

GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN THE PRE-ISLAMIC PERIOD AND EARLY ISLAMIC PERIOD

Budi Nurhamidin and Amaludin Bahansubu

Abstract: This research aims to analyze the comparative system of government policies in the pre-Islamic period and the early Islamic period. This research is necessary because, in the present time, the commitment of the Muslim community, particularly in government policies, is far from the Islamic values taught by Prophet Muhammad PBUH when implementing the Medina Charter as an ideal state consensus. This research is a literature study conducted using a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The research data was obtained through literature such as books and journal articles. The data collection technique involved searching and collecting literature related to the research object. The data analysis technique used deductive analysis. This research finds that in the pre-Islamic period, the Arab people already had civilization but experienced a moral crisis. In contrast, during the early Islamic period, when Prophet Muhammad PBUH became the leader of the state and the religious leader, the government policies took progressive steps in terms of social complexity and political capacity.

Keywords: government policies; pre-Islamic period; early Islam

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perbandingan sistem kebijakan masa pra-Islam dan masa Islam awal. Penelitian ini perlu dilakukan karena dewasa ini komitmen umat Islam khususnya kebijakan pemerintahan jauh dari nilai-nilai keislaman seperti yang diajarkan Nabi Muhammad SAW. ketika menerapkan Piagam Madinah sebagai konsensus negara ideal. Jenis penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kepustakaan dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif. Data penelitian diperoleh melalui literatur berupa buku dan artikel jurnal. Teknik pengumpulan data yaitu dengan mencari dan mengumpulkan berbagai literatur yang berkaitan dengan objek penelitian. Teknik analisis data menggunakan teknik analisis deduktif. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa sistem kebijakan pemerintah pra-Islam, bangsa Arab sudah memiliki peradaban akan tetapi mengalami krisis moral. Berbeda dengan masa Islam awal, ketika Nabi Muhammad SAW. menjadi pemimpin negara yang sekaligus pemimpin agama, sistem kebijakannya memberikan langkah maju dalam hal kompleksitas sosial dan kapasitas politiknya.

Kata kunci: kebijakan pemerintahan; pra-Islam; Islam awal

Introduction

The condition of the Arab nation prior to the arrival of Islam, particularly in the vicinity of Mecca, was still characterised by the worship of idols believed to be gods (Newby, 2022; Henninger, 2020; Al-Jallad, 2020). In addition to idol worship, some were already among the Arab people who embraced and worshipped the Christian religion. Among the inhabitants who embraced the Christian religion were Yemen, Najran, and Syria. Besides that, there was also the Jewish religion embraced by Jewish immigrants in Yemen and Medina, as well as the religion of Zoroastrianism (Mazdaism), which was the religion of the Persian people. Before Islam emerged in Arab lands, they already had a well-established civilisation, although good morals did not accompany it.

The birth and development of Islam in the Middle East, especially for the Arab people, had a significant influence, which can even be called very fundamental (Lapidus, 2022). Islam revealed to Prophet Muhammad that PBUH brought about significant changes for the Arab people, who were initially morally backward and uncivilised, transforming them into a highly advanced nation that developed the world and nurtured a culture and civilisation of great importance to the history of humankind (Ali, 2017).

The civilisation of Islam encompasses discussions related to propriety, morality, ethical conduct, and literature regulated according to Islamic law. Al-Hujwiri (d. 1077), as quoted by Formichi (2022), asserts that Islamic civilisation is a lesson and education on virtue, which is an integral part of the foundations of faith. Meanwhile, ar-Razi (d. 1210), as quoted by Faqih and Muntoha (1998), states that Islamic civilisation is a cultivation of social relationships connected to good behaviour, preserving one's honour, and adhering to and practising the Prophet's tradition. Friendship among individuals should be nurtured as an offering to Allah, not based on personal interests and gains, but solely seeking His approval. Therefore, Islamic civilisation is a part of Islamic culture that encompasses various aspects such as morality, arts, and sciences, as well as a culture that includes technological systems, architectural arts, visual arts, political systems, and vast knowledge. Islamic civilisation is generally understood as a culture aimed at facilitating and enriching life in this world and the hereafter.

