



Non-Muslim Leadership in The Qur'an: An Integrated Approach Through Shahrur's Linguistic Analysis And Fazlur Rahman's Ideal Moral Hermeneutics

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Abstract

The permissibility of non-Muslim leadership in Muslim-majority societies remains a contested issue in contemporary Islamic political thought. This study reexamines Qur'an al-Ma'idah (5):51 through an integrated hermeneutical approach that combines Muhammad Shahrur's structural-linguistic analysis of hudud theory and Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory. Using qualitative library research, the study analyzes the semantic range of the term awliya' and its socio-historical context. The findings show that awliya' in al-Ma'idah (5):51 refers primarily to relationships of political loyalty within a context of wartime betrayal rather than a universal prohibition of non-Muslim leadership. Shahrur's theory identifies a semantic boundary extending from "loyal ally" to "leader," while Rahman's method highlights the verse's moral objective of safeguarding justice, trustworthiness, and communal integrity. The study concludes that the verse is contextually bounded and does not prohibit non-Muslim political leadership as a permanent legal rule. Instead, leadership should be entrusted to individuals who demonstrate competence, justice, and commitment to the public good.

Keywords: Shahrur; Fazlur Rahman; Hermeneutics; Non-Muslim Leadership; Hudud Theory; Ideal Moral.

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Introduction

Whether a non-Muslim may legitimately exercise political authority in a Muslim-majority society remains a subject of considerable debate within contemporary Islamic legal and political scholarship. While several Muslim-majority states, including Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Bangladesh, Algeria, and Malaysia, require their heads of state to be Muslim through constitutional or legal provisions, other countries with substantial Muslim populations have adopted different approaches. In nations such as Nigeria, Senegal, and Lebanon, non-Muslims have held prominent governmental positions without encountering significant religious opposition (Khalik, 2014). These contrasting experiences suggest that no definitive juridical consensus has emerged on the issue and reveal continuing disagreements over the interpretation of key Qur'anic passages that are frequently cited in discussions concerning the legitimacy of non-Muslim leadership. This divergence illustrates the absence of a settled juridical consensus and points to underlying interpretive disputes over a cluster of Qur'anic verses most frequently cited in this debate. While classical

jurists formulated their legal opinions within premodern political structures, contemporary Muslim societies operate within constitutional nation-states whose legitimacy is derived from constitutional law rather than dynastic or religious authority. Modern political institutions must be understood through the framework of *dustur* (constitution), which serves as the ultimate source of legitimacy for state authority and guarantees equal civic rights for all citizens. This shift raises important questions regarding the continued applicability of premodern rulings on political leadership in contemporary plural societies (Fanani & Hidayati, 2022).

Among the Qur'anic passages cited in debates on non-Muslim leadership, Al-Ma'idah (5):51 occupies a particularly prominent position. Classical and modern exegetes, including Ibn Kathir, Al-Zamakhshari, Sayyid Qutb, and Abdul Wahhab Khallaf, have generally interpreted the verse as prohibiting Muslims from appointing Jews and Christians as *awliya'*, a term that has been translated in various ways, including allies, protectors, trusted associates, or leaders. During the twentieth century, Islamist thinkers increasingly advanced an expansive interpretation that linked *awliya'* directly to political authority. This perspective was articulated most prominently by Sayyid Qutb, who viewed political cooperation and loyalty between Muslims and non-Muslims as fundamentally incompatible (Khalik, 2014). In contrast, Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that effective leadership should be evaluated primarily based on justice and competence rather than religious or ethnic affiliation. Reflecting this position, he argued that governance under a just non-Muslim ruler is preferable to rule by an unjust Muslim leader (Khalik, 2014).

This disagreement among scholars extends beyond differences in textual interpretation and reflects broader epistemological debates concerning the proper methodology for understanding the Qur'an. Traditional exegetical approaches generally regard legal rulings derived from Qur'anic verses as universal and largely independent of their historical circumstances. In contrast, contemporary hermeneutical approaches view meaning as emerging through the interaction between the text, its historical context, and the interpretive perspective of the reader. Among the most prominent Muslim thinkers who have challenged conventional paradigms of Qur'anic interpretation are Muhammad Shahrur (1938–2019) and Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988). Although their methodologies differ, they share a commitment to making the Qur'an relevant to contemporary realities. Shahrur emphasizes the linguistic structure of the Qur'anic text and develops the theory of *hudud* (boundaries) to maintain textual accuracy while allowing interpretive flexibility. Rahman, meanwhile, focuses on the socio-historical setting of revelation through his "double movement" approach, which seeks to identify the ethical principles underlying Qur'anic teachings and apply those principles to modern circumstances.

Research on non-Muslim leadership in Islam generally falls into several major analytical perspectives. The first is the normative-classical perspective, which predominantly opposes non-Muslim leadership based on theological considerations and the need to safeguard Islamic beliefs, although certain exceptional circumstances—such as political necessity or emergencies—may

justify limited accommodation (Al-Fajri et al., 2023; Sutisna et al., 2021). The second perspective adopts a contextual-contemporary approach that reexamines Qur'anic texts in light of present-day social and political realities, thereby opening the possibility for non-Muslim leadership when principles such as justice, equality, and human rights are upheld (Amezzian, 2025; Minan & Afifi, 2020). A third strand of scholarship employs comparative exegesis to explore differences among Qur'anic commentators, noting that M. Quraish Shihab generally advances a more context-sensitive interpretation, whereas Ibn Kathir favors a textual reading that tends to produce more restrictive conclusions (Mahmudah & Tahir, 2021).

