



Women's Authority in the Perspective of Hadith: A Thematic and Contextual Analysis

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Abstract: The study of women's authority from the perspective of *ḥadīth* is a timely issue in contemporary discourse, particularly regarding women's roles in leadership and decision-making across various spheres. This research aims to explore the understanding of *ḥadīths* related to women's authority, both in normative and historical contexts. The findings indicate that comprehension of *ḥadīths* concerning women's authority requires a contextual approach that accounts for the social, cultural, and historical backgrounds in which these traditions emerged. Furthermore, this study emphasises the importance of distinguishing between universally normative *ḥadīths* and those that are locally contextual. In many cases, women's authority is not inherently constrained by religious normative texts, but is instead shaped by scholarly interpretations influenced by patriarchal contexts. This article recommends a re-reading of *ḥadīths* using a critical hermeneutic approach to uncover more inclusive dimensions of gender justice. By doing so, the understanding of women's authority in Islam can contribute to establishing a more equitable and just social order, without compromising the core values taught in the religion.

Keywords: Women's Authority; Thematic *Ḥadīths*; Women's Leadership

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1. Introduction

The discourse on women's authority in Islam has always been both intriguing and challenging, especially in modern contexts that demand gender equality and social justice.¹ As a religion believed to be universal and eternally relevant, Islam contains teachings that govern human relationships, including the roles and authority of women in various aspects of life. However, understandings of women's roles are often shaped by interpretations of religious texts, such as the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*, which are frequently influenced by specific cultural, social, and historical perspectives. This makes the study of women's authority through the lens of *ḥadīth* an urgent necessity to present interpretations that are more contextual and responsive to contemporary dynamics.

One frequently debated issue is whether women possess the legitimacy to occupy positions of authority in both public and domestic spheres. As a primary source of Islamic teachings, *ḥadīth* is often invoked to support or challenge women's roles in leadership. Certain *ḥadīths*, for example, the one stating that "a people that appoints a woman as its leader will never prosper," are frequently cited in a literal manner, without due attention to their contextual background. However, despite increasing scholarly attention to gender in Islam, there remains a lack of comprehensive thematic-hermeneutic analysis of *ḥadīths* concerning women's authority, particularly one that critically addresses socio-historical bias in classical interpretations.²

Women's authority can be understood as the recognition of women's rights and capabilities to exercise control across various spheres of life, whether domestic, social, or political. This authority encompasses the ability to make decisions, exert influence, and manage responsibilities in diverse contexts.³ Theologically and culturally, women's authority is often shaped by prevailing societal norms, which frequently restrict women's scope of action, especially in leadership roles and decision-making. From an Islamic perspective, women's authority is acknowledged in various domains, notably in their roles as household managers, educators, and, in certain cases, political and social leaders.⁴

For example, in a *ḥadīth* that acknowledges a woman as a leader within the household, there is recognition of her authority to manage family life and educate the next generation. However, this acknowledgement is often confined by interpretations that restrict women's authority solely to the domestic sphere. Therefore, women's authority extends beyond household management and includes

¹ T. Saiful et al., "Gender Equality Perspective and Women Position in Islam," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Law, Governance and Islamic Society (ICOLGIS 2019)* (Paris, France: Atlantis Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2991/ascehr.k.200306.212>; Ida Afidah, "Promoting Gender Equality and Empowerment: A Quranic and Hadith Perspective on Women's Roles in Islam," *Diroyah: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Hadis* 7, no. 2 (April 28, 2023): 252–70, <https://doi.org/10.15575/diroyah.v7i2.25177>.

² Dadah, Muhammad Rama Ramadan, and Siti Maesaroh, "Islam and Gender: An Exploration of Hadith on the Equality of Men and Women," *Journal of Religion and Social Transformation* 2, no. 1 (November 20, 2024): 45–57, <https://doi.org/10.24235/763kh140>.

³ Eugenie Samier and Eman ElKaleh, "Towards a Model of Muslim Women's Management Empowerment: Philosophical and Historical Evidence and Critical Approaches," *Administrative Sciences* 11, no. 2 (April 29, 2021): 47, <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci11020047>; Rabia Naguib, "Grounded Approach to Women's Empowerment: Understanding the Complexities," 2024, 13–53, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-6006-4_2.

⁴ Yara Yasser Hilal, Denise Mifsud, and Waheed Hammad, "Female Educational Leadership in the Arab World: A Systematic Review of Published Research Literature," *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, February 20, 2024, 1–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2024.2316655>; Tamer Koburtay, Tala Abuhusseini, and Yusuf M. Sidani, "Women Leadership, Culture, and Islam: Female Voices from Jordan," *Journal of Business Ethics* 183, no. 2 (March 28, 2023): 347–63, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05041-0>.

active participation in public life, politics, and social leadership.⁵ Authority can thus be defined as the ability and right to control situations or make decisions, whereas emancipation places greater emphasis on achieving equality of rights.

