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The Legitimacy of Political Systems from the Perspective of Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

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Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (1914–1999) stands as one of the most prominent and influential thinkers of the Indian subcontinent in contemporary Islamic scholarship. His intellectual legacy continues to shape political movements, organizations, and personalities across the region. Nadwi's extensive writings span jurisprudence, political theory, social philosophy, and other disciplines. This study examines his conceptual framework regarding the legitimacy of political systems.

Given the significance of political legitimacy in Islamic thought and Nadwi's enduring intellectual impact, this research addresses the following question: What constitutes a legitimate political system according to Nadwi's perspective? Through a descriptive-analytical methodology applied to his primary works, this article reconstructs his theoretical position. Understanding these ideas contributes to:

1. Enhanced comprehension of intellectual developments in the Muslim world,
2. Fostering ideological awakening among contemporary Muslim societies.

The study hypothesizes that Nadwi's contributions extend beyond political theory—his ideas have fundamentally influenced Islamic intellectual currents both within the Indian subcontinent and globally. Textual analysis of Nadwi's oeuvre reveals his paradigm of political legitimacy:

– The Rashidun Caliphate model serves as the ideal Islamic governance framework,
– Divinely oriented systems (as opposed to secular or authoritarian models) alone possess legitimacy.

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Within this paradigm, a legitimate caliph (political leader) must be appointed through:

1. Consultation with *ahl al-ḥall wa'l-ʿaqd* (the body of qualified electors),
2. Designation by the preceding caliph (where applicable),
3. Collective *shūrā* (deliberative council),
4. Public *bayʿah* (allegiance).

Nadwi explicitly rejects alternative governance models (e.g., secular democracy, hereditary monarchy) as illegitimate within Islamic political theology. This doctrinal stance underlies his profound influence on Islamist movements and intellectuals across South Asia and beyond.

Keywords: *Political system, 'siyāsah' (Islamic statecraft), legitimacy, Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, Indian subcontinent*

Introduction

The legitimacy of political systems has been a central and fundamental subject of inquiry for social and political thinkers from antiquity to the present. Historically, intellectuals, elites, and prominent figures across Eastern and Western civilizations have engaged with this concept. Politically, legitimacy—and its manifestations—holds critical importance for rulers and power-holders in maintaining the stability and continuity of political systems. Consequently, every political regime, even tyrannical or usurpatory ones, strives to anchor its authority on foundations of legitimacy, however spurious.

In other words, legitimacy is so pivotal to political systems that opponents frequently weaponize it to undermine rivals: by casting doubt on a regime's legitimacy, they mobilize social groups against the ruling order, seeking either its overthrow or the creation of chaos. In reality, the strength or weakness of a political system's legitimacy hinges on the performance of its governing elites and leaders. When political elites lack robust legitimacy, they become incapable of implementing effective, constructive, and stable policies, inevitably resorting to coercion and repression to sustain power. Such reliance on violence further erodes their already tenuous legitimacy and disrupts the lived realities of citizens.

Ultimately, political legitimacy is a variable capable of transforming mere power into authoritative governance. It cultivates collective belief in obedience to political authority, rendering compliance with power structures a normative, ethical, and logical practice. Put differently, the greater the belief in a political system's validity, the higher its legitimacy, the more voluntary the

obedience it commands, and the deeper the alignment between the system and its subjects.

Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (1914–1999), a preeminent Islamic thinker of the 20th century, systematically examined the legitimacy of political systems. His ideas profoundly influenced personalities, groups, and movements across the Muslim world, particularly in the Indian subcontinent. This study addresses the question: "What constitutes political legitimacy according to Nadwi's perspective?" Answering this requires a meticulous analysis of his theoretical framework.