Finally, the methodological-hermeneutical perspective stresses the need for interpretive models that combine textual examination with socio-historical analysis, allowing Qur'anic teachings to be understood in ways that remain relevant to contemporary social and political contexts (Harsono et al., 2025; Rum, 2025; Z et al., 2023). Some studies have further highlighted Muhammad Shahrur's scientific-historical method as a framework for reconstructing contemporary Islamic legal theory by integrating classical sources with modern scientific and social approaches. However, these studies remain largely methodological and do not apply Shahrur's theory of *hudud* to specific Qur'anic debates such as the issue of non-Muslim leadership (Fanani & Hidayati, 2022). A more specific strand of scholarship has employed Muhammad Shahrur's interpretive framework to revisit the issue of leadership, such as women leadership (Wathani et al., 2022).

These studies argue that Qur'anic injunctions should not be understood through rigid textualism but rather through a linguistic and contextual analysis that takes into account the semantic range of key Qur'anic terms and the changing realities of Muslim societies. By emphasizing the distinction between historical circumstances and universal moral principles, Shahrur's approach opens space for a more flexible understanding of political leadership in pluralistic contexts. Although these studies have made valuable contributions to the discourse on non-Muslim leadership in Islam, their analyses remain largely fragmented. Existing scholarship has generally failed to provide a systematic framework that combines linguistic examination of the Qur'anic text with the contextual and moral hermeneutics developed by Fazlur Rahman in interpreting QS Al-Ma'idah 51. Furthermore, few studies have incorporated the linguistic insights and *hudud* (boundary) theory proposed by Muhammad Shahrur as a means of establishing interpretive limits and maintaining textual coherence. Addressing this gap, the novelty of this present study seeks to integrate these two methodological approaches in order to produce a more comprehensive and contextually relevant interpretation of the verse.

This article seeks to address the identified gap by developing an integrated interpretive framework that combines the approaches of Muhammad Shahrur and Fazlur Rahman. The discussion unfolds in three stages. First, it examines the key methodological concepts proposed by both scholars that are relevant to the issue under investigation. Second, it applies this combined framework to QS Al-Ma'idah (5):51 and several related Qur'anic passages. Third, it

formulates the underlying moral principles that emerge from this integrated reading and assesses their implications for contemporary debates on non-Muslim leadership. The study argues that QS Al-Ma'idah (5):51 should be understood within the specific historical circumstances in which it was revealed rather than as a universally binding prohibition. Through this perspective, the verse is shown to emphasize broader ethical values, particularly justice, trustworthiness, and the preservation of social cohesion without categorically endorsing or rejecting non-Muslim political leadership in all contexts.

Method

This research adopts a qualitative library research methodology that relies primarily on textual analysis of relevant sources. The primary materials consist of the works of Muhammad Shahrur, particularly *Al-Kitab wa al-Qur'an: Qira'ah Mu'asirah* (1990), as well as the writings of Fazlur Rahman, including *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (1982) and *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (1980). In addition, the study draws upon classical and contemporary Qur'anic commentaries and relevant Prophetic traditions. To support and contextualize the analysis, secondary sources comprise scholarly journal articles, academic books, and other research publications addressing Qur'anic hermeneutics, Islamic political thought, and debates surrounding the issue of non-Muslim leadership.

The study integrates Muhammad Shahrur's hudud theory and Fazlur Rahman's double-movement hermeneutics as complementary analytical frameworks. The analysis is conducted through four interconnected stages. First, the study performs a linguistic examination of the relevant Qur'anic passages by analyzing their etymological roots, morphological forms, and syntactic structures in accordance with the methodological framework developed by Muhammad Shahrur. Second, it identifies the *hudud* established by the text, namely the minimum and maximum semantic as well as legal boundaries that define the range of acceptable interpretations. Third, the research undertakes a socio-historical investigation based on both the immediate circumstances of revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*) and the broader social and political environment of the Medinan period, following the double-movement approach proposed by Fazlur Rahman. Fourth, it seeks to formulate the underlying moral objectives of the verse and assess their relevance to contemporary debates concerning non-Muslim leadership. Throughout these stages, intertextual analysis occupies a central position by examining the relationship between QS Al-Ma'idah (5):51 and QS Al-Mumtahanah (60):7–9, an approach that corresponds to *tartil* in Shahrur's methodology and thematic interpretation in Rahman's hermeneutical framework.

Finding and Discussion

Shahrur's Linguistics and the Theory of Hudud

As human civilization continues to advance in an increasingly modern and interconnected world, the engagement of Islamic thought with intellectual

developments originating in the West remains a contested issue. Historical experiences of colonial domination have left a lasting impact on many Muslim societies, generating a degree of skepticism toward Western-produced knowledge and epistemological frameworks. Within this intellectual climate, Muhammad Shahrur offers an alternative approach by arguing that the foundations of Muslim intellectual inquiry should be derived directly from the Qur'an (Shahrur, 1990). Through this perspective, the Qur'an is not viewed merely as a source that legitimizes scientific inquiry; rather, it functions as an epistemological framework that encourages Muslims to recognize the presence of scientific insights and principles of knowledge embedded within the divine text. According to Shahrur, the Qur'an must live not only in the spiritual world but also in the material world, not only oriented towards the afterlife but also the driving force of civilization for social life in a good world. This can only be done by giving the text of the Qur'an more room to be interpreted with reasoning supported by modern science (Wathani et al., 2022). The Qur'an is a timeless divine text, but its meaning must be continuously rediscovered through human reason and modern knowledge so that it remains a living force in shaping both spiritual life and worldly civilization.

