

The Dynamics of Hadith Interpretation Regarding Leadership Women in the Modern Era: A Study of Classical and Contemporary Commentaries

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Abstract:

This article examines the dynamics of hadith interpretation regarding women's public role within the tradition of hadith literature across different historical periods. This study is based on an analysis of 17 hadith commentaries, comprising both classical and contemporary works that represent the intellectual perspectives of scholars from various periods in Islamic history. Each generation of scholars demonstrates differences in form and argumentation when explaining hadiths relating to women's leadership in the public sphere. Consequently, this study seeks to answer two main questions: how do scholars' interpretations of hadiths concerning women's leadership differ over time, and how does Islam conceptually view women's participation in the public sphere? A comparative approach is employed, examining hadith commentaries by scholars across different eras. The research findings reveal differing perspectives that place restrictions on women's leadership, albeit with variations in argumentation and distinct historical contexts between the classical and contemporary periods. Classical scholars tended to restrict women's participation, with the exception of matters of the highest leadership. Conversely, contemporary scholars demonstrate a more inclusive tendency by not imposing rigid restrictions on women's leadership, provided it remains within the framework of Sharia values.

Keywords: Interpretation of hadith; the role of women in public life; classical and contemporary commentaries.

1. Introduction

Hadith is the primary source of law and morality in Islam, containing not only theological teachings but also ethical guidance for the social life of the Muslim community. It contains a number of narrations that touch upon women's involvement in the public sphere, such as leadership and social participation. However, interpretations of these hadiths vary. Each generation of scholars interprets the text of the hadith in accordance with the surrounding social, political and cultural context (Wasman et al., 2023). Consequently, the understanding of leadership—including women's leadership—cannot be viewed as a literal meaning but rather as the result of a dynamic ijtihadic construction, which remains open to reinterpretation in line with changes in historical context and developments in Islamic thought (Al Ghazali, 2001)

There are several studies discussing women in the public sphere, including a study by Ahmad Nur Fauzi, Siti Nurul Aini Latifah and Nasrulloh Nasrulloh entitled 'Women as Leaders in the Public Sphere' (A Review of Muhammad Syuhudi Ismail's Methodology for Understanding Hadith Textually and Contextually), which examines the hadith on women as leaders through the textual and contextual principles of Muhammad Syuhudi Ismail. The difference between this and my own work is that my research discusses the exegesis of the hadith on women in the public sphere across different historical periods (Fauzi et al., 2023). Furthermore, the research by Erly Sulistiyawati¹ and Akhmad Zaki Yamani, entitled 'Women's Leadership in the Public Sphere: A Critical Analysis from the Perspectives of Fiqh al-Siyasah and Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah', focuses on the concept of women's leadership in public office based on the principles of fiqh al-siyasah and maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, in order to address the challenges of gender equality within the framework of contemporary constitutional law (Sulistiyawati & Yamani, 2025).

This differs from the research I am about to present, which focuses on the interpretations of scholars across different eras in explaining the hadiths concerning women's leadership. Furthermore, the research by Nur Ikhlas, entitled 'Reinterpretation of Hadiths on Women in the Public Sphere from a Socialist Feminist Perspective', focuses on comparing the hadith prohibiting travel without a mahram with those suggesting that it is permissible for women to travel without a mahram. It then offers a new interpretation based on a compromise between these seemingly 'contradictory' hadiths, analysed through a feminist lens, with the aim of fostering a new understanding so that religious texts—particularly hadiths concerning travelling without a mahram—do not appear to restrict women (Ikhlas & Hifni, 2022). My research, meanwhile, focuses on comparing classical and contemporary hadith commentaries to understand the differences between them.

From the existing body of research, it is evident that studies on women in the public sphere have been conducted using various methodological approaches and academic perspectives; however, there remains scope for research that has not yet been explored in depth. The research by Ahmad Nur Fauzi et al. highlights hadiths concerning women as leaders using Syuhudi Ismail's textual and contextual approach, whilst Erly Sulistiyawati and Akhmad Zaki Yamani examine the issue of women's leadership from the perspectives of fiqh al-siyasah and maqāṣid al-sharī'ah. Meanwhile, Nur Ikhlas proposes a reinterpretation of the hadith concerning women travelling without a mahram using a socialist feminist approach. These three studies place greater emphasis on normative or contextual analysis of specific hadiths, rather than on the development of scholars' interpretations across different eras. Among the studies mentioned above, there is as yet no systematic examination tracing the evolution of understanding among classical to contemporary scholars in their exegesis of hadiths concerning women's roles in the public sphere.

Against this background. This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of how classical to contemporary scholars have interpreted hadiths concerning women's public roles, by examining how social contexts shape differences in interpretative patterns. Furthermore,

this study seeks to identify shifts in interpretative paradigms and to formulate a conceptual framework that explains the dynamics of the construction of meaning regarding women's leadership within the hadith tradition.