The development of knowledge within Islamic civilization greatly owes to the significant role of Prophet Muhammad PBUH in constructing the moral fabric of the Arab nation during that time. The presence of Prophet Muhammad PBUH in Arab society led to the crystallization of a new experience in the dimension of divinity, influencing all aspects of community life, including the laws prevalent at that time. Prophet Muhammad PBUH achieved relatively swift success in gaining the trust of the Arab people. His ability to transform the pre-Islamic Arab way of life, characterized by ignorance (*jahiliyyah*), towards a moral and Islamic foundation was remarkable.

In his preaching, Prophet Muhammad PBUH employed not only his prophetic aspect through *tabligh* (conveying the message) but also political strategies by exemplifying his leadership qualities in resolving various issues (Salehzadeh, 2017; Lubis, 2022). As the number of Prophet Muhammad's followers increased, the challenges he faced also grew. These challenges ranged from diplomatic approaches accompanied by persuasion to acts of violence launched by the Quraysh in their attempts to halt his message. However, Prophet Muhammad PBUH remained steadfast in his mission to propagate the religion of Islam.

The purpose of this article is to elucidate the government policies before and after the arrival of Islam. Generally, it is known that one of the signs of Prophet Muhammad's success in disseminating virtuous values was through the governance system and political strategies employed. This is evident in the establishment of the Islamic state of Madinah, which grew stronger and more developed based on the vision and mission of the Islamic community. One civilization that exemplifies the wisdom of Prophet Muhammad PBUH is the Constitution of Madinah (Ishak & Aziz, 2022). Through the Constitution of Madinah, Prophet Muhammad introduced the concept of an ideal state characterized by insight, transparency, participation, and the principles of freedom and shared socio-political responsibility.

Method

This research is a qualitative study. It is categorized as a qualitative study because the data presented as the research object consists of textual data, such as books and articles in scholarly journals directly related to the

development of Islamic civilization history. Therefore, this research can also be referred to as a literature review developed to examine the differences in government policy systems before and after the introduction of Islam. Once the required data has been obtained, the next step taken by the author is to conduct data analysis as a process of organizing and categorizing the data into themes, patterns, and descriptive units (Allen, 2017; Mann, 2015).

Results and Discussion

Government Policies in the Pre-Islamic Period

Mecca is a city of great importance and fame among the cities of the Arabian Peninsula, both due to its traditions and location. The city lies on a bustling trade route connecting Yemen in the south and Syria in the north. With the Kaaba's presence in the city's centre, Mecca became a religious hub for the Arabs. The Kaaba was a place of pilgrimage, surrounded by 360 idols, with Hubal as the main idol. The religion and society of the Arabs at that time reflected the tribal reality of the Arabian Peninsula, which covers an area of one million square miles. Most of the region is covered by the Sahara desert, situated in the middle and characterized by diverse conditions and characteristics (Yatim, 2005).

The Arab people have a long history, belonging to the race or ethnic group known as Caucasoid, specifically the Mediterranean sub-race, encompassing regions around the Mediterranean Sea, North Africa, Armenia, Arabia, and Iran. The Arabs led a nomadic lifestyle because their land was predominantly desert, with little rainfall. Their movements from one place to another followed the growth of steppe vegetation or grasslands that sporadically appeared in the Arabian lands around oases or water pools after rainfall (Supriyadi, 2016).

They later inhabited the Arabian Peninsula, once an extension of desert regions stretching from the western Sahara in Africa to the east, crossing through Central Asia, Iran, and the Gobi Desert in China. This region is extremely arid and hot due to the surrounding seawater vapour. However, it is rich in oil resources (Supriyadi, 2016), making it the largest oil-producing region in the world to this day.

Before Prophet Muhammad PBUH introduced Islam as the foundation of a new civilization, the Arab and neighbouring peoples already had their civilizations. Various pre-Islamic civilizations had developed in religion, politics, economy, and cultural arts. Muslim historians divide the Arab population into three categories: Ancient Arabs (*al-'Arab al-Ba'idah*), Indigenous Arabs (*'Arab al-Arabiyah*), and Immigrant Arabs (*al-'Arab al-Musta'ribah*). The existence of Ancient Arabs cannot be fully traced historically, except for a few tribes mentioned in the Qur'an and its predecessors. Indigenous Arabs are descendants of Khatan or, more commonly known, the descendants of Yemeni Arabs, and they settled in Hejaz, Tihama, Najd, Palmyra, and other regions, known as the Northern Arabs. In terms of residence, they can be divided into two groups: *ahl al-Hadrahah* (city dwellers) and *ahl al-Badiyah* (desert dwellers). These two groups have many differences in social structures, customs, economics, and politics influenced by geographical variations and the natural conditions of their habitats (Karim, 2017).