Key Concepts

1. The Political System (al-Niẓām al-Siyāsī)

Despite its critical importance in the Islamic world, the concept of the "political system" has not been subjected to rigorous theoretical examination. Consequently, no fixed, comprehensive definition has been universally accepted. Several proposed definitions include:

From a terminological perspective, the compound term "political system" consists of two elements:

- "Niẓām" (system/order): Referring to a structured pattern of organization
- "Siyāsah" (politics/governance): Encompassing concepts of power and authoritative decision-making

When "niẓām" denotes a specific model of order and "siyāsah" implies the exercise of power, a political system may be understood as "a framework of interconnected human relations characterized by varying degrees of power, authority, or governance" (Dahl 1985: 8).

In its substantive sense, the political system equates to the state (dawlah) or government (ḥukūmah) in the broadest terms—essentially an organization of power comprising:

- Individual actors: Rulers and societal leaders
- Institutional structures: Entities with specialized functions and roles (Lakzaei 2008: 130–131).

From a functional standpoint, it constitutes "the collective of individuals and institutions that, through superior power, formulate and enforce supreme laws within a society" (Feyrahi 2007: 7–12).

Synthesis: The political system may thus be defined as the structural mechanism for organizing power relations within human collectives, aiming to establish just and orderly interactions across social, cultural, and political dimensions of society.

2. Legitimacy (Mashrūʿiyyat)

The term "mashrūʿiyyat" (legitimacy) is lexically derived from "sharʿ" (divine law/revealed religion), signifying innate disposition or constitution. It is also used to denote that for which God the Exalted created and subjugated humankind, or that which God has decreed for humankind from religion, commanding them to choose and aim for it by their free will, excluding matters over which various sharīʿas (legal systems) differ and those subject to abrogation (naskh) and replacement (al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1991: 451). Furthermore, legitimacy refers to that which is approved by the sharʿ (Bustani 1996: 825).

Although "mashrūʿiyyat" is etymologically derived from the root "sh-r-ʿ" (sharʿ), in political discourse, its intended meaning is not directly related to religious ordinances (sharʿiyyāt), nor does it signify conformity with the sharʿ or something decreed by the Lawgiver. Rather, this term is a translation of the word "Legitimacy" and is synonymous in meaning with "rightfulness" (ḥaqqānīyat). The antonym of "mashrūʿiyyat" is expressed as "usurpation" (ghaṣb) and "tyranny" (jawr) (Āryānpūr Kāshānī 1990: III/2858).

In any case, the terms legitimacy, usurpation, and tyranny are employed when some form of authority, will, imposition, or domination over a specific object, person, or individual is involved.

In the terminology of political philosophy thinkers, various explications have been provided for this term. However, a sound understanding can be succinctly stated as follows: Legitimacy signifies the rational justification of the right to exercise power by rulers (Karimi Wala 2008: 24). Some scholars, in their terminology, have defined legitimacy as meaning conformity with the law. Thus, if a government is formed and sustained based on established laws or legal norms, that government possesses the backing of legitimacy (Heywood 2004: 202; Ālam 1998: 105).

Theoretical Framework

A proper understanding of the political thought of a key figure from the Indian subcontinent—namely, Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi—requires the establishment of a comprehensive theoretical framework capable of explicating and analyzing the intellectual connections within his political thought. This study

employs Thomas Spragens' "Crisis Theory" as its theoretical and methodological framework for analyzing phenomena.

This theory stands as one of the most significant methods for comprehending the "internal logic" of political theory. From Spragens' perspective, every political theory emerges from the crisis of its time, shaped by the existing conditions (what is) and the desired conditions (what ought to be). He argues that the great merit of a political theory lies in its ability to reconcile these two states—*the is* and *the ought*. Consequently, he rejects the distinction between *is* and *ought* and opposes the separation of "descriptive" elements from "prescriptive" ones in political theory (Spragens 1990: 35).

According to Spragens' theory, the transformation of thought into political theory occurs in four stages, each building upon the previous one:

Observation of Crisis and Perception of Disorder in Society

The first stage involves recognizing a crisis and sensing societal disorder. It can be argued that most theorists develop their works after observing and experiencing severe societal crises (Spragens 1990: 43). Thus, the initial step is identifying the crisis within the surrounding environment. Indeed, witnessing disorder and crisis compels individuals to diagnose its underlying causes (Spragens 1990: 43).