In different contexts, the term women's authority is often paralleled in conceptual studies related to gender issues. In the Women's Studies Encyclopedia, gender is defined as a cultural concept intended to differentiate roles, behaviours, mindsets, and emotional characteristics between men and women in society.⁶ This definition is reinforced by Musda Mulia, who states that gender comprises a set of roles, responsibilities, functions, attitudes, rights, and behaviours attributed to both men and women through cultural and environmental constructs.⁷ According to him, this concept is dynamic and may evolve. Nasaruddin Umar further notes that gender is used as a conceptual tool to understand the socio-cultural differences between men and women.⁸

The nature of women has long been regarded as a normative and cultural value ingrained in societal life. This inherent nature, which encompasses natural qualities such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding, shapes perceptions of women's roles.⁹ Consequently, women are often encouraged to engage in work or activities aligned with these natural inclinations, including nursing infants, caring for and educating children, and managing household affairs. This is exemplified in the verse of Allah, An-Nisa 4:34, which states:

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۚ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَنَاطٌ
حُفَظَتْنَ لِنَفْسِهِنَّ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ وَالَّتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاصْرَبُوهُنَّ ۚ
فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا

Translation:

34. Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given some of them preference over others and because they spend out of their wealth. Righteous women are devoutly obedient, and they protect in their husbands' absence what Allah has entrusted them with. As for those from whom you fear disobedience (*nushūz*), first counsel them, then refuse to share their beds, and if they still disobey, gently discipline them. But if they obey you, do not seek a way to harm them. Indeed, Allah is Most High, Most Great.¹⁰

The verse supports the inherent nature and position of women in their roles of safeguarding and managing the household, educating, and raising their children. Furthermore, the verse implies a division of labour within the framework of production and reproduction in society: the husband is designated as the provider (production), while the wife assumes the role of homemaker focused on childbearing and raising the family.

⁵ Ummi Kalsum Hasibuan and Hafizzullah Hafizzullah, "Hadis Tentang Wanita Menjadi Pemimpin: Menelisik Antara Pemahaman Tekstual Dan Kontekstual Perspektif M. Syuhudi Ismail," *Khazanah Theologia* 3, no. 2 (March 14, 2021): 81–92, <https://doi.org/10.15575/kt.v3i2.11023>.

⁶ Alice H. Eagly and Wendy Wood, "The Origins of Sex Differences in Human Behavior: Evolved Dispositions versus Social Roles.," *American Psychologist* 54, no. 6 (June 1999): 408–23, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.6.408>.

⁷ Siti Musdah Mulia et al., *Keadilan Dan Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Perspektif Islam (Edisi Kedua)* (LKAJ (Lembaga Kajian Agama dan Jender), 2003).

⁸ Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001).

⁹ Eko Mukminto, "Hukum, Ideologi Patriarki, Dan Kekerasan Sistematis Atas Perempuan—Suatu Kajian □ i □ ekian," *Nurani Hukum* 3, no. 1 (September 2, 2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.51825/nhk.v3i1.8566>.

¹⁰ Kementerian Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an Dan Terjemahannya (Edisi Revisi)* (Jakarta: Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an., 2019).

Behind their maternal nature, women also possess dynamic characteristics. The Qur'an includes numerous signals regarding gender and women who resist gender bias and discrimination. Such resistance becomes apparent when discourse on women's inherent nature is interpreted narrowly. The term *kodrat*, derived from the Qur'anic notions *qaddara* and *taqdir*, is frequently debated among scholars. This ongoing debate permeates society and eventually shapes cultural norms or values, often interpreted as "fate." In some cases, this interpretation has been criticised for contributing to setbacks within Muslim communities.

The discourse that frames women's nature as "fate" often discourages female autonomy, placing their roles and status under the control of others. Across various spheres, within the family, society, and the public domain, women are frequently relegated to subordinate or second-class positions. Over time, the advancement of knowledge and social change continually create space for renewal and improvement. The Qur'an itself only hints at women's innate nature and status according to the measure and decree of Allah. However, these qualities are also shaped by customary practices and prevailing social norms.

Throughout history, during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and thereafter, there were numerous women engaged in various professions. Among them was Umm Salim bint Milhan, who worked as a bridal makeup artist, and Qilat Ummi bint Anmar, who was active in trade. Zaynab bint Jahsh, one of the Prophet's wives, processed animal hides and donated the proceeds from her work. Additionally, Raitha, the wife of the Prophet's companion Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, worked to support her family.¹¹ The Commander of the Faithful, Umar ibn al-Khattab, later established an institution known as Nizham al-Hisbah, appointing al-Shifa bint Abdullah to one of its key positions. Al-Shifa was also recognised for her significant role in promoting literacy among women. In Makkah al-Mukarramah, this institution continued to develop, with Samrah bint Nuhaik emerging as the first woman to be entrusted with such responsibilities.¹²

Islam established various principles of equality that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) applied in his daily life, principles evident during the early development of Islam approximately 1,500 years ago, before deviations and regressions in Islamic practice emerged. During the era of the Khulafā' al-Rāshidīn and parts of the Umayyad period, gender equality across various areas of life remained largely intact. However, during the Abbasid Caliphate, especially around the 13th century CE, restrictions on women reached their zenith. Women were increasingly confined to harems, lost access to political roles, and were left with minimal opportunities for meaningful contribution.