The desert dwellers mainly resided in the Northern Arab regions, were illiterate, and lacked advancement (nomads). Historians have been unable to record and uncover their history in ancient times. Thus, this period is known as *al-Ayyam al-Jabilyah* (the Days of Ignorance). The term is not solely due to their ignorance in various aspects or lack of civilization but rather their lack of knowledge about religion, societal customs, politics, and the concept of the Oneness of Allah (Karim, 2017).

One of the negative precedents associated with pre-Islamic Arabs was the condition and status of women, who were viewed with contempt and as less than human. Although a few female tribal leaders were found in Mecca, Medina, Yemen, and other places, such as Ummu Aufah and Kindah, their numbers were extremely few. In the eyes of society, women had no value and were no more precious than merchandise in the market (Supriyadi, 2016). Even more vulgarly, some opinions regarded them as nothing more than animals. Women were considered commodities and livestock, devoid of rights. They were not entitled to inherit from their husbands or parents. On the other hand, men were free to marry as many women as they wished, regardless of the number. Even after his death, the eldest child could inherit

a wife whom her husband abandoned or one of the deceased husband's relatives. This starkly contrasts with the position of husbands after marriage, who held a status akin to kings and rulers (Karim, 2017).

Pre-Islamic Arab society was also notorious for the tradition of burying children alive. However, this tradition did not apply to all Arab tribes. Only a few tribes and clans practised such a tradition, including the Bani Tamim and Bani Asad tribes. This practice was based on the belief that most female children were the cause of poverty and brought shame to the family. There were two reasons behind the killing of children. The first reason was population control, which was based on the opinion that massive urbanization, resulting from the collapse of the Ma'arib Dam in Yemen, led people to migrate northwards, including to cities like Mecca, Medina, and Damascus. This significantly impacted the economy, as the increase in family members led to difficulties in meeting their needs, resulting in poverty. Hence, they resorted to killing their children. The second reason was that female children were considered a disgrace. It was believed that if husbands went to war and suffered defeat, their wives and female children would become sexually enslaved people for the victorious soldiers. Therefore, they chose to kill the female children first. In other tribes, many showed love and affection towards their children, girls and boys. However, having male children remained a source of pride for the Arab tribes of that time (Karim, 2017).

There were also charismatic women or tribal leaders who could have multiple husbands. There were four popular types of marriages. Firstly, a man who married a woman had to pay a dowry that was received by the woman's parents, not the woman herself. Secondly, husband and wife would consult each other to conceive intelligent and capable children. Therefore, after the wife entered her fertile period, the husband would accompany her to be intimate with a prominent individual. Once signs of pregnancy appeared, the husband would bring her back. Thirdly, a woman was allowed to have multiple husbands (up to ten), and after having children, the mother had the right to determine the child's father. Lastly, if a woman had more than ten husbands, the expert astrologer (fortune-teller) would determine the child's father (Karim, 2017).

The Arab people were also known to live in tribes or clans. They coexisted with other tribes through peace agreements known as *al-Ahlaq*. Their love for family, lineage (nasab), and tribe surpassed their love for anything else. Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) referred to this as *al-'Ashabiyah*. This tribal fanaticism often led to conflicts with other tribes, resulting in wars over trivial matters, such as losing in a horse race, disputes over livestock, water sources, or grazing land. The geographical factors of the vast and barren desert influenced the nature and behaviour of the average Arab, which appeared to be rugged (Yahya, 2019).

Their way of life, based on tribes, did not negate the existence of a central government. At that time, the prevailing form of governance was an oligarchy, where power was shared among a group or several individuals, each responsible for specific areas. Some tribes handled religious affairs, while others dealt with defence and the economy. The centre of governance at that time was Dar al-Nadwa, which served as the Majlis Shura and was located in the Holy City of Mecca, where the Kaaba, the sacred structure of the Arab people, was situated. There were several departments within the governance of Mecca, such as *al-Hiabab* (managing the Kaaba), *al-Saqayyah* (responsible for providing the pilgrims with the Zamzam water), *al-Rifadah* (welcoming the pilgrims), *al-Najwa* (membership affairs in the Majlis Shura), and *al-Lima* (raising the flag) (Karim, 2017).