Root-Cause Analysis: Diagnosing the Origins of Crisis and Disorder

The second stage entails tracing and identifying the root causes of the crisis and disorder. Discovering these causes allows the theorist to internalize doubt and skepticism while seeking the primary sources of societal problems and instability. Without accurately diagnosing the roots of the crisis, proposing viable solutions remains unfeasible (Spragens 1990: 93).

Mental Reconstruction of an Ideal Political Order Free from Problems and Disorder

In this stage, the theorist envisions a utopian political order, imagining it as a potential replacement for a society experiencing crisis or void. The objective here is to establish a connection between the individual and the political environment. The durability and rationality of this envisioned order depend on the conclusions drawn from the previous stage of diagnosing causes. Thus, the researcher strives to conceptualize a model of an ideal society and derive

its defining criteria. In this sense, political theories essentially offer symbolic representations of a reconstructed society (Spragens 1990: 149, 174).

Proposing Practical Solutions and Establishing a New Political Order

In the final stage, after completing the three preceding steps, the theorist presents practical solutions to overcome the crisis and disorder, thereby establishing a new political order free from dysfunction (Spragens 1990: 44).

According to "Crisis Theory", when a crisis erupts and disorder prevails in society, individuals may experience fear, anxiety, and distrust toward information sources (Spragens 1990: 35). Hence, upon observing a crisis, the foremost priority is diagnosing its causes (Spragens 1990: 35). In such circumstances, the manner in which information is disseminated from credible sources can significantly influence social behavior, reduce anxiety, and aid in identifying the crisis's origins. Clearly, once the source of the crisis is uncovered, it facilitates sound decision-making.

The crisis of legitimacy and the collapse of the political system following the caliphate of Uthman led to the emergence of ideologies advocating a return to the caliphate system and the political order of early Islam.

Biography of Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi was born in 1914 CE in the village of "Takia Kalan," located in the district of Rae Bareli within the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. He was born into a devout and martyr-nurturing family, all of whom were distinguished scholars and writers. He began his elementary education in his hometown by memorizing the Holy Quran. After mastering the fundamentals of Urdu, he proceeded to study Persian. Nadwi was bereaved of his father at the tender age of ten and was subsequently raised by his pious mother. He studied Arabic under renowned scholars such as Shaykh Khalil ibn Muhammad Yamani and the eminent Moroccan scholar, Allama Taqiuddin Hilali. Upon completing his primary education, he enrolled in university at the age of fourteen, specializing in Arabic literature while simultaneously learning English. He further studied Hadith sciences under Allama Haidar Hasan Khan. Later, he traveled to Lahore to pursue advanced studies, learning under the tutelage of the distinguished scholar Maulana Ahmad Ali Lahori and benefiting from the teachings of Allama Hussain Ahmad Madani at Darul Uloom Deoband.

In 1934 CE, at the age of twenty, Nadwi began teaching exegesis and literature at Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama, where he served for ten years. In 1939 CE, he embarked on a journey across India to acquaint himself with its reli-

gious and Islamic institutions. During this trip, he met prominent reformers of his time, including Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Ra'i Furi and Shaykh Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi. These encounters profoundly influenced him, and he remained spiritually indebted to Shaykh Abdul Qadir Furi throughout his life, while adopting Shaykh Ilyas al-Kandhlawi's approach in political activism, societal reform, and religious outreach. In 1943 CE, he established an Islamic educational center, followed by the founding of the "Humanity Mission Movement" in 1951 CE and the "Islamic Research Academy" in Lucknow in 1959 CE. He assumed the rectorship of Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama in 1961 CE. Nadwi further contributed to the establishment of the "Muslim Consultative Council" in India in 1964 CE and the "Committee for Research on Islamic Personalities" in 1972 CE. He authored over 500 works on diverse subjects, many of which have been translated into Persian.