During this period, classical Qur'anic exegeses also emerged, such as those by al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, and Ibn Kathīr, which largely overlooked verses affirming gender equality. Moreover, the Prophet's sunnah, originally dynamic (a "living sunnah"), became increasingly rigid. As a consequence, misogynistic *ḥadīths* that demean women began to surface.¹³

In the modern era of globalisation, Islamic law faces significant challenges in addressing these issues, as it is often viewed as perpetuating injustice and gender bias. Therefore, a critical re-examination is necessary to eliminate bias and dominance in

¹¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Tematik Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat (12th Ed.)* (Bandung: Mizan, 2001).

¹² H. Nurhalim Nasrullah Nur, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an Tentang Perempuan* (Makassar: Alauddin University Press, 2011).

¹³ Syarif Hidayatullah, *Teologi Feminisme Islam* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010).

religious interpretation. This effort must be carried out through collective processes that include scholarship, social analysis, education, and concrete action in addressing women's issues. To meet these challenges, Islamic law must be studied more deeply to remain relevant in confronting contemporary problems.

Although prior research has examined women's roles in Islam, few have critically explored *ḥadīths* on women's authority using a thematic-hermeneutic approach. Existing studies often rely on literal or decontextualised readings, leaving a gap in scholarship that integrates contemporary gender perspectives with Islamic interpretive traditions. This study seeks to fill that gap by offering a contextual re-reading of relevant *ḥadīths*, contributing a more gender-just theological framework to current Islamic discourse.

This study assumes that *ḥadīth* texts are dynamic and shaped by specific socio-historical realities, meaning that literal interpretations divorced from context can be misleading. The second assumption is that women's authority is not confined to the domestic sphere but also holds legitimacy in education, economics, and even politics, supported by early Islamic narratives about the Prophet's companions such as Umm Salim and al-Shifa. The third assumption posits that a thematic-hermeneutic approach allows for the rereading and reactivation of women's voices within *ḥadīth*, like efforts by Islamic feminist movements like Musawah and Sisters in Islam. The fourth assumption is that interpretations responsive to modern social contexts help bridge the gap between textual authority and contemporary realities, thereby promoting more just and civilised Islamic policies.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using thematic *maudhū'ī* analysis to examine *ḥadīths* related to women's authority in Islam. This method was selected for its ability to provide a deep and contextualised understanding of the themes under investigation. The primary data consist of *ḥadīths* drawn from key *ḥadīth* collections such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, and *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, which explicitly or implicitly address women's roles and authority, especially in leadership and decision-making contexts. In addition, secondary data, including classical and contemporary Islamic literature, journal articles, and other academic works, are utilised to support the analysis.¹⁴

Once the data were collected, both *sanad* (chain of transmission) and *matan* (text) criticisms were conducted to ensure the authenticity of the *ḥadīths*. The *sanad* criticism aimed to assess the legitimacy of narrations based on the reliability of narrators and the continuity of the transmission chain. The *matan* criticism evaluated the content of the *ḥadīths*, taking into account their compatibility with the Qur'an, other authentic *ḥadīths*, and the relevant socio-historical context.¹⁵ *Ḥadīths* that passed these critical evaluations were then subjected to thematic analysis to identify interpretative patterns related to issues of female authority. This analysis went beyond the textual level, incorporating a contextual study of the social, cultural, and political conditions that shape the message conveyed in the *ḥadīths*.¹⁶

¹⁴ Arifuddin Ahmad, *Metodologi Pemahaman Hadis: Kajian Ilmu Ma'ani Al-Hadis (Edisi Ke-2)* (Makassar: Alauddin University Press, 2013).

¹⁵ Ahmad.

¹⁶ Sugiyono, *Memahami Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: CV Alfabeta, 2013).

This study also employs a critical hermeneutic approach to uncover deeper meanings within the hadith texts. This method involves reflecting on the interplay between the text itself, its historical context, and contemporary socio-cultural realities, thereby generating a dynamic and inclusive understanding. According to one definition, critical hermeneutics seeks to expose underlying social interests and power dynamics that shape interpretation. Moreover, research validity is maintained through data triangulation, which involves comparing the analysis results with perspectives from classical and contemporary scholars, as well as engaging in discussions with experts in Islamic and gender studies.¹⁷ Through these steps, the study is expected to make a significant contribution by clarifying the position of female authority from a hadith perspective, and by addressing the challenges of gender discourse in Islam both academically and practically.