A fundamental aspect of Muhammad Shahrur's methodology is his effort to interpret the Qur'an through the Qur'an itself. He approaches the sacred text in the way scholars derive linguistic principles from Qur'anic Arabic, including the disciplines of *nahw* (syntax), *sarf* (morphology), and *balaghah* (rhetoric). Building upon this foundation, Shahrur develops a hermeneutical framework that rejects the notion of true synonymy within the Qur'an, maintaining that each word is deliberately chosen and conveys a unique meaning that cannot be fully substituted by another term. This principle can be seen in his examination of lexical pairs such as *khalafa* and *ja'ala* (خلق / جعل). According to his analysis, *khalafa* refers to the act of bringing something into existence for the first time, whereas *ja'ala* denotes the process of transforming an existing entity into a new condition or form (Manzur, 1990). Having identified these semantic distinctions, Shahrur then employs them as interpretive instruments for uncovering more precise meanings within Qur'anic discourse.

Drawing on the tradition of Abu 'Ali al-Farisi and Ibn Jinni, Muhammad Shahrur argues that every distinct word in the Qur'an carries a distinct meaning, and that apparent synonyms encode nuanced semantic differences that classical commentators have glossed over. This principle has far-reaching consequences, as it demands that the interpreter attend to the precise semantic field of each term, its etymology (*isytiqaq*), and the syntactic environment in which it appears before deriving any legal or ethical ruling (Shahrur, 1990).

In contrast to other hermeneutical thinkers who place greater emphasis on contextual meaning, the sacredness of the text remains central within the hermeneutics of Muhammad Shahrur. Through his anti-synonymy linguistic approach, Shahrur affirms that the perfection of thought can be articulated through language. The Qur'an, as the medium conveying the divine intellect, must be engaged through language as a product of human culture, and therefore is understood to possess a linguistic inimitability (*i'jaz*) that is *salih li kulli zaman*

wa makan (valid for all times and places). To ensure its continued intelligibility across historical contexts, the Qur'an must be read in a *tartil* manner.¹ Shahrur develops the concept of *tartil* as a form of intertextual reading of the Qur'an. As noted by Komaruddin Hidayat (Hidayat, 1996), at the first level of intertextuality, there exists a structure or system of signs within the Qur'an itself. This implies that reading the Qur'an in a *tartil* manner requires that, when interpreting a particular verse or expression, one first examine its relationship to other words and verses throughout the text. Such an approach is commonly reflected in thematic exegesis, encapsulated in the principle *al-Qur'an yufassiru ba'duhu ba'dan*, that the Qur'an explains itself.

Extending this intertextual-linguistic framework, Muhammad Shahrur articulates his theory of *hudud* through a foundational distinction between *istiqamah* and *hanifiyyah* terms in the Qur'an. He contends that these two concepts are largely overlooked in mainstream Islamic discourse (Fatah, 2019), constitute the epistemic basis for understanding the flexibility and limits of Islamic law. While *istiqamah* is conventionally associated with steadfastness, Shahrur redefines it linguistically as denoting straightness, firmness, and normative stability, derived from the root *qaum*. In contrast, *hanifiyyah*, originating from *hanafa*, signifies inclination or curvature, representing deviation from linearity and thus embodying dynamism and adaptability.

Within this schema, Islamic law is conceptualized as a dialectical interplay between these two principles. *Hanifiyyah* reflects the fluid and evolving nature of socio-historical reality, whereas *istiqamah* designates the fixed divine limits (*hudud*) that regulate and constrain such movement (Mubarak, 2007; Shahrur, 1990). This thought reinforces Shahrur's broader hermeneutical claim that meaning emerges through the interaction between textual structure and historical contingency. Accordingly, the theory of *hudud* does not impose rigid legal determinacy but delineates a semantic and normative range within which interpretation operates, thereby preserving the relevance of Islamic law across temporal and spatial contexts.

According to Shahrur, classical jurisprudence tended to extract a single, maximally specific ruling from a Qur'anic verse and treat it as immutable. Shahrur argues that the Qur'an typically establishes a minimum boundary (*al-hadd al-adna*) and a maximum boundary (*al-hadd al-a'la*), within which human societies retain legitimate interpretive freedom. Legislation that falls within these two boundaries is Islamically valid; legislation that crosses either boundary is not. The analogy Shahrur uses is that of a football pitch: the boundaries define the field of play, but the players are free to move anywhere within it and must develop their own strategies (Shahrur, 1990).

¹ This approach is grounded in the Qur'anic injunction found in Surah al-Muzzammil (73:4), "ورتل القرآن ترتيلاً" (recite the Qur'an in a measured and orderly manner).