Nadwi is regarded as one of the most significant religious and political leaders of the Indian subcontinent. He championed the rights of Indian Muslims and advocated for the objectives of the Islamic movement. A core tenet of his belief was the active participation of scholars in politics, given the inseparable connection between religion and governance. Until his death in 1999 CE at the age of 87, he remained dedicated to reformist and revivalist efforts. He is recognized as a leading figure of the "Dawah Movement" and inspired numerous Islamic revivalist movements through his intellectual contributions (Nadwi 2004: 12–14; 2006: 14–23; 2022a: 17–21).

Foundational Principles of Nadwi's Political Thought

Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi was a reformist and traditionalist thinker of the Indian subcontinent, deeply concerned with the contemporary state of Muslims, the preservation of Islamic tradition, and its survival. An examination of his works, rooted in jurisprudential and theological principles alongside the exigencies of modern Muslim society, reveals the following core tenets of his political thought:

– Affirmation of Divine Oneness in opposition to rampant materialism and rebellion against God.

Primacy of Revelation over unaided human reason, while maintaining the compatibility of revelation with sound intellect.

– Adherence to the Twin Pillars of Islamic Law: the Quran as the foundational legal text and the necessity of prophetic tradition (Sunnah) as a guiding framework.
– Spiritual Transformation of the Individual Muslim as a prerequisite for broader societal reform.

– Promotion of Islamic Revivalism and support for Islamic movements.
– Rejection of the Notion that Islam is Purely Political, despite his acknowledgment of Islam's political dimensions and governance models.

Nadwi emphasized that while Islam provides political frameworks for societal administration, it should not be reduced to a purely political ideology. He cautioned against conflating theological, devotional, and ethical boundaries with political objectives (Alikhani 2011: 189–190).

The Necessity of Establishing Governance

Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi considered the formation of a political system and governance an unavoidable necessity not only for Muslim societies but for all human civilizations. He argued that Islam places immense emphasis on establishing political authority (caliphate or emirate), to the extent that life outside such a framework constitutes "pre-Islamic ignorance (Jahiliyyah)," and death in such a state is equated with "a death of ignorance" (Nadwi 2022b: 164).

Nadwi maintained that no cultural or worldly aspect of human life can be properly managed without governance. A culture devoid of political authority holds no relevance in practical life. He noted that prophets, too, sought to establish divine governance to implement God's ordained systems. Contrary to those who view governance merely as a divine promise to the righteous rather than an objective, Nadwi asserted that the establishment of God's religion and the implementation of His laws are impossible without governance. Thus, all prophets endeavored to bring about political revolutions—some, like Prophet Abraham, laid the groundwork, while others, such as Prophets Joseph, Moses, and Muhammad, achieved this objective (Mawdudi 2004: 39–41).

However, Nadwi did not regard governance as the ultimate goal of religion but rather as a vital means to achieve higher objectives—namely, the establishment of divine order (iqamat al-deen). Governance, in his view, is a necessary precursor to this end. By "establishing divine order," Nadwi referred to the comprehensive implementation of Islamic laws, including the revival of religious sciences, upholding Islamic pillars, jihad, instituting a judicial system, enforcing divine ordinances, eradicating oppression, and promoting virtue while forbidding vice (Alikhani 2011: 205–206).

Due to his Sufi inclinations, Nadwi prioritized inner spiritual and moral reform over political activism. He believed that a religious government could not be legitimately established prior to the internal reformation of individuals within society. In his Sufi-oriented framework, any violent or armed struggle for political demands or the seizure of power was deemed il-

legitimate, though combating injustice and oppression remained obligatory (Alikhani 2011: 162, 200).