3. Results

3.1. Results of hadith tracing

Hadith Narrated in Bukhari:¹⁸

حَدَّثَنَا عُثْمَانُ بْنُ الْهَيْثَمِ حَدَّثَنَا عَوْفٌ عَنْ الْحَسَنِ عَنْ أَبِي بَكْرَةَ قَالَ لَقَدْ نَفَعَنِي اللَّهُ بِكَلِمَةٍ سَمِعْتُهَا مِنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَيَّامَ الْجَمَلِ بَعْدَ مَا كُنْتُ أَنْ أَلْحَقَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْجَمَلِ فَأَقَاتِلَ مَعَهُمْ قَالَ لَمَّا بَلَغَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنَّ أَهْلَ فَارَسَ قَدْ مَلَكُوا عَلَيْهِمْ بَنَتْ كِسْرَى قَالَ لَنْ يُفْلِحَ قَوْمٌ وَلَوْ أَمَرَهُمْ امْرَأَةٌ¹⁹

Translation:

It was narrated by Abu Bakr, “On the days of the Battle of Al-Jamal, Allah benefitted me with a statement I heard from the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) when I was about to join the companions of Al-Jamal (i.e., the camels) and fight alongside them. When the Prophet (ﷺ) was informed that Persia had crowned Khosrau’s daughter as their ruler, he said: ‘Never will succeed such a people who appoint a woman as their leader.’”

In the Hadith narrated by al-Tirmidhi, as well as in the narrations of an-Nasa’i and Ahmad ibn Hanbal:²⁰

عَصَمَنِي اللَّهُ حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْمُثَنَّى حَدَّثَنَا خَالِدُ بْنُ الْحَارِثِ حَدَّثَنَا حُمَيْدُ الطَّوِيلُ عَنْ الْحَسَنِ عَنْ أَبِي بَكْرَةَ قَالَ بَشَّرَنِي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ لَمَّا هَلَكَ كِسْرَى قَالَ مَنْ اسْتَخْلَفُوا قَالُوا ابْنَتُهُ فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ لَنْ يُفْلِحَ قَوْمٌ وَلَوْ أَمَرَهُمْ امْرَأَةٌ قَالَ فَلَمَّا قَدِمَتْ عَائِشَةُ يَغْنِي الْبَصْرَةَ ذَكَرْتُ قَوْلَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ هَذَا حَدِيثٌ حَسَنٌ صَحِيحٌ. اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَعَصَمَنِي اللَّهُ بِهِ

Translation:

Narrated by Muhammad ibn al-Mutsanna, from Khalid ibn al-Harith, from Humayd al-Thawil, from Al-Hasan, from Abu Bakrah, who said: “Allah protected me by [the statement] I heard from the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). When Kisra died, the Prophet (ﷺ) asked, ‘Who will succeed him?’ They replied, ‘His daughter.’ The Prophet (ﷺ) then said, ‘A people will never succeed if they entrust their affairs to a woman.’ Abu Bakrah

¹⁷ Abuddin Nata, *Metodologi Studi Islam* (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 2016).

¹⁸ Muhammad Nashiruddin al-Albani, *Ringkasan Shahih Bukhari (Edisi Pertama)* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Imam Bukhari, *Shahih Bukhari, Bab Kitabu Nabiyyu saw ila Kisrah*, Juz 13, h. 337. Dan *Bab al- Fitnatu al- lati Tamuju kamaujil Bahri*, Juz 21, h. 497.

²⁰ Ali Nashiri, *Pustaka Hadis: Ensiklopedi Hadis Sunni - Syi'ah (Edisi Pertama)* (Jakarta: Sadra Press, 2019).

continued: When ‘Ā’ishah arrived in Basrah, I remembered the Prophet’s words, and by them Allah protected me. Abu ‘Isa (Tirmidhi) said: This hadith is hasan sahih.”

3.2. Analysis of the hadith’s chain of transmission

The selected chain of transmission is via the an-Nasā’ī route, with narrators as follows:

a. Al-Hasan (died 110 AH)

Full Name: Al-Hasan ibn Abū-Hasan Yāsār, known as al-Basrī, with the kunya Abū Sa‘īd, and classified within the *tabaqāt al-tābi‘īn al-kubrā* (major class of the second generation of Muslims). He resided in Basrah and passed away in 110 AH (728 CE). His teachers included notable figures such as Nāfi‘ ibn Ḥārith ibn Kilādah (Abū Bakrah), Ubayy ibn Ka‘b, Aḥmar ibn Jazā’, Anas ibn Mālīk, Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh, among other scholars. His students comprised ‘Auf ibn Abū Jamīlah, ‘Asy-as ibn Abū Ya‘ṣā, Ayyūb ibn Abū Tamīmāh, and others. Classical scholars, such as Ibn Sa‘d, praised him with descriptors like *jāmi‘* (comprehensive), *‘ālim* (learned), *ṣīqah* (trustworthy), *ma‘mūn* (reliable), *‘ābid* (devout), *nāṣik* (pious), *kāsir al-‘ilm* (abundant in knowledge), and *ḥujjah* (a proof or authority).²¹

b. Humaid (died 142 AH)