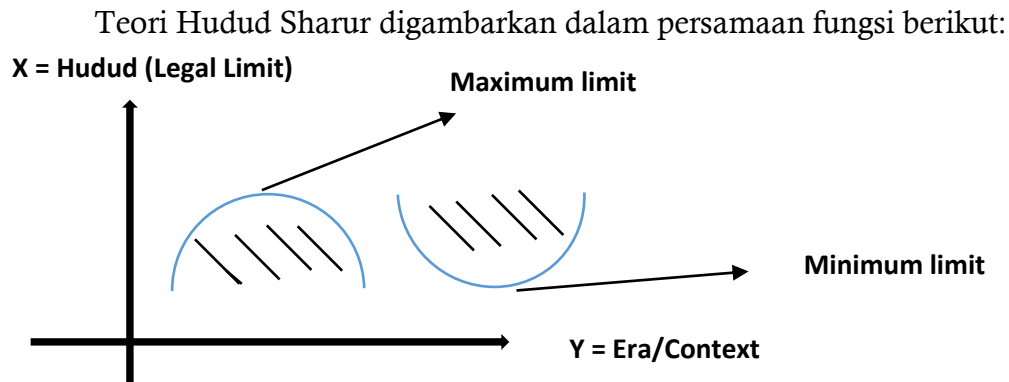


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Domain of Ijtihad within Divine Boundaries

As illustrated in the figure above, the domain of legal reasoning (*ijtihad*) is situated within the curve of *hanifiyyah* (the shaded area). The X-axis represents time, space, socio-historical conditions, and contextual variables, all of which remain subject to continuous change. Accordingly, the movement of *ijtihad* is dynamic, evolving in accordance with these shifting contextual dimensions. This movement, however, is not without limits; it is constrained by the *hudud Allah*, symbolized by the Y-axis (Mustaqim, 2012). In this sense, the determination of legal rulings may vary across multiple possibilities, as long as they remain within the divinely prescribed boundaries.

Extending his analogical framework, Muhammad Shahrur classifies the application of the *hudud* theory into six functional models, each representing different configurations of legal limits. First, *halat hadd al-a'la* (maximum limit) denotes a single upper boundary that cannot be exceeded, although rulings may fall below it. Shahrur exemplifies this with the punishment for theft in Q.S. al-Ma'idah (5):38, where amputation represents the maximum penalty (Mustaqim, 2012; Syahrur, 1990). Second, *halat hadd al-adna* (minimum limit) establishes a lower boundary that must not be violated, while allowing expansion above it, as seen in prohibitions of marriage in Q.S. al-Nisa (4):22-23 and other legal domains (Mustaqim, 2012; Syahrur, 1990).

Third, *halat hadd al-a'la wa al-adna ma'an* combines both upper and lower limits, permitting legal determination within a bounded range, as in inheritance and polygamy regulations (Q.S. al-Nisa 4:3, 11-14) (Mustaqim, 2012). Fourth, *halat al-mustaqim* represents a fixed linear rule with no interpretive flexibility, where no alternative rulings are permitted, such as the prescribed punishment for adultery in Q.S. al-Nur (24):2 (Mustaqim, 2012).

Fifth, *halat hadd al-a'la duna al-mamas bi al-hadd al-adna abadan* describes a model in which legal movement approaches the maximum boundary without intersecting the minimum, illustrated in the gradual progression of male–female relations toward zina (Mustaqim, 2012; Syahrur, 1990). Sixth, *halat hadd al-a'la mujaban mughlaqan wa al-hadd al-adna saliban* posits a positive maximum limit that must not be exceeded and a negative minimum limit that may be surpassed,

exemplified in economic ethics where *riba* constitutes the absolute upper prohibition, while *zakat* represents a minimum threshold that can be exceeded through voluntary charity (Mustaqim, 2012; Shahrur, 1990).

Taken together, these models demonstrate Shahrur's attempt to reconceptualize Islamic law as a system of dynamic boundaries rather than fixed rulings. This approach forms part of his wider paradigm of contemporary *ijtihad*, which emphasizes contextual engagement with changing realities and challenges conventional understandings of legal authority in Islamic jurisprudence. While this paradigm has been praised for opening new possibilities for legal reform and reinterpretation, it has also attracted significant criticism. Nevertheless, this framework has also been subject to critique, particularly regarding his tendency to impose mathematical analogies onto Qur'anic interpretation (Purkon, 2022), especially in equating *hanifiyyah* with elasticity and curved motion.

Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement and the Ideal Moral

The Qur'an constitutes a divine message that emerges within the unfolding of history and engages directly with specific socio-historical contexts. It was revealed gradually in response to the diverse problems and circumstances faced by the early Arab society. At times, these responses take the form of concrete and specific legal prescriptions; at other times, the Qur'an addresses particular questions and situations through more general normative principles. This character of revelation necessitates a socio-historical approach in Qur'anic interpretation. The gradual revelation of the Qur'an is explicitly articulated in Q.S. al-Furqan (25):32:

كَذَلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ وَرَتَّلْنَاهُ تَرْتِيلًا

“Thus [it is revealed] that We may strengthen your heart with it, and We have recited it in a measured way.”

This verse underscores that the Qur'an was revealed progressively to respond to concrete situations while simultaneously reinforcing the moral and spiritual disposition of the Prophet.

In hermeneutical theory, Fazlur Rahman shows a certain affinity with the Western hermeneutic tradition represented by Emilio Betti, particularly in affirming the existence of objective and authentic meaning. However, they diverge significantly in their understanding of what constitutes “authentic meaning.” For Betti, the original meaning of a text resides in the mind of its author, and interpretation requires reconstructing the author's intention (Mustaqim, 2012). When applied to the Qur'an, such an approach becomes problematic, as the Qur'an is understood as the divine word of God, whose “intentionality” cannot be fully accessed by human reason. Consequently,

interpretation of the Qur'an can only be conceived to approximate the meaning intended by God, without ever fully attaining it. In this sense, the "authentic meaning" of the Qur'anic text is necessarily limited by the cognitive capacity of human interpreters. Rahman, therefore, argues that the original meaning of the Qur'an should be approached through its historical context, namely, the circumstances in which the text was revealed. Since grasping the "mind of God" is beyond human reach, the most viable interpretive strategy is to reconstruct the socio-environmental conditions surrounding the revelation (Mustaqim, 2012). In this framework, context may be understood as a form of *macro asbab al-nuzul*, derived through historical analysis.