Adherence to the Model of Rightly-Guided Caliphate and the Ideal Government

Like other Sunni thinkers, Nadwi considers the caliphate to be the ideal governance model for Islamic societies. He refers to the era of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (Khulafāʾ al-Rāshidūn) as the "virtuous Medina" (Alikhani 2011: 183–214), attributing to them four defining characteristics:

1. They were people of the Book (Scripture) and Sharia;
2. They were not affiliated with any particular faction and believed in the virtue of all nations;
3. They upheld both spiritual and worldly affairs;
4. They possessed exceptional moral upbringing and self-purification before assuming leadership (Nadwi 2021: 165–170).

Nadwi's thought emerged during a period when the Sunni world faced a profound identity crisis following the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate—which he regarded as a symbol of Islamic glory, the sanctuary of the caliphate, and the backbone of Islam. His reformist ideology took shape against the backdrop of the Ottoman Empire's decline and the rise of Western modernity and emerging ideologies that influenced the Muslim world. In this context, Nadwi framed his conception of the Islamic caliphate in opposition to Western domination and anti-caliphate movements. He sought to revive the Islamic caliphate, which had declined after the Ottoman defeat, through a functional interpretation of the Quran and Islam. For Nadwi, the return to Islam and the restoration of the caliphate were the only solutions to crises, challenges, and the reconstruction of Muslim societies in accordance with foundational Islamic principles. He viewed the caliphate as the sole path to prevent Islamic societies from degenerating, considering the Umayyad transformation of the caliphate into a monarchy (mulk) as the primary factor in the decline of Islamic civilization—a deviation from its original trajectory. Thus, he regarded this shift as the dividing line between the zenith and decline of Islamic civilization (Nadwi 2021: 183).

For Nadwi, prophethood (nubuwwa), divine caliphate (khilāfa ilāhiyya), and the Rightly-Guided Caliphate constitute the "prophetic caliphate." He holds the brief era of the Rightly-Guided Caliphate superior to all subsequent Islamic caliphates, presenting it as a paradigm for future generations. In his view, this period was the most complete, beautiful, and glorious, unparalleled in history. He praises it as an era where material, spiritual, moral, religious,

and intellectual resources converged to form a government that was the greatest political power of its time. Nadwi argues that the Rightly-Guided Caliphate gained global renown for its moral governance, flourishing trade and industry, minimal crime, the ascetic lives of the caliphs, trustworthiness, and territorial expansion—so much so that even enemies praised it. A Roman military leader, for instance, described Muslim soldiers: "They stand in prayer at night, fast during the day, fulfill their covenants, enjoin good, forbid evil, and maintain equity among themselves" (Nadwi 2021: 170–171).

In summary, Nadwi regards the Rightly-Guided Caliphate as the perfect model of Islamic governance—both in theory and practice—and an exemplary archetype for posterity. To him, it was not merely a political system but the complete and total succession (niyāba) of prophethood. No other period in history, in his view, surpasses its perfection, beauty, and prosperity. It embodied the spirit of ethics, harmonized religion and knowledge, and utilized all means for human refinement and the emergence of a virtuous civilization. The political power of the Rightly-Guided Caliphate, Nadwi asserts, surpassed all contemporary political powers (Nadwi 2021: 170–171).

The Structure of Legitimate Political System in Nadwi's Thought

Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi offers a unique interpretation of political legitimacy grounded in divine principles and Islamic law. For him, legitimacy entails a political system's conformity with Islamic injunctions. Thus, any political system must align with Sharia principles and values to be deemed legitimate. As one of the foremost contemporary reformers in the Islamic world and the Indian subcontinent, Nadwi's thought demands re-examination. He represents the socio-political ideology of the Deobandi school—now one of the largest Sunni schools after Egypt's Al-Azhar, with even greater influence in recent decades.