Humaid ibn Abī Humaid, whose *kunya* was Abū Ubaydillah and *laqab* al-Tawāl, belonged to the *tabaqāt al-tābi‘īn al-ṣuḥrā* (the junior generation of the Followers). He died in 142 AH. Among his teachers were Ishāq ibn ‘Abd Allāh, Anas ibn Mālīk, and al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan Yāsār (al-Basrī). His students included Abū Bakr ibn Iyyās, Sufyān ibn Sa‘īd, and others. Hadith critics such as Yahyā ibn Ma‘īn, al-Nasa’ī, and al-‘Ajli judged him to be *ṣīqah* (reliable). Abū Ḥātim described him as *lā ba’sa bihi* (“not problematic”), while Ibn Kharāsh regarded him as *ṣīqah ṣidq* (reliably truthful).²²

c. Khalid bin al-Haris

Khalid ibn al-Harīs, known by his *kunya* Abū ‘Uthmān, belonged to the senior generation of the Followers of the Followers (*tabaqāt al-tābi‘īn al-kubrā*) and passed away in 186 AH. He studied under scholars such as ‘Abān ibn Sam‘ah, Ḥumaid ibn Abī Ḥumaid, and Sulaymān ibn ‘Alī. His students included Aḥmad ibn Miqdām, Muḥammad ibn al-Muṣannā, among others. Hadith scholars like Muḥammad ibn Sa‘d and Abū Ḥātim evaluated him as *ṣīqah* (reliable and trustworthy).²³

d. Muhammad bin al-Musanna (167-252)

Muḥammad ibn al-Muṣannā ibn ‘Ubayd, known by the *kunya* Abū Mūsā and *laqab* al-Zamān, passed away in 252 AH. He belonged to the major generation of the Followers of the Followers of the Followers (*tabaqāt al-tābi‘īn al-tābi‘īn al-kubrā*). His

²¹ Muhammad Misbah, *Studi Kitab Hadis: Dari Muwaththa’ Imam Malik Hingga Mustadrak Al Hakim (Edisi Pertama)* (Malang: Ahlimedia Press, 2020).

²² Parwiz Stanekzai and Wali Mohammad Saeedi, “Judge and Women’s Judgement in Islamic Sharia and the Laws of Afghanistan,” *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 7, no. 7 (2023): 218–32.

²³ Lukmanul Hakim, *Pengantar Ilmu Hadis (1st Ed.)* (Surakarta: CV Jejak Publisher, 2022).

teachers included notable figures such as Khalid ibn al-Harīs, Aḥmad ibn Sa‘īd, and Sulaymān ibn Dāwūd. His students comprised prominent scholars like al-Bukhārī, Muslim, and al-Nasa‘ī. Hadith critics, including Yahyā ibn Ma‘īn, considered him *ṣīqah* (trustworthy), while al-Zaḥābī referred to him as a ḥujjah (authority). Abū Ḥātim described him as *ṣāliḥ al-ḥadīth* (a practitioner of hadith) and *ṣidq* (truthful), and Ibn Khirāsh labelled him *min al-asbat* (from those of integrity).²⁴

Based on our chain-of-transmission (*sanad*) analysis, all narrators in this hadith possess verified intellectual and moral integrity. None have been criticised or deemed weak by hadith scholars. In terms of sanad continuity, the research confirmed direct teacher-student links throughout, establishing that the *sanad* is *muttasil* (uninterrupted). After tracing and comparing all transmission lines, no *shādhhdh* (irregularities) or hidden defects (*‘illāt*) were detected. There are no flaws or inconsistencies within the sanad. Accordingly, this hadith can be classified as *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) concerning its *sanad*.

3.3. Analysis of the hadith text (*matan*)

قَالَ لَنْ يُفْلِحَ قَوْمٌ وَلَوْ أَمَرَهُمْ امْرَأَةٌ... عَنْ أَبِي بَكْرَةَ ...

Translation:

“...From Abu Bakrah... ‘A society led by a woman will never succeed’”
(Narrated in Sahih Bukhari).²⁵

This hadith is often cited as a basis for prohibiting women from assuming leadership roles in society, whether in civil institutions such as foundations and mass organisations, or political leadership, particularly in state governance (*al-imāmah al-‘uẓmā*). From the perspective of the chain of transmission (*sanad*), the hadith is indeed classified as *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic). However, there are several important considerations. First, because it is categorised as a solitary report (*ḥadīth āḥād*), hadith scholars note that its authenticity cannot be regarded as certain. Second, this hadith was transmitted solely by its narrator, Abū Bakrah, approximately 23 years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). During that interval, no other companions are known to have reported the same hadith, despite the significance of its content. Third, the hadith was conveyed during a period of internal conflict between the faction of ‘Ā’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) and the camp of Sayyidunā ‘Alī (may Allah be pleased with him), at a time when ‘Ā’ishah’s side appeared to be facing defeat. Fourth, the Prophet’s statement was made in the context of the Persian Empire, which was historically hostile toward Islam. Therefore, interpretations of this hadith concerning female leadership must be contextualised within its historical background.²⁶

3.4. Semantic analysis of hadith regarding the limits of women’s authority

Semantic analysis in hadith studies aims to uncover the deep meanings of terms used in hadith texts, to achieve a clearer and more precise understanding of the conveyed message. In this context, key terms such as *lan*, *al-mufliḥūn*, *qawwāmūna al-nisa’*,

²⁴ al-Albani, *Ringkasan Shahih Bukhari (Edisi Pertama)*.

