religious authorities, making this concept more complex (Kamali, 2004). In Indonesia, the discourse on Ulil Amri includes debates between political and religious power, especially since the period of the Old Order up to the Reform era (Azra, 2002). Islamic groups often use the concept of Ulil Amri to support their political positions, whether in favor of or against the government.

The relevance of Ulil Amri in the modern context has become more pressing, particularly due to the growing influence of globalization and the pressures from secular ideologies. In democratic states, the role of Ulil Amri is often questioned, especially concerning the limits of obedience to leaders who do not fully implement Islamic law (Al-Roubaie, 2013). Contemporary Muslims also face ethical and theological dilemmas: To what extent should they obey governments that may not always align with Islamic principles? This has become a significant debate within the field of Islamic political jurisprudence, or fiqh siyasah (Rahman, 2018).

Furthermore, the development of information technology and social media has accelerated the spread of political and religious ideas. This has influenced how Muslims understand and apply the concept of Ulil Amri. Many religious movements critically challenge the authority of modern Ulil Amri, claiming that many Muslim leaders no longer represent the aspirations of their people (Yilmaz, 2020). As a result, a significant question arises: Who truly deserves to be called Ulil Amri in the modern era, and how should Muslims respond?

This paper aims to delve deeper into the theological understanding of the concept of Ulil Amri in the Sunnah and explore its practical implications in the social and political life of modern Muslims. Specifically, this paper will examine how the concept of Ulil Amri can be applied in Islamic governance and its impact on social structures. By utilizing the perspectives of both classical and contemporary scholars, this paper hopes to provide a comprehensive understanding of obedience to Ulil Amri and how its limitations are established in the Sunnah and fiqh siyasah.

Some classical scholars, such as Ibn Qayyim in his work Zaad al-Ma'ad, emphasize that Ulil Amri refers to those who hold executive and judicial power, such as heads of state and judges. Ibn Qayyim asserts that obedience to Ulil Amri is part of obedience to Allah and His Messenger, provided that their policies do not contradict Sharia (Ibn Qayyim, 1994). On the other hand, contemporary scholars like Yusuf Al-Qaradawi propose a more flexible approach to this concept in modern states. According to Al-Qaradawi, Ulil Amri is not limited to political leaders but also includes legal experts, scholars, and intellectuals who hold authority in public affairs (Al-Qaradawi, 2001).

In the context of modern states, it is essential to reassess this concept, as current governance structures often differ from the caliphate model that served as the basis of governance in early Islamic periods. Scholars like Kamali (2004) argue that Ulil Amri in the modern context must be defined with regard to the legal and democratic systems in Muslim-majority countries. For instance, in Indonesia, political leaders are elected

democratically but still face challenges in implementing Islamic values in a pluralistic society (Azra, 2002).

Using a multidisciplinary approach, this paper will explore the boundaries of obedience to Ulil Amri in states that do not fully implement Islamic law. How can Muslims balance their obedience to political leaders who may not fully align with religious teachings? What role do scholars play in ensuring that government policies remain within the framework of Sharia? This paper will attempt to answer these questions by drawing upon theological and political Islamic literature.

Ultimately, this paper will not only address theological theories surrounding Ulil Amri but also examine how these theories can be practically applied in the context of state governance. In doing so, this paper will provide a valuable contribution to understanding the relevance and application of the Ulil Amri concept in the lives of modern Muslims, in terms of politics, society, and religion.

METHODS

This research uses a textual analysis approach, focusing on the method of tafsir bi al-ma'tsur (interpretation based on narration) and tafsir bi al-ra'yi (interpretation based on rational opinion) to understand the meaning of the Ulil Amri concept within Islamic texts. This method involves comparing the views of various classical and contemporary scholars regarding the interpretation of Quranic verses and Hadith related to Ulil Amri. The approach of Islamic political jurisprudence (fiqh siyasah) is also used to analyze the application of the Ulil Amri concept in the context of governance and social life in the modern era.