For Nadwi, the ideal government is one rooted in divine teachings. While discussing the caliphate and its necessity, he emphasizes not only the principle of governance itself but also its form and structure. Thus, the foundations of Nadwi's legitimate and ideal government consist of:

1. Divine Sovereignty (Ḥākimiyya Ilāhiyya) – The absolute authority of God as the supreme legislator.
2. Shura (Consultation) – A deliberative council (Ahl al-Hall wa-l-ʿAqd) that ensures collective decision-making.
3. Leadership Institution – A qualified and morally upright leader who governs in accordance with Islamic principles.

4. Rule of (Divine) Law – The Quran and Sunnah as the constitutional basis of governance.

These components will be briefly examined below.

1. Divine Sovereignty (Ḥākimiyya Ilāhiyya)

Nadwi asserts that absolute sovereignty (ḥākimiyya) belongs solely to God. To substantiate this, he invokes the metaphysical philosophy promulgated by prophets: all existence, including humanity, falls under the dominion of one Sovereign (sulṭān). The Creator of the universe is its sole Owner and Ruler; there is no authority besides Him, and all beings are subject to His command. In Nadwi's view, humans are inherently created as subjects (raʿiyya) and cannot exist otherwise. Thus, they have no choice but to obey the Creator's decrees. Under divine sovereignty, humans lack the right to legislate their own duties or life plans; their role is solely to submit to the directives of the "Owner of the Kingdom" (Mālik al-Mulk), conveyed through revelation. Divine sovereignty operates invisibly—no visible ruler imposes it, nor do humans feel coerced (Nadwi 2022a: 82–84).

The declaration "Lā ilāha illā Allāh" (There is no god but Allah) encapsulates this: sovereignty (mulk), creatorship (khāliqiyya), and dominion (rubūbiyya) belong exclusively to God. He holds the kingdom of all things, grants protection, and needs none (Nadwi 2022a: 82).

Islam, in essence, means submission (taslīm)—accepting divine commandments, where all things comply with God's will and law. Human existence has two dimensions:

– Instinctive Obedience: Humans are naturally bound to divine law and cannot defy it.
– Rational Agency: Humans are endowed with intellect (ʿaql), enabling them to discern, reflect, accept, or reject matters. Thus, they are not mechanically constrained but exercise free will and opinion.

These dual dimensions guide human life toward perfection. A person, by nature, obeys God and, through free will, adheres to Sharia—just as they follow natural laws in their involuntary existence. This constitutes the "perfect Muslim" who actualizes Islam in all life spheres, wholly accepting God's sovereignty (Nadwi 2022a: 82).

Nadwi's political philosophy rests on the axiom that God is the absolute Sovereign of humanity and the universe, while humans are His subjects. The Quran explicitly affirms divine sovereignty in verses such as:

– To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth... (Quran 42: 49).
– Indeed, Allah's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth... (Quran 9: 116).
– The earth belongs to Allah; He bequeaths it to whomever He wills of His servants... (Quran 7: 128).

2. Shura (Consultation)

A pivotal element in Nadwi's political thought is his advocacy of the caliphate as the leadership model for the Islamic ummah. While rejecting hereditary rule, he emphasizes shura (consultation) as the legitimate means of attaining and legitimizing governance. Nadwi considers the Banu Hashim worthy of the caliphate and rejects the pre-Islamic Arab tradition of selecting leaders based solely on seniority.

He cites Quran 42: 38 as evidence: "Those who respond to their Lord, establish prayer, conduct their affairs by mutual consultation, and spend out of what We have provided them."

Nadwi's conception of shura aligns with the Sunni tradition, where it is exercised by Ahl al-Hall wa-l-ʿAqd (the people of authority who bind and loosen)—essentially the consultative council of the preceding caliph. Though he upholds the principle of election and free choice, he does not elaborate extensively on its mechanisms. His traditionalist leanings and strong admiration for the Rightly-Guided Caliphate suggest his acceptance of both shura and the theory of succession (istikhlāf) (Alikhani 2005: 209). Thus, his notion of legitimacy derives from mainstream Sunni political theory, which regards shura as the legitimate method for establishing political authority. This approach, like other models of succession in early Islam, is rooted in the political realities of the prophetic era. For Sunnis, the actions of the Companions (ṣaḥāba)—alongside the Quran and Sunnah—serve as the primary sources of political jurisprudence. Hence, the Sunni tradition idealizes the methods by which the Rightly-Guided Caliphs assumed leadership as the paradigm of legitimate Islamic governance (Feyrahi 2007: 35).