2. Methods

This study employs a descriptive-analytical qualitative research design based on *library research*. The choice of this method is based on the study's focus, which centres on textual and contextual analysis of 17 hadith commentaries written by scholars from the classical to the contemporary era. The analysis in this study is supported by a historical approach. This approach is used to trace the historical context of the writings.

The research subjects encompass hadith commentary works from various periods:

1. Classical/Salaf scholars, such as *Ma'ālim al-Sunan* by Al-Khattabi (d. 388 AH), *Syarh Sahih al-Bukhari* by Ibn Bathal (d. 449 AH), *al-Muntaqa Sharh al-Muwaththa* by Abu Walid al-Baji' (d. 474 AH), *Ikmal al-Mu'lim* by I'yadh al-Qadhi (d. 544 AH), *Tuhfat al-Muhtaj* by Ibn al-Mulqin (d. 804 AH), *al-Tamhid* by al-Birmawi (d. 831 AH), and *Fath al-Bari* by Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (d. 852 AH).
2. Works by scholars of the late or early modern period, such as *Fayd al-Qadir* by Abdur Rouf al-Manawi (d. 1031 AH), *Subul al-Salam* by al-Şan'ānī (d. 1182 AH), *Nayl al-Awṭhar* by al-Syaukani (d. 1250 AH), as well as works by modernist figures such as *Tafsir al-Manar* by Rasyid Ridha (1935 CE)
3. Contemporary scholars, such as *al-Tafsir al-Wadih* by Musa Syahin (1430 H), and works by contemporary thinkers *Nawwal bintu Abdul Aziz* (2011) and *Yusuf al-Qaradhawi*

The data collection method involved a literature review, comprising reading, note-taking and selecting relevant information from commentaries on hadith and supporting research. The data were classified according to the period of the scholars (classical, early modern and contemporary) and the focus of their interpretations of hadiths concerning women in the public sphere, such as hadiths on leadership, testimony and women's social roles.

The data analysis methods employed were comparative analysis and content analysis. Comparative analysis was used to compare interpretative patterns across different periods of scholars, whilst content analysis was used to identify themes, methods of interpretation (textual or contextual), and ideological or social trends influencing hadith commentaries. The results of the analysis were then synthesised to identify patterns of development, shifts in meaning, and methodological consistency amongst the scholars.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The results of the textual and contextual analysis of hadith commentaries reveal an evolution that is divided into shifts across different periods of Islamic scholarship. Through

historical and normative approaches, the interpretations of scholars of the Salaf era, such as al-Khaṭṭābī and Ibn Baṭṭāl, viewed women's participation in the public sphere through the framework of *sadd al-dzarī'ah* in order to maintain the moral stability and social structure of classical society. Interpretations during this era constructed gender relations in a protective and domestic manner, in which the protection of honour was the primary priority.

Entering the transitional era, scholars of the Khalaf period, such as al-Qaṣṭallānī and al-Mubārakfūrī, began to develop a more contextual reading. They expanded the interpretation of the texts by allowing space for women's social and humanitarian participation in the fields of health and education, provided that this remained within the ethical boundaries of Sharia and did not involve holding the highest positions of political leadership. This interpretative framework subsequently reached a transformative juncture in the contemporary era through the thought of Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī, who deconstructed traditional interpretations by reaffirming women's status as fully *accountable individuals* (*musāwāh fī al-taklīf*). Social and political engagement, including the right to vote and to stand for election, is regarded as a religious trust and a manifestation of the duty to *enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil* (*amar makruf nahi munkar*).

This paradigm shift in exegesis is linked to the dynamics of modern Muslim society. The active participation of women, who now play a wide-ranging role as educators, medical professionals, academics, politicians and leaders of social institutions, demonstrates that public engagement and religious identity are no longer viewed as contradictory, but rather as an adaptive articulation of Islamic values in line with the changing times.

3.2. Discussion

Salaf scholars in explaining hadiths concerning women in the public sphere

Al-Khottobi (d. 388 AH), in his work *Ma'ālim al-Sunan*, is among the Salaf scholars who interpreted hadiths concerning women using a normative approach that emphasises social prudence and gender-based role division. He argued that women are permitted to participate in scholarly and educational activities, particularly as teachers to other women, provided they adhere to the boundaries of sharia-compliant interaction. However, in matters of political leadership and the management of public affairs involving men, al-Khottobi prohibited women from holding such positions. This argument is based on the assumption that public leadership demands physical strength, courage and the ability to make decisions under difficult circumstances—attributes which al-Khottobi considered to be more prevalent in men. His views reflect the mindset of Islamic society (Al-Khaṭṭābī, n.d.).