The research process involves collecting and evaluating relevant literature, which is then critically analyzed to address the research questions on how the concept of Ulil Amri is understood in the Sunnah and how its application can help shape an Islamic governance system that is just and aligned with Sharia. The results of the analysis are organized into several sections, including the theological background, interpretation, and discussions on the practical implications of this concept in a modern context. By using this method, the research aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth view of Ulil Amri, and how obedience to leaders in Islam can be understood and applied in the context of governance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Definition and Interpretation of Ulil Amri in the Quran and Sunnah

Etymologically, Ulil Amri is composed of two words: uli or ulu, meaning "possessor" or "owner," and amri, meaning "matter" or "command." The combination of these two words gives Ulil Amri the meaning of "the one who possesses authority" or "the party with authority" (Syaripudin, 2014). In the context of the Quran, Ulil Amri specifically refers to those given authority in leadership and the management of the people's affairs. This term appears in two verses of Surah An-Nisa, specifically in verses

59 and 83. In verse 59, Allah commands the believers to obey Allah, His Messenger, and Ulil Amri among them: "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you" (QS. An-Nisa [4]: 59).

The interpretation of who is meant by Ulil Amri in this verse has been the subject of long-standing debate among scholars. They hold differing views regarding who has the right to bear this title and to whom Muslims should offer their obedience. Some scholars argue that Ulil Amri refers to political leaders, while others assert that it refers to scholars or even both.

In classical interpretations, many scholars have attempted to provide a more specific definition of Ulil Amri. A commonly cited interpretation is that of Al-Thabari, who emphasizes that Ulil Amri refers to rulers and officials responsible for the people's affairs. He bases his view on hadith narrations that underscore the importance of obeying political leaders as long as they do not command acts of disobedience (Al-Thabari, 1997). According to Al-Thabari, obedience to Ulil Amri is one form of obedience to Allah and His Messenger, as long as the policies enacted are in line with Sharia

Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, in his work Zaad al-Ma'ad, also emphasizes that Ulil Amri refers to political leaders and those entrusted with managing the affairs of the people. Ibn Qayyim asserts that obedience to Ulil Amri should be given as long as they govern justly and do not command anything contrary to the orders of Allah and His Messenger (Ibn Qayyim, 1994). He also notes that disobedience to leaders is only permissible if they command disobedience, as stated in various hadiths.

A broader view is presented by Fakhruddin Al-Razi in his Mafatih al-Ghayb. Al-Razi states that Ulil Amri is not limited to political leaders but also includes scholars who hold authority in religious knowledge. According to him, scholars and religious experts play an important role in guiding the people and ensuring that political leadership remains within the bounds of Sharia (Al-Razi, 1981). Al-Razi argues that political leaders should continue to receive advice from scholars, and scholars have a role as moral and ethical guardians for rulers.

In addition to classical commentaries, contemporary interpretations also provide a different nuance to the concept of Ulil Amri. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, a prominent contemporary scholar, asserts that in the modern context, Ulil Amri includes more than just political leaders. According to Al-Qaradawi, Ulil Amri in modern Islamic societies can encompass various parties who hold authority in public matters, including political leaders, scholars, intellectuals, and professionals with expertise in certain fields important to society (Al-Qaradawi, 2001). Al-Qaradawi also suggests that in modern states with democratic systems, Muslims can elect leaders who are best able to implement Islamic law and serve the public interest.

Muhammad Hashim Kamali, a contemporary scholar of Islamic law, adds that the concept of Ulil Amri in the modern context must take into account changes in the structure of governance and political systems in Muslim-majority countries. Kamali argues that in this modern era, Ulil Amri is not limited to individuals who hold political

power but also includes governmental institutions that function according to Sharia principles (Kamali, 2004). He posits that leaders elected through democratic processes, as long as they operate within the limits of Islamic law, can also be considered Ulil Amri.

In Indonesia, the discourse surrounding Ulil Amri has shifted from the Old Order era to the Reform era. During the New Order period, the concept of Ulil Amri was often linked to political legitimacy, with the government seeking obedience from the people by referring to Quranic verses on obedience to leaders (Azra, 2002). However, in the context of political reforms post-1998, the role of Ulil Amri has been re-evaluated, especially regarding how a government not formally based on religious law can still gain legitimacy from Muslims.

The debate over who has the right to be called Ulil Amri continues today. Most scholars agree that Ulil Amri in the context of the Quran and Sunnah refers to political leaders, particularly those with the authority to manage and govern society. However, as elaborated by Al-Razi and Al-Qaradawi, the role of scholars in guiding and advising leaders is also crucial. In many cases, Ulil Amri is seen as a combination of political leaders and scholars, with both working together to ensure that society remains on the correct moral and legal path.