The socio-historical approach is employed to minimize concerns that Islamic teachings have been influenced by external elements not rooted in the Qur'an, particularly *Isra'iliyyat* traditions introduced by early Jewish and Christian converts (Ahmadi, 2017). These narratives are widely found in classical exegesis, such as in the works of Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir, especially in stories like Harut and Marut, Dhu al-Qarnayn, and the cow of the Israelites. Although often related to narrative rather than legal verses, such materials significantly shape how moral lessons (*'ibrah*) are understood. Nevertheless, Fazlur Rahman remains cautious toward micro *asbab al-nuzul*, noting inconsistencies among transmitted reports (Mustaqim, 2012). This concern is also acknowledged by Al-Wahidi and Al-Suyuti, who recognized contradictions within such reports, the latter attempting to resolve them through critical compilation in *Lubab al-Nuqul* (Badruzaman, 2018). In this framework, the formal legal expressions of the Qur'an are seen as context-bound, requiring reinterpretation through their underlying moral objectives to maintain relevance across changing historical conditions.

Responding to his critique of atomistic interpretation, Fazlur Rahman proposes a thematic and ethically oriented approach that emphasizes the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* (worldview) as an integrated moral vision. His *double movement* theory operates primarily within the legal and social domain, distinguishing between the historically conditioned legal-formal aspects of the Qur'an and its universal ideal moral objectives. While this distinction may open space for subjectivity, Rahman argues that it can be controlled through the Qur'an itself by identifying the underlying rationale (*'illat al-hukm*) behind specific legal rulings (Ahmadi, 2017). In this way, interpretation seeks not merely to reproduce legal formulations, but to uncover the moral purposes that inform them.

Methodologically, the *double movement* consists of two interrelated stages. The first is an inductive movement from specific verses to general moral principles, achieved by reconstructing both the micro and macro socio-

historical contexts of revelation and identifying the rationale behind legal rulings (Arman, 2024; Hastriana, 2018; Rahman, 1979). The second is a deductive movement that translates these general principles into contemporary contexts, requiring careful analysis of present socio-historical conditions to ensure their relevant application (Arman, 2024; Hastriana, 2018; Rahman, 1979). Through this process, Qur'anic ethics are continuously reformulated, allowing their normative vision to remain coherent and applicable across changing historical circumstances.

Through this process, Qur'anic ethics are continuously reformulated, allowing their normative vision to remain coherent and applicable across changing historical circumstances. In this sense, Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics ultimately rests on the distinction between the historically conditioned legal-formal dimension of the Qur'an and its universal ideal moral objective, which is operationalized through the double movement (Rahman, 1982).

Discussion

The Integration of Shahrur's Hermeneutic and Fazlur Rahman's Hermeneutic as Complementary Tools

The integration proposed in this article uses Shahrur's linguistic analysis as the first analytic layer; it pins down the semantic boundaries of key terms and the syntactic logic of the verse, preventing the interpreter from departing from the text's language. Rahman's contextual analysis then functions as the second layer; it situates the verse in its historical moment, recovers the specific problem it addressed, and identifies the principle that animated the Qur'an's response. The ideal moral extracted through the second movement is then tested against the language of the hudud theory established in the first layer. Interpretations that exceed the semantic maximum established by Shahrur's analysis, or that contradict the ideal moral identified by Rahman's contextual reading, are rejected.

The method proceeds through five steps: (1) identification of theme and mode of interpretation; (2) linguistic analysis (semantic, morphological/*isytiqaq*, and syntactic analysis of the verse); (3) contextual analysis (micro asbab al-nuzul and macro socio-historical context); (4) determination of *had* of the teks (the minimum and maximum textual boundaries); and (5) determination of *had* of the ideal moral in the universal ethical principle encoded within those textual boundaries. Steps 2 and 4 are primarily Shahrurian; steps 3 and 5 are primarily Rahmanian. The resulting reading is neither purely textualist nor purely contextualist but integrates the strengths of both methods.

Applying the Method to al-Ma'idah (5):51 and al-Mumtahanah (60):7-9

The central verse under examination is al-Ma'idah (5):51:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَارَىٰ أَوْلِيَاءَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ
مِّنْكُمْ فَإِنَّهُ مِنْهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ

"O you who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as *awliya'*; they are allies of one another. Whoever takes them as allies from among you is indeed one of them. Surely Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people."

Step 1: Linguistic analysis of *awliya'* (أَوْلِيَاءَ)

The debate over non-Muslim leadership in Muslim-majority societies is closely connected to the interpretation and translation of the Qur'anic term *awliya'* (Faizin et al., 2024), particularly in QS al-Ma'idah (5):51. Different renderings of this term as "leaders," "allies," "protectors," or "guardians" have produced significantly different legal and political conclusions regarding the permissibility of non-Muslim leadership. Consequently, a careful examination of the semantic range of *awliya'* is essential before deriving normative rulings from the verse.

The word *awliya'* is the plural form of *waliyy* (ولي), which originates from the Arabic root و-ل-ي, a root associated with notions of closeness, affiliation, continuity, and responsibility. In *Lisan al-'Arab*, Ibn Manzur classifies the meanings of this root into two major semantic domains: *imarah*, which encompasses governance, authority, and the exercise of power, and *nushrah*, which refers to support, protection, and loyal assistance (Manzur, 1990). These meanings are closely interconnected, since an individual who holds authority (*waliyy* in the sense of *imarah*) is also expected to provide protection and support to those under his responsibility. Consequently, a linguistic examination of the term indicates that *awliya'* possesses a broad semantic range, extending from the notions of trusted allies and close associates to those of rulers, guardians, or political leaders.