²⁵ al-Albani.

²⁶ Misbah, *Studi Kitab Hadis: Dari Muwaththa’ Imam Malik Hingga Mustadrak Al Hakim (Edisi Pertama)*.

imra'ah, and *amrahū* frequently become focal points of analysis to discern the meanings intended by the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) in his hadiths.²⁷ Below is the methodological explanation for the semantic analysis of these key terms:

a. *Lan* (لن)

The word *lan* in Arabic functions to affirm that something will never occur in the future. In hadith literature, *lan* is often utilised to signal the impossibility or rejection of a state of affairs. For example, in the hadith regarding a woman who will never lead a community, the use of *lan* conveys that such a situation is impossible, not merely inadvisable.²⁸

b. *Al-Muflihun* (المفلحون)

The word *al-muflihūn* derives from the root *falah*, which means success or happiness. In hadith terminology, this term often refers to those who attain true happiness and safety, both in this world and in the Hereafter. From a semantic perspective, analysis of this word focuses on identifying *al-muflihūn*, those who succeed in achieving happiness through righteous deeds, piety (*taqwā*), and adherence to religious guidance.

c. *Qawwamuna Al'al-Nisa'* (قوامون على النساء)

The term *qawwamūna 'alā al-nisā'* in the Qur'an refers to the role of men as protectors or maintainers of women within the family. The word *qawwam* derives from the root *qāma*, meaning 'to stand,' 'to maintain,' or 'to uphold.' In semantic analysis, this term is often understood in the context of men's duty to provide protection and care for women, whether materially, emotionally, or spiritually. However, semantic studies also emphasise that this role must be viewed within the scope of familial relationships and not interpreted as discrimination or dominance over women.

d. *Imra'ah* (امراة)

The term *imra'ah* means 'woman' in Arabic. However, in hadith studies, it is important to analyse the meaning and role that *imra'ah* represents within its social and religious context. In many hadiths, *imra'ah* is ascribed various characteristics that reflect women's responsibilities and roles within the family and society. These roles may vary depending on the context, time, place, and the specific interpretation of the hadith.

e. *Amrahu* (أمره)

The word *amr* originates from the Arabic root '*amr*', meaning 'command' or 'mandate.' In many hadiths, *amr* refers to a directive from Allah or the Messenger (peace be upon him) to act, typically one that brings about benefit. In semantic analysis, understanding AMR and its derivatives focuses on the relationship between the command given and the individual's responsibility to fulfil that duty. For example, in leadership contexts, such commands often pertain to the obligation to uphold justice and safeguard the well-being of the community".²⁹

²⁷ Nashiri, *Pustaka Hadis: Ensiklopedi Hadis Sunni - Syi'ah* (Edisi Pertama).

²⁸ Misbah, *Studi Kitab Hadis: Dari Muwaththa' Imam Malik Hingga Mustadrak Al Hakim* (Edisi Pertama).

²⁹ Nashiri, *Pustaka Hadis: Ensiklopedi Hadis Sunni - Syi'ah* (Edisi Pertama).

Semantic analysis of key terms in hadith is essential for understanding the messages contained within them. A deeper comprehension of words such as *lan*, *al-muflīhūn*, *qawwamūna* ‘*alā al-nisā*’, *imra’ah*, and *amrahū* aids in interpreting the social, cultural, and religious contexts of the hadith, and helps avoid misinterpretations that may arise without considering the broader context.³⁰

3.5. Contextual review of hadith on women’s authority

The verse “الرَّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ” (“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women”) from Qur’an 4:34 has sparked extensive discussion concerning the roles of men and women in society, particularly within the institution of marriage. In his exegesis, Al-Qurtubi explains that men are granted leadership responsibilities because they are obligated to provide for and protect their wives. Furthermore, he asserts that men assume roles as rulers, judges, and soldiers, positions traditionally not held by women. Consequently, this verse affirms that husbands bear the responsibility of guiding, educating, and directing their wives in domestic life, provided such guidance aligns with religious teachings.³¹

However, this view has faced criticism from a number of contemporary mufassir (Qur’anic commentators). They argue that the verse need not be understood in a strictly literal sense. The term “الرَّجَالُ” (“men”) in this context should be interpreted more narrowly as “husbands,” considering the verse explicitly refers to providing for one’s wife and is set within the framework of marital life. Thus, in their view, the verse focuses specifically on the spousal relationship, rather than positioning all men as general leaders over all women.³²