In the modern context, where many Muslim countries implement governance systems not fully based on Islamic law, Muslims face a dilemma. They must decide whether obedience to leaders who do not fully implement Sharia can still be considered obedience to Ulil Amri. In this situation, the role of scholars becomes increasingly important, particularly in providing moral and ethical guidance to both the government and the Muslim community (Yilmaz, 2020).

From the various interpretations presented, it is clear that the concept of Ulil Amri has multiple dimensions of complexity. In the Quran and Sunnah, Ulil Amri refers to those with authority over the management of the people's affairs, both politically and religiously. Classical scholars like Al-Thabari, Ibn Qayyim, and Al-Razi provide diverse views on who qualifies as Ulil Amri, with some emphasizing political leaders and others including scholars and religious authorities.

In them modern context, interpretations of the Ulil Amri concept evolve by taking into account changes in political and social systems. Political leaders and scholars play complementary roles in maintaining the stability of Muslim societies and ensuring that government policies align with Islamic teachings. Thus, obedience to Ulil Amri remains relevant in the modern context but must always be guided by just and wise principles of Sharia.

Obedience to Ulil Amri: Boundaries and Conditions

The obligation to obey Ulil Amri (those in authority) is one of the fundamental principles in Islam, based on the commands in the Quran and Sunnah. However, obedience to Ulil Amri is not unconditional and absolute. In Islam, there are criteria that a leader must meet to be deemed worthy of obedience, and there are certain boundaries

that regulate when obedience is obligatory and when it is permissible to disobey, especially when the leader deviates from the teachings of Sharia. Key criteria such as amanah (trustworthiness) and ahliyah (competency) are essential conditions for obedience to Ulil Amri. Additionally, the principle of Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar (enjoining good and forbidding wrong) serves as a guide for the community in dealing with leaders who violate religious principles.

In various Islamic sources, amanah and ahliyah are often mentioned as primary conditions that must be possessed by a leader. The community's obligation to obey their leader is closely tied to the leader's ability to carry out their duties in accordance with Sharia and Islamic moral standards. A hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah mentions that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "When the matter is entrusted to those who are not competent, then await its destruction" (Sahih al-Bukhari). This hadith emphasizes the importance of ahliyah (competency) as a crucial qualification for a leader to be obeyed. In other words, a leader who lacks the skills or knowledge to lead cannot be considered worthy of obedience.

In addition to ahliyah, amanah is also a key criterion. A trustworthy leader is one who can be relied upon to carry out their duties with fairness and wisdom. In Surah An-Nisa [4]: 58, Allah commands the believers to hand over trusts to those qualified to handle them and to judge justly when making decisions: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice" (QS. An-Nisa [4]: 58). This verse emphasizes that a leader must possess integrity and justice, and only with these qualities are they deserving of the community's obedience (Kamali, 2008).

Obedience to Ulil Amri is obligatory, but it is not absolute. There are boundaries defined by Sharia regarding when the community is required to obey its leaders and when disobedience is allowed. A fundamental principle in this matter is that obedience is only granted as long as the leader does not command something contrary to Sharia. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "There is no obedience in disobedience to Allah; obedience is only in what is good" (Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim). This hadith makes it clear that obedience to Ulil Amri is conditional upon their compliance with Islamic law. If a leader commands something that contradicts the teachings of Allah and His Messenger, Muslims are not required to obey.

This principle is also supported by scholars like Ibn Qayyim, who asserts that obedience to leaders is a religious obligation as long as they do not deviate from the commands of Allah and His Messenger. Ibn Qayyim states that if a leader enacts policies contrary to Sharia, the community is permitted to disobey them, and it is even mandatory to oppose them if such policies lead to sinful actions (Ibn Qayyim, 1994). In this context, the boundaries of obedience are clear: Muslims must obey their leaders as long as they rule justly and in accordance with Sharia, but obedience should not be given if the leader commands sinful acts.