Critically, as Shahrur's method requires, the article definite with '*ahd dhihni* must be considered in the phrase *al-Yahud wa al-Nasara*. The use of the definite article here does not generalize the prohibition to all Jews and Christians throughout history; rather, it refers to specific, known groups, those who were parties to the agreements of the Medinan Charter and subsequently violated them. The phrase *ba'dhum awliya'u ba'din* (they are allies of one another) reinforces the relational, conflict-specific nature of the description. It characterizes a particular political alignment in a moment of crisis, not a permanent ethnoreligious category (Hakim, 2020).

Step 2: Intertextual reading (*tartil*) with al-Mumtahanah (60):7-9.

Shahrur's *tartil* method requires placing a verse in dialogue with other Qur'anic verses addressing the same theme. The most important intertextual partner for al-Ma'idah (5):51 is al-Mumtahanah (60):7-9:

لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ
وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

"Allah does not forbid you from being good and just toward those who have not fought you over religion nor driven you from your homes. Allah loves those who are just. Allah only forbids you from those who fought you over religion, drove you from your homes, and supported your expulsion from taking them as allies. Whoever takes them as allies, they are the wrongdoers."

This passage occupies a central place within the integrated interpretive framework because it clarifies the Qur'an's underlying criteria for determining who may or may not be regarded as *awliya*'. QS Al-Mumtahanah (60):7-9 indicates that the decisive factor is not an individual's religious affiliation but rather their conduct toward the Muslim community, particularly in relation to hostility, aggression, expulsion, or acts of betrayal. The verses explicitly distinguish between non-Muslims who engage in hostile actions and those who coexist peacefully, excluding the latter from the scope of prohibition. Instead, peaceful non-Muslims are identified as legitimate recipients of *birr* (benevolence and kindness) and *qisth* (fairness and justice). Furthermore, the passage begins with the expression *'asa* ("perhaps" or "it may be"), which conveys an expectation of positive transformation. This wording suggests that the Qur'an envisions the possibility that hostility between different communities can give way to *mawadda* (mutual affection and goodwill) once the conditions that produce conflict are removed.

Step 3: Socio-Historical Contextual Analysis

Following Rahman's double movement hermeneutic, the micro *asbab al-nuzul* of al-Ma'idah (5):51 must be reconstructed. Four main narrations exist in the tradition. *First*, that the verse was revealed in connection with 'Ubada ibn al-Samit's repudiation of his alliance with the Jews of Banu Qaynuqa' after they revolted against the Prophet, and 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul's continued loyalty to them despite their betrayal (At-Thabari, 2022; Hisyam, 2019). *Second*, On the other hand, in a different narration, this verse was revealed to a group of believers who were tortured by the polytheists of Makkah and planned to ask the Jews for protection (At-Thabari, 2022). *Third*, that it concerned Abu Lubaba's mission to the Banu Qurayza following their violation of the Medinan Charter, and *fourth*, that it addressed Muslim anxieties about seeking help from Jewish and Christian allies before the Battle of Uhud (At-Thabari, 2022; Syamsuddin, 2017). Despite their differences, all three narrations converge on a single context that the political crisis caused by the betrayal of the Medinan Charter by specific Jewish tribal groups during a period of active armed conflict.

The broader socio-historical setting of the revelation further supports this interpretation. QS Al-Ma'idah (5):51 was revealed during the Medinan period, a time when the Prophet Muhammad had established the *Medinan Charter (al-Mithaq al-Madani)*, a political agreement that regulated relations among the diverse religious communities of Medina and granted Muslims, Jews, and other groups shared rights and obligations within a common civic framework. The stability of this arrangement was later undermined by a series of political conflicts and acts of disloyalty involving groups such as the Banu Qaynuqa, Banu al-Nadir, and Banu Qurayza, creating serious security challenges for the emerging Muslim community. Within this context, the verse functions as a warning against maintaining political alliances with parties that have demonstrated hostility or compromised the collective security of the community (Syamsuddin, 2017). This concept is strengthened by Ath-Thabari's takwil towards QS. Al-Ma'idah: 51 that we are commanded to be hostile to Jews and Christians as they are hostile to us (At-Thabari, 2022). This means that it shows a cause-and-effect social system, as clarified in the meaning of QS. Al-Mumtahanah: 7-9.

From the perspective of Fazlur Rahman's first movement of interpretation, this historical reconstruction suggests that the primary concern of the verse was the preservation of communal cohesion and political stability during a period marked by conflict, betrayal, and external threats. Consequently, the verse should not be understood as establishing a universal and timeless legal prohibition against non-Muslims occupying positions of authority within Muslim societies. Rather, its original rationale was tied to specific historical circumstances in which issues of loyalty, security, and communal survival were of paramount importance.

This interpretation may also be situated in relation to the classical exegetical tradition. Al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, and Al-Qurtubi discussed QS al-Ma'idah (5):51 primarily within the context of alliances, loyalty, authority, and the protection of the Muslim community during periods of political tension. While these classical exegetes did not formulate the distinction between textual boundaries and ideal moral objectives proposed in this study, their discussions consistently connect the verse to concrete socio-political circumstances rather than to an abstract question of religious identity alone. Building upon these classical discussions through the integrated hermeneutical frameworks of Shahrur and Rahman, this study argues that the underlying concern of the verse lies in communal security, justice, and political trustworthiness.