Masdar F. Mas’udi argues that this verse has been employed to affirm male dominance in various aspects of women’s lives, notably by restricting women’s access to public roles. In his view, the verse is more appropriately understood within the family context, rather than as justification for male authority in public or state affairs. He also contends that the masculine bias embedded in religious interpretation has contributed to excluding women from leadership roles in society. This bias becomes particularly evident when women’s contributions in intellectual, social, and familial spheres are viewed merely as supplementary, rather than as decision-making roles.³³

In his interpretation, Muhammad Abduh emphasises that the verse “الرَّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ” signifies that a husband must be responsible for understanding and fulfilling his wife’s needs, including offering care, protection, and guidance. Abduh does not view this verse as a justification for a husband to dominate his wife, but rather as a form of compassionate and responsible leadership. He places greater emphasis on the importance of wise leadership rather than domination.³⁴

One of the hadiths frequently cited as a basis for rejecting women’s leadership in public spheres is: “A nation that entrusts its affairs to a woman will never prosper.” According to Syuhudi Ismail, this hadith must be understood within its historical context, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) made this statement in response to the

³⁰ Hakim, *Pengantar Ilmu Hadis (1st Ed.)*.

³¹ Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur’an: Tafsir Tematik Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat (12th Ed.)*.

³² Nur, *Wawasan Al-Qur’an Tentang Perempuan*; Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur’an: Tafsir Tematik Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat (12th Ed.)*.

³³ Masdar, *Islam Dan Hak-Hak Reproduksi Perempuan (Edisi Kedua)* (Bandung: Mizan, 1997).

³⁴ Ahmad Lubis et al., *Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Islam: Tinjauan Berbagi Perspektif (Edisi Pertama)* (Cendekia, 2022).

appointment of a woman as queen in Persia.³⁵ At that time, both Persian and Arab societies believed that only men were capable of leading a nation. However, this situation must be interpreted contextually, as the Prophet's statement was related to a political context that was vastly different from that of today.

Quraish Shihab argues that the hadith cannot be applied universally, as the Prophet's (peace be upon him) statement was specifically directed at the case of a woman being appointed as queen in Persia, where, at the time, society did not recognise women as legitimate leaders. However, over time and with social changes, there have been numerous examples of women who have successfully led nations, such as Cleopatra, Margaret Thatcher, and Benazir Bhutto. Therefore, the interpretation of this hadith must be viewed within a broader context, one that is open to the realities of changing times.³⁶

Said Aqil Siradj also adds that the hadith is more case-specific, meaning it applies only to particular circumstances and cannot be generalised. The issue addressed in the hadith is not a prohibition against female leadership, but rather the incompetence of the specific woman in question as a leader. Islamic history itself records the significant involvement of women in various aspects of life, including politics. For instance, Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) led troops in the Battle of the Camel. This indicates that women in Islam possess leadership potential that can be exercised not only in the domestic sphere but also in the public domain.

Overall, there is no religious provision that prohibits women from participating in politics or leading a nation, although certain views may seek to limit women's roles in specific positions. In the modern context, many women have proven themselves in political and social leadership, demonstrating that with the necessary capacity, knowledge, and competence, women can serve as effective leaders. Therefore, there is no justification for denying women the opportunity to play a greater role in public life, whether in political or social spheres.³⁷

4. Discussion

This study demonstrates that the normative-universalist interpretation of the *ḥadīth* "*lan yufliḥa qawmun wallaw amrahum imra'ah*" as a categorical prohibition against female leadership has become obsolete in contemporary society due to its neglect of the *ḥadīth's* historical context. A contextual-local interpretation views this *ḥadīth* as a reaction to the political situation in Persia following the death of Khosrow, rendering it conditional and not universally applicable. A survey on the correlation between women and leadership revealed that 63% of respondents expressed confidence in women's leadership abilities, while 47% faced challenges rooted in conventional interpretations.³⁸ These findings underscore the need to reassess this *ḥadīth* through a contextual-normative lens.

The research affirms that applying the *ḥadīth* as a universal legal ruling without its historical context undermines the essence of justice and the broader objectives of

³⁵ Nurfitriani Nurfitriani, "Konsep Al-Qur'an dan Hadis tentang Radha'ah dan Hadhanah Perspektif GendeR," *SANGAJI: Jurnal Pemikiran Syariah Dan Hukum* 6, no. 1 (March 31, 2022): 51–70, <https://doi.org/10.52266/sangaji.v6i1.772>.

³⁶ Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Tematik Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat* (12th Ed.).

³⁷ Nur, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an Tentang Perempuan*.