Pre-Islamic Arabs had advancements in the field of economy, particularly in agriculture. The Arab society was familiar with and used semi-modern agricultural tools such as ploughs, hoes, rakes, and long sticks for planting. The use of livestock to pull ploughs and carry water was also known then. They could create efficient irrigation systems, although the Ma'arib Dam they constructed eventually broke down and became non-functional. In order to fertilize the soil, pre-Islamic Arab communities utilized various organic fertilizers, such as animal manure, and practised crossbreeding specific trees to obtain superior seedlings. Managing orchards and fields also involved land rental, profit-sharing, or cooperation with tenant farmers (Karim, 2017).

In addition to agriculture, they were also renowned for their trading activities. Trade was not limited to Arab-Arab transactions but extended to

non-Arab regions. Their progress was evident in the export and import activities conducted by South Arabian and Yemeni traders 200 years prior to the advent of Islam. They exported incense, agarwood, perfumes, animal skins, and raisins. They imported construction materials, ostrich feathers, precious metals, gemstones, silk, ivory, spices, diamonds, and other items from Africa, Persia, South Asia, and China (Karim, 2017).

Government Policies during the Early Islamic Era (Time of Prophet Muhammad)

As is known, the Prophet began his preaching and received his second revelation, initially conducting his preaching within his immediate family circle. He performed semi-secret preaching to his closest relatives from the Banu Hashim and Banu Abdul Muttalib clans. Eventually, Allah commanded him to openly convey the message to the wider community (Prilatmoko, 2022). The Prophet's preaching in Mecca faced challenges and strong resistance from active and passive members of society. They subjected his followers to economic boycotts, physical torture, and mental harassment and plotted his assassination. They also sought negotiations, offering wealth, power, and women in exchange for him to halt his preaching. Furthermore, they attempted to compromise with the Prophet in matters of worship, suggesting that he could worship their idols at other times. However, despite tempting offers and the threat of murder from the people of Mecca, the Prophet's determination to spread the religion of Islam did not waver (Amin, 2014).

After the open proclamation of his message, the leaders of the Quraysh tribe began to hinder the Prophet's preaching as the number of his followers increased. The challenges and opposition from the Quraysh tribe intensified. The affluent elite was particularly apprehensive that if Muhammad came to power, it would disrupt their centralized economy controlled by a few individuals, while Islamic economics aimed to benefit the wider society. Salabi (1983) states that five factors led the Quraysh people to oppose the call of Islam. Firstly, they needed help differentiating between prophecy and leadership, mistakenly believing that submitting to the call of Muhammad (PBUH) meant submitting to the leadership of Banu Abdul Muttalib. Secondly, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advocated equality between the

aristocracy and enslaved people. Thirdly, the Quraysh leaders could not accept the teachings about resurrection and the afterlife. Fourthly, blind adherence (taklid) to ancestral customs was deeply rooted in Arab society. Fifthly, sculptors and statue sellers regarded Islam as a hindrance to their livelihood (Karim, 2017)

The first and second pledges of *al-Aqabah* served as the initial foundation for the authority and leadership of Muhammad in Medina. In al-Aqabah Mina, twelve men from the residents of Yathrib (later known as Medina) met the Prophet and embraced Islam. In this pledge, they acknowledged the prophethood of Muhammad and pledged not to worship anything besides Allah, to refrain from theft, adultery, killing their children, and lying to the Prophet. Those who violated these conditions would be subject to redemption (*kafarat*) and punishment hereafter (Sutriani, 2016).

The arrival of Prophet Muhammad was greeted with joy, and he was considered a highly influential leader in Medina. Previously, conflicts and hostilities were prevalent among the people. The government established by Prophet Muhammad in Medina had several fundamental principles, as stated in the Charter of Medina, which consisted of 47 articles. Among these articles, it was established that the state and government of Medina were characterized by theocracy, with the Prophet Muhammad as its head and leader of the religion. The laws were based on the Quran, and while the Prophet was the head of the government, ultimate sovereignty resided with Allah (Karim, 2017).