In Islam, the principle of Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar (enjoining good and forbidding wrong) is one of the guiding principles for Muslims in their relationship with their leaders. Islam does not only teach obedience but also requires Muslims to advise and correct their leaders if they stray from the right path. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "The best form of jihad is to speak the truth before a tyrant ruler" (Sunan Abu Dawood and Jami' at-Tirmidhi). This hadith emphasizes the moral responsibility of the community to speak out against injustice, even when confronting a tyrannical leader.

Fakhruddin Al-Razi, in his Mafatih al-Ghayb, explains that the principle of Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar is a form of social control that the community holds over its leaders. Al-Razi believes that scholars and the public have a duty to remind leaders when they begin to deviate from Sharia (Al-Razi, 1981). In other words, Muslims are not only responsible for obeying their leaders but also for correcting them when they err.

This principle is particularly significant in the modern context, especially when many leaders in Muslim-majority countries do not fully implement Islamic law in their policies. In such situations, Muslims have a duty to offer constructive criticism to their leaders. However, this criticism should be delivered wisely and in a manner consistent with Islamic values.

In modern politics, particularly in countries that do not fully implement Sharia, Muslims often face dilemmas about the extent to which they should obey their political leaders. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi argues that in situations where leaders do not fully implement Islamic law, obedience must still be given as long as those leaders do not command something contrary to Sharia (Al-Qaradawi, 2001). He also emphasizes the crucial role of scholars in guiding leaders to ensure that their policies remain aligned with Islamic values.

On the other hand, Kamali (2008) argues that in modern states with democratic systems, leaders who are democratically elected can still be considered Ulil Amri as long as they uphold the principles of justice and ethics as outlined by Sharia. Kamali adds that Muslims must work with their leaders to ensure that government policies prioritize public welfare and align with Islamic teachings. This shows that obedience in the modern context requires a more flexible and adaptive understanding but must always remain within the framework of Sharia.

Application of the Ulil Amri Concept in Modern Nationhood

In the Islamic political system, Ulil Amri or those in authority play a crucial role in maintaining societal order and ensuring that laws and policies are implemented in line with Sharia. This concept has been thoroughly discussed in the Quran and Sunnah, as indicated in Surah An-Nisa [4]: 59, which commands Muslims to obey Allah, His Messenger, and Ulil Amri among them. However, challenges arise when this concept is applied in the modern context, especially in Muslim-majority countries that do not always formally implement Sharia law. Therefore, it is important to understand how the

concept of Ulil Amri is applied in modern nationhood, particularly in states with diverse systems of governance.

During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Rightly Guided Caliphs, Ulil Amri was identified as political leaders who also served as religious leaders. As previously discussed, the Prophet was the sole Ulil Amri, responsible for both religious and political affairs. After the Prophet's passing, the caliphs who led the Muslim community also carried out this dual function, governing not only political matters but also ensuring that the law implemented was in accordance with Sharia (Syaripudin, 2014).

During the time of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, obedience to Ulil Amri was strong, as these leaders were widely recognized as the legitimate successors of the Prophet and governed according to Islamic principles. The separation between political leadership and religious authority was not rigid during this period, as the caliphs held both powers simultaneously. However, after the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, the caliphate system underwent shifts, particularly with the emergence of hereditary dynasties. Although these leaders were still considered Ulil Amri, the relationship between political and religious power began to change.

Ibn Qayyim, in his work Zaad al-Ma'ad, explains that leaders considered Ulil Amri must govern according to the laws of Allah and His Messenger. Obedience to them is obligatory as long as they rule justly and do not deviate from Sharia. However, if they command something contrary to Islamic teachings, Muslims are permitted to disobey (Ibn Qayyim, 1994). This demonstrates that in classical governance, obedience to Ulil Amri was always tied to Sharia.

When the concept of Ulil Amri is brought into the modern context, various challenges emerge. Many Muslim-majority countries today have adopted modern governance systems based on democracy, secularism, or a combination of both. Countries such as Indonesia, Turkey, and Egypt have adopted political models that separate religion from state affairs, while Saudi Arabia and Iran maintain a strong influence of Sharia in their governance. In this context, a significant question arises: Who qualifies as Ulil Amri, and to what extent must Muslims obey political leaders who do not explicitly govern based on Islamic law?