³⁸ M. Ferry Irawan et al., "Women in Leadership: Exploring Potential and Challenges in the Islamic Context," *An-Nisa Jurnal Kajian Perempuan Dan Keislaman* 17, no. 1 (July 16, 2024): 55–66, <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v17i1.234>.

maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah.³⁹ Similarly, several contextual scholars argue that this *ḥadīth* emerged from a specific political situation in Persia rather than from an immutable gender restriction.⁴⁰ The fact that 47% of respondents encountered challenges due to conventional interpretations reflects the dominance of patriarchal narratives in sacred text interpretation.⁴¹ A critical hermeneutic approach emphasises the need for re-reading to avoid static normative analyses. This article combines the maqāṣid methodology with *asbāb al-wurūd* as the most relevant strategy for addressing literal textual issues surrounding female leadership. This conclusion is supported by historical narratives, such as the story of the Queen of Sheba in Surah An-Naml, which highlights the efficacy of female leadership.⁴² Therefore, this study argues that the interpretation of this *ḥadīth* should be more contextual and integrative rather than literal.

In the current academic landscape, a clear contrast emerges: contemporary scholars like Wahbah az-Zuhayli adopt a normative stance with adaptable applications,⁴³ while others, such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Muhammad al-Ghazali, Taha Jabir al-‘Alwani, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Abdullah Saeed, strongly advocate for contextual and maqāṣid-oriented approaches. Al-Qaradawi emphasises that leadership roles should be based on competence and benefit rather than gender, whereas Zuhayli permits women to occupy leadership roles, albeit not as head of state but in capacities such as ministers or directors.

This study is grounded in the theoretical frameworks developed by prior research, including Glas et al. and Zulaiha, which emphasise the importance of hermeneutical and historical methodologies. Previous studies have largely concentrated on the textual or *isnād* dimensions, overlooking the exploration of socio-political consequences.⁴⁴ This article refines those studies by incorporating empirical data that reinforce the alignment between women’s capabilities and modern *ḥadīth* interpretations. The study successfully synthesises textual, contextual, and empirical approaches, a rare achievement. It also addresses the need for a scholarly and practical reformulation of interpretation. These findings may serve as a benchmark for the revitalisation of Islamic jurisprudence and religious policy. This study enhances both theoretical and practical significance by correlating *ḥadīth* interpretation with the socio-political realities of Indonesia.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the *ḥadīth* concerning women's authority in leadership, despite possessing an authentic chain of narration (*sanad sahih*), must be interpreted within its socio-historical context. The *ḥadīth*, originally responding to the

³⁹ Taryudi Taryudi and Nabilah Nuraini, “Critical Review in the Application of the Concept of Qath’iy and Zhanny to the Qur’an and Hadith,” *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 1, no. 2 (May 5, 2021): 183–86, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v1i2.11821>.

⁴⁰ Maghfirah Maghfirah, Ahmad Maulidizen, and Hasbullah Hasbullah, “Women’s Leadership in Islam with Asbāb Al-Wurūd Approach,” *Madania: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman* 24, no. 2 (December 31, 2020): 145, <https://doi.org/10.29300/madania.v24i2.3433>.

⁴¹ Moh. Syaeful Bahar, Dodik Harnadi, and Zaimatus Sa’diyah, “The Patriarchal Interpretation and the Political Participation of Rural Women in Bondowoso East Java,” *Karsa: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture* 30, no. 1 (June 28, 2022): 184–207, <https://doi.org/10.19105/karsa.v30i1.5179>.

⁴² Ismail Lala, “The Queen of Sheba in the Sunni Exegetical Tradition,” *Religions* 13, no. 3 (March 9, 2022): 233, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13030233>.

⁴³ Eni Zulaiha, “Tafsir Feminis: Sejarah, Paradigma Dan Standar Validitas Tafsir Feminis,” *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur’an Dan Tafsir*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.15575/al-bayan.v1i1.1671>.

⁴⁴ Lala, “The Queen of Sheba in the Sunni Exegetical Tradition”; Zulaiha, “Tafsir Feminis: Sejarah, Paradigma Dan Standar Validitas Tafsir Feminis.”

appointment of Khosrow's daughter, reflects a particular cultural and temporal situation rather than a universally binding norm. Hence, political leadership should be grounded in competence and public legitimacy, regardless of gender. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that restrictions on women's authority are often shaped not by the core principles of Islam but by patriarchal interpretations embedded in historical exegetical traditions. In response, this study proposes a critical hermeneutic re-reading of gender-related hadiths, utilising tools from gender analysis and social sciences to uncover more inclusive meanings. This approach aligns with Qur'anic values of justice, humanity, and egalitarianism.

Nevertheless, this research is limited in scope, as it focuses on a single hadith and draws from selected interpretive traditions. A broader analysis involving a wider range of gender-related hadiths and diverse scholarly perspectives across various Islamic schools of thought would enrich the findings. Additionally, empirical studies examining how reinterpretations of these hadiths impact Muslim communities in practice remain underexplored. Future research should therefore expand the corpus of hadiths analysed and integrate interdisciplinary methods, including discourse analysis and field studies, to assess the real-world implications of gender-sensitive interpretations. Such efforts would contribute further to the development of inclusive Islamic thought and promote a more just and equitable social order rooted in authentic religious principles.

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