Muhammad acted as the executor, but he did not neglect the people's sovereignty. In times of emergency, he accepted the decisions of the Shura Council, and the government was not a monarchy but a republic. The Islamic state led by Prophet Muhammad provided individual freedoms, freedom of religion, and rights as citizens. It acknowledged that sovereignty was in the hands of Allah, with the Prophet having full authority as the head of state. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad established a state secretariat to administer his government in Medina. The state was divided into nine provinces, each headed by a governor (*wali*), and twenty-one districts were headed by a tax collector (*amil*) as their primary responsibility. The state's

income comprised booty (*ghanimah*), zakat (obligatory alms), *jizyah* (security tax), *kharaj* (non-Muslim tax), and *al-fay* (Karim, 2017).

As the head of state, Prophet Muhammad PBUH always engaged in consultation (*shura*) with his companions and did not adopt an authoritarian approach. Notably, in the process of consultation, as established by the Prophet, he had the right to express his opinion on important matters. However, he never displayed or showed signs of dominance over his companions as partners in making crucial decisions related to the state of Medina. He valued and respected differences of opinion, even though, as the head of state, he may have had his views concerning his policies (Azahry, 1992).

Prophet Muhammad also applied the principle of equality, and was closely linked to the principle of justice. The Prophet did not differentiate between individuals based on their social status, whether dignitaries or rulers; all were equal before the law. As the head of state in Medina, Muhammad did not consider himself superior to others, per the Qur'anic doctrine that the measure of superiority lies in one's level of piety. He treated Bilal, who was of black skin and was initially a slave, on an equal footing with his other followers. Bilal was even appointed as the muazzin, and the Prophet always maintained a distance from performing his duties as the head of state (Azahry, 1992).

Undoubtedly, under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad, Arab society made significant progress in terms of social complexity (Nahel, 2020) and political capacity. The organizational structure that emerged during the Prophet's time laid the foundation for the early caliphs to establish an organizational framework for a global empire, which was truly remarkable for its time and place. Early Islamic society is modern in terms of the high commitment, engagement, and participation expected from all segments of society.

Early Islamic society was also modern regarding openness to evaluating leadership positions based on universal foundations, symbolised by the effort to institutionalise leadership positions not based on lineage. Although certain obstacles in the early stages hindered the full implementation of these principles, it was almost perfect as a model for the development of a modern

national community that surpassed imaginable ideals. The modern Muslim effort to depict the early Islamic community as a type of nationalism with egalitarian participation is by no means an ahistorical ideological fabrication (Syam, 2015).

The system of governance established by Prophet Muhammad was rooted in the concept of "al-mujtama' al-Madani" (civil society), which was based on a value system (Zaenab, 2022; Hasibuan et al., 2022) and linked to the tradition of "*al-hanifiyyah al-sambah*" as the objective of Islamic politics '*siyasah syar'iyah*', laying the foundations of political Islam as a universal message.

The governance of Prophet Muhammad gave birth to a global perspective aimed at fostering understanding among the elites and the people through collective action based on consensus, considering moral aspects and noble principles of life. The development of the political foundations of the prophetic government provided ample space for the transformation of civilisation based on knowledge and wisdom. Medina was built on an Islamic-Jewish-Christian-Pagan cultural consortium, guaranteeing religious freedom and providing opportunities for the people to cultivate international relations (Vachruddin, 2021; Thabrani, 2014). In the context of the existence of the Medina government, when it is related to socio-political power, the global perspective in humanising humanity and building its resources based on faith, knowledge, and wisdom is a tradition of nurturing '*tarbiyyah*' that ensures tranquility for all layers of society. The Prophet laid a solid foundation for realising Islam as a comprehensive way of life (*al-din*), encompassing the fields of society, economy, politics, education, and governance (Thabrani, 2014)

Conclusion

Implementing the above explanation certainly gives us an overview that Prophet Muhammad was influential in laying the foundations of human civilization. The Arab people, by nature, were known for their civilization, but that civilization was not based on humane values, as it was morally corrupt and uncivilized. One example is the pre-Islamic Arabs who heartlessly killed their flesh and blood (female infants) under the pretext that they would bring shame to the family and cause poverty.

Islamic civilization, on the other hand, encompasses discussions related to propriety, ethics, code of conduct, and literature regulated according to Islamic law. The arrival of Prophet Muhammad was greeted with joy, and he was considered a highly influential leader in Medina. Muhammad was a political leader and the spiritual leader of the entire Muslim community. The system established during his time as a Prophet and head of state upheld the values of humanity, emphasizing moral principles and exhibiting egalitarianism and tolerance towards non-Muslim religions.

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