Yusuf Al-Qaradawi argues that in modern states, Ulil Amri does not have to be limited to political leaders who fully implement Sharia. He suggests that in modern political systems, leaders who are democratically elected can also be considered Ulil Amri as long as they maintain justice and do not command anything contrary to Sharia (Al-Qaradawi, 2001). In his view, it is important for Muslims to continue participating in modern political processes, even if these systems are not fully based on Sharia.

In Indonesia, the discourse surrounding Ulil Amri has been an essential part of national politics. Although Indonesia is a Muslim-majority country, its governance system is based on secular democracy. This creates a dilemma for some Muslims who feel that political leaders who do not implement Sharia are not worthy of obedience.

However, most scholars in Indonesia, as represented by major organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, emphasize the importance of obeying legitimate leaders as long as they do not violate fundamental principles of justice and humanity, even if their governance is not based on Sharia (Azra, 2002).

One of the biggest dilemmas Muslims face in the modern era is how to balance obedience to political leaders who do not fully implement Sharia with the obligation to adhere to Islamic teachings. In many cases, Muslims are led by leaders who may not fully follow Islamic principles in their policies. This is especially challenging in countries like Egypt, Tunisia, and Pakistan, where tensions between secular governments and Islamic groups continue to persist.

According to Kamali (2008), Muslims must understand that obedience to political leaders in modern governance systems does not always equate to absolute obedience. Leaders who are democratically elected in modern systems can still be considered Ulil Amri as long as they govern justly and uphold public interest. However, if the policies implemented by such leaders clearly contradict Sharia, Muslims have the right to reject those policies or offer criticism based on the principle of Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar.

In Yusuf Al-Qaradawi's view, Muslims should exercise wisdom when responding to such dilemmas. In situations where no ideal Islamic governance system exists, Muslims still have a duty to maintain social and political stability while offering constructive criticism to leaders who deviate from Islamic values (Al-Qaradawi, 2001). This criticism should be delivered in a wise and peaceful manner, avoiding violence or anarchy.

In the modern context, the role of scholars as Ulil Amri in terms of religious guidance becomes increasingly important. As many Muslim countries adopt governance systems that are not based on Sharia, scholars play the role of moral guardians for political leaders. Fakhruddin Al-Razi emphasizes in his commentary that scholars play an important role in advising political leaders to ensure that their policies remain in line with Islamic teachings (Al-Razi, 1981). In other words, scholars serve not only as spiritual guides for the Muslim community but also as moral advisers to rulers.

In countries such as Iran, the role of scholars in governance is very evident, where the system of governance based on the principle of Wilayatul Faqih grants supreme authority to a scholar. Although this model is not adopted in all Muslim countries, the role of scholars in advising leaders remains important, especially in countries that have adopted democratic systems like Indonesia, Turkey, and Malaysia.

The application of the Ulil Amri concept in modern nationhood faces various challenges, particularly when implemented in governance systems that are not fully based on Sharia. Nonetheless, this concept remains relevant and important in maintaining political and social stability in Muslim-majority countries. Obedience to political leaders remains a duty as long as they govern with justice and do not deviate from Sharia. However, Muslims also have the right to offer constructive criticism when leaders' policies do not align with Islamic values. In such situations, the role of scholars

as moral advisers and overseers of state policies is crucial to ensure that governance remains within the framework of Islamic teachings.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the importance of the concept of Ulil Amri in Islam as part of the obligation for Muslims to obey their leaders, both in theological and social contexts. In the Quran and Sunnah, Ulil Amri is identified as those in authority who must be obeyed as long as they govern with justice and in accordance with Sharia. However, this obedience is not unconditional and must be based on criteria such as amanah (trustworthiness) and ahliyah (competency). In the modern context, the application of the Ulil Amri concept faces significant challenges, especially in Muslim-majority countries that adopt secular or democratic governance systems. Muslims are often required to balance obedience to political leaders who do not fully implement Sharia with the need to adhere to Islamic teachings. This research also emphasizes the important role of scholars in ensuring that government policies remain aligned with Islamic values through the principle of Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar. The role of scholars as moral advisers and overseers of state policies is particularly significant in the modern era, where political systems often do not fully adhere to Sharia law. Thus, the concept of Ulil Amri remains relevant in maintaining the balance between political obedience and loyalty to Sharia in the lives of Muslims, especially in the context of nationhood.

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