Step 4: Determining *Hadd al-Nass* (Textual Boundaries)

Applying Shahrur's *hudud* framework to the results of the linguistic and contextual analysis yields the following textual boundaries for al-Ma'idah (5):51:

(a) Minimum boundary (*hadd adna*): The minimum meaning of the prohibition is the injunction not to maintain bonds of exclusive loyal friendship (*walaya* in the sense of *nasra* and mutual solidarity) with those who are actively hostile to

and at war with the Muslim community. This is the irreducible core of the verse's normative content.

(b) Maximum boundary (*hadd a'la*): The maximum extension of the prohibition is the categorical exclusion of all Jews and Christians from positions of political leadership (*walaya* in the sense of '*imara*') in all circumstances. This reading, however, is conditioned by the additional clause *ba'dhum awliya'u ba'din*, which limits the scope to those who form a hostile alliance against the Muslims, as confirmed by al-Mumtahanah (60):7-9.

The linguistic analysis, therefore, establishes that the maximum textual boundary does not apply universally but only to non-Muslims who fulfill the behavioral criterion of active enmity, betrayal, and expulsion. Non-Muslims who do not fulfill this criterion fall outside the verse's scope. This reading is consistent with the Prophet's own practice of cooperating with non-Muslim leaders. His use of 'Abdullah ibn Uraiqit al-Laythi (a non-Muslim) as a guide during the Hijra, the Qur'an's positive account of the Negus of Abyssinia (a Christian king who provided refuge to persecuted Muslims), and the story of the Queen of Sheba, cited in the Qur'an as an example of wise governance even before her conversion.

Step 5: Determining Hadd al-Ideal Moral (The Universal Ethical Principle)

Rahmanian's second movement, given the historical context and the Qur'an's response, seeks the ideal moral principle that should guide Muslims in the contemporary context. The evidence from both the text and its context converges on a cluster of values, namely justice (*al-qist/al-'adl*), trustworthiness (*al-amana*), and the protection of communal integrity (*al-hifaz 'ala maslahat al-umma*). These values are derived from the Qur'an's distinction between hostile and non-hostile relations in al-Mumtahanah (60):7-9, its emphasis on justice toward peaceful non-Muslims, and the historical objective of preserving social cohesion during periods of political instability.

The implication for the contemporary question of non-Muslim leadership is far-reaching. The integrated reading does not produce a blanket permission for non-Muslim leadership, nor does it produce a blanket prohibition. It produces a set of leadership qualities that should be entrusted to those who are just, competent, trustworthy, and committed to the welfare of the community they govern. In the context of a modern pluralistic nation-state, where the relevant category is not 'Muslim' versus 'non-Muslim' but 'citizen' versus 'non-citizen', and where the legal framework guarantees the rights and welfare of all citizens irrespective of religion, the ideal moral of al-Ma'idah (5):51 is best served by applying these substantive criteria to all candidates for leadership, regardless of religious affiliation.

This reading is consistent with Ibn Taymiyya's insight that a just non-Muslim ruler is preferable to an unjust Muslim one and with the principle embedded in al-Mumtahanah (60):8 that Allah loves those who are just (*al-muqsitin*) without qualification. It also coheres with the broader Qur'anic

narrative of divinely endorsed non-Muslim governance, the Qur'an presents Solomon's engagement with the Queen of Sheba not as a cautionary tale about non-Muslim authority but as a model of diplomatic wisdom and eventual guidance through just governance.

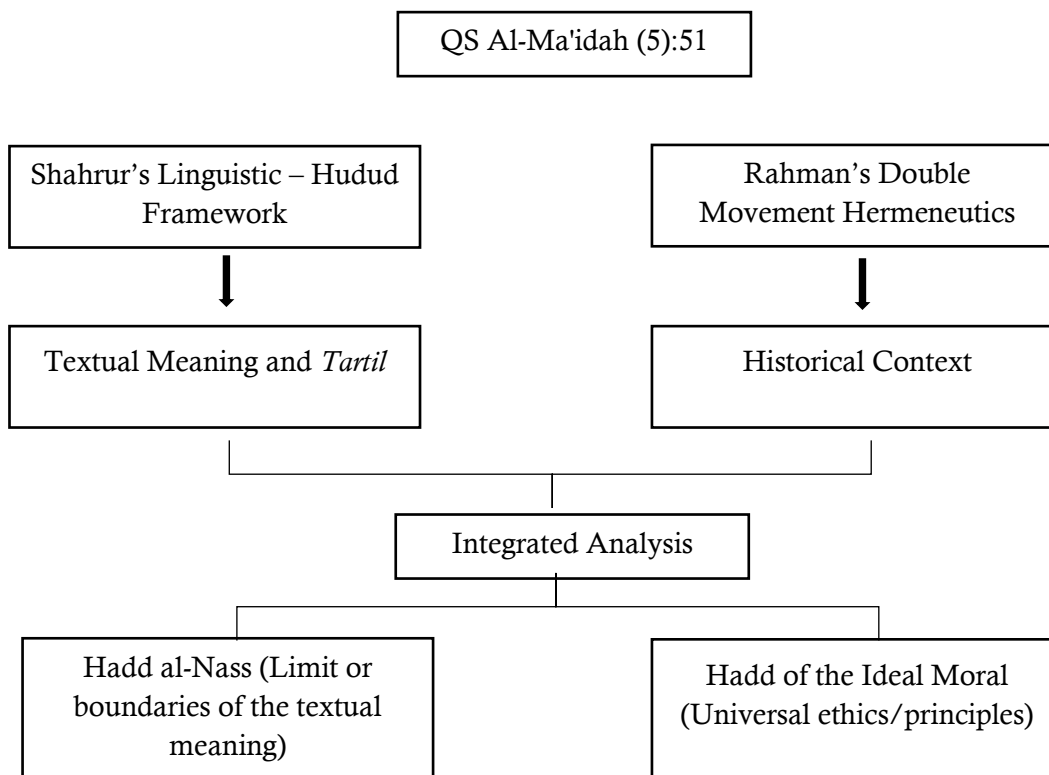


Figure 2. Integrated Analytical Model Combining Shahrur's Hudud Theory and Rahman's Double-Movement Hermeneutics in Interpreting Q.S. Al-Ma'idah (5):51.