Meanwhile, Ibn Bathal (449 H) in his *Syarah Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* presents a distinctive view amongst the Salaf scholars: he does not categorically reject the presence of women in the public sphere, but limits their role to social and humanitarian fields that do not give rise to fitnah. In his explanation, Ibn Bathal maintains that women who are safe from potential harassment and fitnah are permitted to participate in social service activities, such as providing medical assistance, fetching water, and aiding troops on the battlefield. This involvement is considered legitimate because it is of an emergency nature and is oriented towards the common good of the community, rather than a quest for power. However, in the

realms of political leadership and the judiciary, Ibn Bathal rejects women's involvement, on the grounds that these positions demand decisiveness and the ability to deal with conflict—qualities which, in his view, are more suited to men. This view reflects a strong social interpretative framework: it is grounded not only in the text of the hadith but also in the socio-cultural reality of his society, which still regarded women as a group in need of care and protection (Baṭṭāl, n.d.).

Abu al-Walid al-Bāji' in *al-Muntaqā Syarḥ al-Muwatta'* also explains the position of women in the public sphere through a strict legal approach grounded in historical precedent. He argues that women are not permitted to hold positions of public leadership, whether in the political or judicial spheres, as there are no historical examples from the time of the Prophet and his companions to suggest that women ever held such high-ranking positions. Furthermore, al-Bāji' also restricted women's testimony to specific matters, such as property disputes and minor *diyah* cases, whilst in more serious matters their testimony was deemed insufficiently weighty. This view is rooted in the assumption that the social structure and the burden of public responsibility are more heavily borne by men, who, in his view, possess greater rational capacity and courage to withstand social pressure (Sulaymān, n.d.).

Qadhi 'Iyādh, in *Ikmāl al-Mu'allim*, presents a somewhat more balanced and nuanced perspective than some other early scholars when explaining women's involvement in the public sphere. He does not simply restrict women's scope of action, but rather emphasises the importance of moral context and intention in every form of social participation. In his interpretation of the hadiths describing women assisting men on the battlefield—such as tending to the wounded, providing drinking water, and attending to logistical needs—Qadhi 'Iyādh regards these actions as part of *khidmah insāniyyah* (humanitarian service), which is considered an act of worship provided they are carried out by righteous women and under conditions that preserve their dignity. He also noted that a woman's testimony is admissible if accompanied by *piety* and prudence, demonstrating his confidence in women's moral capacity and accountability in specific cases ('Iyādh, n.d.).

Ibn al-Mulqin, in *Taudhīḥ Sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, adopts a relatively moderate stance within the tradition of the Salaf scholars regarding women's involvement in the public sphere. He does not categorically reject women's roles in the social and political spheres, but he does set clear limits, stipulating that women must not hold the highest offices, such as head of state (*imāmah kubrā*) or judicial office (*qadhā*). In his view, women are permitted to be active in public life provided they do not violate Sharia norms or cause *fitnah*; indeed, they may play a role in administrative, social or public welfare matters. This stance reflects a shift from the classical, rather exclusive view towards a more functional and realistic approach. Ibn al-Mulqin appears to have interpreted the hadiths concerning women not merely textually, but also by taking into account the dimensions of public interest and the evolving social needs of his society. He recognised that women possess moral and intellectual capacities that can be utilised to support public life, albeit not in the highest positions of authority (al-Mulqin, n.d.).

Syamsuddin al-Birmawī, in *al-Lāmi' aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ bi-Syarḥ al-Jāmi' aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ*, continued the conservative tradition of the Salaf scholars who restricted women's roles in public affairs, particularly in the fields of leadership and the judiciary. He asserts that women are not suited to hold the highest leadership posts or judicial positions because such roles require intensive

engagement with the public sphere and extensive interaction with men, which, in his view, has the potential to cause fitnah and violate the principles of Islamic modesty. For al-Birmawī, the task of public leadership is not merely an administrative matter, but a major responsibility that demands rationality, courage and decisiveness—attributes traditionally associated with men. This view is consistent with the social framework of 9th-century Hijri Islamic society, which still regarded women as guardians of domestic morality, rather than as managers of political or legal affairs (al-Birmāwī, n.d.).

From the intellectual dynamics of the Salaf scholars, as represented by Al-Khattabi, Ibn Battal, Abu al-Walid al-Baji, Qadi Iyad, Ibn al-Mulqin, and Syamsuddin al-Birmawī, a general tendency can be observed to restrict women's involvement in the public sphere, particularly in the fields of political leadership (*imāmah kubrā*) and the judiciary (*qaḍā'*). These restrictions include a prohibition on holding the highest positions of authority, limitations on giving testimony in certain cases, and the assertion that public spaces involving extensive interaction with men have the potential to cause fitnah and therefore need to be restricted. The arguments employed generally draw upon a normative-textual approach, historical precedents, and social assumptions regarding differences in capacity and roles between men and women.