Influenced by Sunni political thought, Nadwi asserts that an Islamic government must be founded on shura, and the caliph is obligated to adhere to it. He argues that even the Prophet Muhammad, despite being God's appointed messenger and recipient of revelation, was commanded to consult his companions on critical political matters not explicitly addressed by divine revelation. Nadwi bases this on Quran 3: 159: "So consult them in the matter, and once you have resolved, put your trust in Allah."

For Nadwi, shura is a defining feature of Muslim political conduct. However, he maintains that if the caliph is confident in his judgment, he may insist on his opinion even if it contradicts the council's majority view (Nadwi 2019: 184–185).

3. The Quran as the Supreme Law

Nadwi regards a political system as legitimate only if grounded in divine law (sharīʿa). He rejects man-made laws, arguing that they stem from human ignorance, leading to error and oppression. In his view, the Quran alone—as the divine constitution—can legitimize an Islamic government or caliphate. The Quran's authority lies not merely in its wording but in its divine content, accessible and applicable to humanity (Alikhani 2005: 311).

The Quran's self-attestation to its clarity and divine origin underscores its supremacy in legislation:

– These are the verses of the clear Book (Quran 12: 1).
– We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran so that you may understand (Quran 12: 2).
– Indeed, this is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds, brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit to your heart, so that you may be one of the warners, in a clear Arabic tongue (Quran 26: 192–195).

The Quran further emphasizes its precision and clarity in multiple verses, such as: "And those who believe say, 'If only a surah were revealed.' But when a decisive surah is revealed and fighting is mentioned therein, you see those in whose hearts is hypocrisy looking at you with a look of one overcome by death" (Quran 47: 20).

Nadwi, citing Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Yasar, considers the clear verses (muḥkamāt) as God's irrefutable proof, whose meanings are unambiguous and immutable. A legal system based on such a text—whose rulings are explicit, logically sound, and immune to misinterpretation—is inherently superior to all human legislation (Alikhani 2005: 212).

For Nadwi, a legitimate government must adhere to the Quran and Sunnah, as their rulings are immutable. Only in matters not explicitly addressed by these sources may an Islamic state derive laws through ijtihād (juridical reasoning), guided by the principles of the Quran, Sunnah, and the precedents of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (Nadwi 2019: 189).

4. Justice-Centric Governance

Throughout history, the realization of justice has been a paramount ideal, pursued by prophets, scholars, and thinkers alike. The Quran positions justice as the foundation of monotheism, the core mission of prophets, and the basis of ethical values. In contemporary discourse, justice remains a central concern for Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers.

From an Islamic perspective, justice holds absolute value. It is not merely an ethical ideal but the essence of harmonious coexistence. Nadwi asserts that a legitimate political system must be rooted in justice, ensuring equitable access to social rights for all citizens. An Islamic government must neither show favoritism nor neglect justice due to personal enmities. The Quran unequivocally commands:

- Indeed, Allah commands justice, grace, and generosity to relatives... (Quran 16: 90).
- Allah commands you to return trusts to their rightful owners, and to judge with justice when you rule over people (Quran 4: 85).
- O believers! Stand firm for justice as witnesses for Allah, even if it is against yourselves or your parents and relatives. Do not let hatred for a people lead you to injustice. Be just! That is closer to righteousness (Quran 5: 8).

Nadwi's thought underscores that a legitimate government must prioritize justice while demonstrating compassion and concern for societal welfare (Nadwi 2019: 187–188).