Implications for Contemporary Muslim Political Contexts

The findings of this integrative analysis have important implications for Muslim societies living in pluralistic and democratic modern countries. Through a linguistic analysis of the term *awliya'*, an intertextual reading (*tartil* reading) with QS al-Mumtahanah (60):7-9, and a reconstruction of the historical context of the descent of the verse, this study shows that the prohibition in QS al-Ma'idah (5):51 is not aimed at all non-Muslims without exception, but rather at those who show hostility, betrayal, or threat to the security of the Muslim community. Therefore, the normative meaning of the verse cannot be reduced to a universal prohibition against non-Muslim leadership.

Through Muhammad Shahrur's *hudud* theory, the textual limit (*hadd al-nass*) of the verse shows that the object of prohibition is related to political loyalty relationships (leaders, rulers, protectors, close friends, lovers) that have the potential to harm the interests of the community. Meanwhile, through Fazlur Rahman's second movement, the historical context was transformed into more universal moral principles, such as justice, trust, protection of the public

interest, and the maintenance of social stability. Thus, the main focus of the verse is not the religious identity of the leader as a formal category, but the moral values that must be embodied in the use of political power.

According to this framework, the assessment of a leader should not be based solely on his religious affiliation, but on his ability to realize the values that are the moral goals of the Qur'an. A leader who is able to uphold justice, maintain public trust, protect the rights of citizens, and prioritize the common good is closer to the moral ideal of the verse than a leader who only fulfills a certain religious identity but fails to realize these values in government practice. In the broader historical context of Medina, as the first constitutional state, the categories of Muslims and non-Muslims were both placed as citizens. This suggests that the prohibition of making non-Muslims as *awliya'* is for reasons of treason and betrayal of the agreed constitution.

In the Indonesian context, for example, the constitution guarantees equality of citizenship and political participation for all citizens regardless of religion. In such a system, the legitimacy of leadership is determined not only by religious identity, but also by a commitment to justice, accountability, and the public interest. Therefore, the moral ideal of QS al-Ma'idah (5):51 does not demand that the president must be a Muslim, but rather that the leader must meet the ethical standards that are the main purpose of the verse.

This integrative reading also clarifies the scope of the prohibition of the verse. The prohibition of making non-Muslims *awliya'* remains relevant when dealing with those who commit aggression, treason, or acts that threaten the security and interests of the political community. In such a situation, the principle of political vigilance contained in the paragraph still has normative validity. However, the ban cannot be extended to a blanket rejection of non-Muslim citizens living in the same political system and subject to the same constitution. Thus, the main measure in the selection of leaders is not religion as a formal identity alone, but the extent to which a leader is able to realize the moral values taught by religion in public life.

Conclusion

This article has applied an integrated hermeneutical method combining Shahrur's structural linguistic analysis and hudud theory with Fazlur Rahman's double movement to the question of non-Muslim political leadership as it arises from al-Ma'idah (5):51. The analysis demonstrates that neither the linguistic structure of the verse nor its socio-historical context supports the classical maximalist reading that treats it as a universal and permanent prohibition against non-Muslim political leadership.

Shahrur's linguistic method establishes that the term *awliya'* operates within a semantic range from 'loyal ally' (minimum) to 'leader' (maximum), and that the definite article in al-Yahud wa al-Nasara restricts the prohibition to specific groups with a known history of political enmity, not to all Jews and Christians throughout history. Rahman's double movement recovers the verse's ideal moral, the protection of communal integrity, justice, and trustworthiness as the

governing criteria for political alliance and leadership. The intertextual reading with al-Mumtahanah (60):7-9 confirms that the Qur'an's own governing logic is behavioral and relational, not categorical. Non-Muslims who are not hostile are explicitly exempted from the prohibition and declared appropriate recipients of justice and goodness.

The integrated conclusion is that al-Ma'idah (5):51 addresses a crisis of political betrayal in the Medinan period and articulates principles of communal self-protection whose ideal moral justice, trustworthiness, and commitment to the public good is universally applicable. In contemporary democratic and pluralistic contexts, this ideal moral does not require nor does it prohibit non-Muslim political leadership as such. It requires that leadership be evaluated based on justice, competence, and fidelity to the common good of all citizens.

This study has limitations: it focuses on a single verse-cluster and does not provide a comprehensive survey of all Qur'anic passages bearing on inter-religious political relations. Future research should extend the integrated method to the full range of relevant verses (including Ali Imran (3):28, al-Anfal (8):73, and al-Tawba (9):71) and should engage more directly with contemporary Islamic political theory and comparative constitutional law. A systematic evaluation of how the integrated method performs relative to other contemporary hermeneutical approaches, such as the maqasid-based reading and the feminist contextual approach, would also deepen the contribution.

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