5. Leadership by the Qualified

Nadwi attributes the decline of Islamic societies to the misguided policies of incompetent rulers. He advocates for leadership by the qualified (ahl al-kifāya)—a legitimate government must be headed by a capable individual deeply versed in the spirit of Islam and its intricacies, capable of resolving the ummah's crises. An ideal leader must possess intellectual acumen, scholarly rigor, and decisiveness to harness natural resources, power, and wealth for Islam's benefit. Conversely, unqualified leadership not only paralyzes religious teachings but also fractures Islam's foundations, distorting its essence.

Nadwi warns that without qualified leadership, power devolves into dictatorship, as seen during the Umayyad era. The Umayyad caliphs divorced politics from religion and, lacking religious insight, co-opted scholars opportu-

nistically, dismissing them when inconvenient. This separation, coupled with incompetence, revived pre-Islamic tribal regression, sowing discord between rulers and the ruled. In such regimes, Islamic injunctions like enjoining good and forbidding evil (al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-n-nahy ʿani-l-munkar) are abandoned, while vice proliferates. Ultimately, heresies emerge, and Islam loses its true character (Nadwi 2019: 187–189).

Conclusion of Nadwi's Perspective

From the above, we deduce that Nadwi, through a Sunni lens, views governance as a human endeavor entrusted to people's discretion after the Prophet. Power in an Islamic state, he argues, flows from the bottom up. He idealizes the caliphate as the supreme political system, grounded in shura (consultation) via Ahl al-Hall wa-l-ʿAqd (the people of authority).

Critique of Nadwi's Views

Nadwi's stance on political legitimacy is exclusivist and rigid. He deems only the caliphate legitimate, rejecting any criticism of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs and Companions, whose actions he considers infallibly aligned with Sharia (Nadwi 2021: 170–171; 2022b: 75). This contrasts with Islamic scholars—even among Sunnis—who challenge the caliphs' conduct (Mawdudi 1984: 65; Rida n. d.: V/198–199).

Theological and Scholarly Rebuttals

Non-Infallibility of Caliphs

Only the Prophet is infallible (maʿṣūm), as affirmed by Quran 53: 3: "Nor does he speak from [his own] inclination."

Historical accounts document moral and political failures among the Companions, including adultery and armed rebellion (Mawdudi 1984: 166). Thus, their actions cannot be binding precedents (ḥujja).

Shiʿi Perspective

In Twelver Shiʿism, only an infallible Imam's governance is beyond critique. All other systems, including the Rashidun Caliphate, are subject to scrutiny.

Lack of Scriptural Basis

No Quranic verse or hadith asserts the infallibility of the Companions or caliphs. Al-Bukhari's *Ṣaḥīḥ* (2002: 1632) records their errors, undermining Nadwi's claim.

Diversity of Islamic Thought

Nadwi's rigid caliphate model faces opposition from modernist Sunni scholars, Deobandi thinkers, and Shiʿi jurists, who advocate adaptable governance structures.

Final Analysis

This study examines Nadwi's theory of legitimacy, which rests on:

– Tawḥīd (Divine Oneness) as a bulwark against materialism.
– Primacy of Revelation over unaided reason.
– Quran and Sunnah as constitutional foundations.
– Spiritual Reformation of individuals.
– Revival of Jihad's ethos to counter Western "neo-Jahiliyya."

For Nadwi, legitimacy hinges on a polity's conformity to Sharia, with governance serving as a means to establish divine order (iqāmat al-dīn). His ideal structure combines:

– Shura (consultative governance).
– Quranic legal supremacy.
– Justice-centric administration.
– Meritocratic leadership.

However, his rejection of pluralism and uncritical veneration of the Rashidun model conflict with:

– Islamic intellectual diversity.
– Historical evidence of caliphal errors.
– Contemporary needs for ijtihād (juridical innovation).

Islam's dynamism necessitates adaptable governance frameworks, responsive to temporal and spatial contexts. While Nadwi's traditionalism offers moral clarity, its inflexibility risks stagnation in the face of modern challenges.

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