Scholars of the Khalaf / Late Classical period (from the medieval to the modern era) in explaining the hadiths concerning women in the public sphere

There are six classical scholars who discuss the role of women in the public sphere, including the following: Shihab al-Din al-Qastallani, in *Irsyad al-Sari li-Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, adopts a view that remains rooted in the Salafist framework of thought, but with a more contextual explanation. He emphasises that women have a social sphere recognised by Islamic law, particularly in humanitarian fields such as medical care, education and social welfare, as exemplified by the female Companions during the time of the Prophet. However, he continues to exclude women from the highest leadership positions, such as head of state or judge, as these roles require involvement in broad public affairs and decision-making that has implications for the community as a whole. In his view, this prohibition is not a form of discrimination, but rather an effort to preserve a social structure in harmony with the principle of *qiwāmah* (male leadership in public responsibility). Nevertheless, al-Qaṣṭallānī does not rule out the possibility of women playing a role in specific cases where their presence is required, particularly when this serves the public good. His views reflect a transitional phase within the Islamic tradition: from a highly normative interpretation towards a form of social exegesis that takes into account the conditions of society (Al-Qastalani, n.d.).

Abdur Rauf al-Manāwī, in *Fayḍ al-Qadīr*, presents a view that remains heavily influenced by the classical Salafist mindset, despite living in the Khalaf period (11th century AH). He asserts that it is not permissible for women to hold the highest leadership position in the affairs of the Muslim community, on the grounds that women are 'aurat' who must be shielded from public scrutiny. This view reflects a symbolic and moralistic interpretation: al-Manāwī is not merely speaking of women's capabilities, but of the principles of honour and protection that form the foundational values of the classical Islamic social system. By referring to women as 'aurat', he interprets leadership not merely as an administrative responsibility,

but also as a position demanding public presence and social exposure, which is deemed to have the potential to violate women's honour. Although it may appear harsh, al-Manāwī's argument is in fact rooted in an effort to maintain a stable social structure and uphold the values of Islamic modesty within the context of a patriarchal society. He does not entirely reject women's participation in social affairs, but limits this sphere to activities that do not require direct involvement in leadership or widespread public appearances (al-Qāhirī, 2001).

Al-Ṣan'ānī, in *at-Tanwīr Sharḥ al-Jāmi' aṣ-Ṣaghīr*, reaffirms a view still deeply rooted in classical tradition, namely that women are not suited to hold positions of general leadership over the community, such as head of state or supreme leader (*al-imāmah al-'uẓmā*). In his view, leadership demands the courage to appear before the public, the ability to speak in public forums, and firmness in leading men—all of which, according to al-Ṣan'ānī, run counter to women's natural disposition and social status as prescribed by Islamic law. He proceeds from the normative view that women have boundaries of honour that must be upheld, so that excessive exposure in public affairs is deemed incompatible with the modesty and self-protection that characterise their dignity (Al-Ḥasanī, n.d.).

In *Nayl al-Awṭār*, al-Sukānī sets out a view that tends to uphold the hardline stance of classical scholars regarding women's involvement in the public sphere, particularly in matters of leadership and the judiciary. He asserts that the realm of public leadership is the preserve of men, as men possess greater rational capacity, decisiveness and the ability to engage in ijtihad than women. According to al-Sukānī, positions such as that of a judge (*qāḍī*) require critical thinking, mental fortitude, and direct interaction with other men in forums for debate and dispute resolution—a space in which it is socially inappropriate for women to be present. Nevertheless, al-Sukānī still allows limited scope for women to participate in public affairs where there is an urgent need, for example in emergency situations such as war or humanitarian disasters. This view reveals two layers of argumentation: firstly, the normative aspect that restricts women's roles in order to preserve propriety and honour; secondly, the pragmatic aspect that acknowledges the flexibility of Islamic law in emergency situations (Ash-Shawkānī, n.d.).

Aḥmad 'Alī al-Sahāranfūrī, a 13th-century AH hadith scholar from India, in *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* expressed a relatively more open view compared to some earlier classical scholars. He permitted women to serve as qāḍī (judges) in certain cases, particularly those relating to property and muamalah, where women's testimony is recognised as valid under Islamic law. This view marks a shift in the tradition of Islamic thought, from a total rejection of women's judicial leadership towards limited recognition based on the type of case and the validity of testimony. Al-Sahāranfūrī does not interpret the prohibition on women's leadership in absolute terms, but rather views it within a functional framework: certain positions or responsibilities may be held by women provided they do not conflict with the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah (the objectives of Islamic law) and the public interest (As-Sahāranfūrī, n.d.).

In *Tuhfat al-Aḥwadhī*, Al-Mubārakfūrī presents a moderate view on the role of women in the public sphere, demonstrating a balance between respect for the texts of the hadith and an

understanding of social realities. He emphasises that general leadership roles for women are indeed restricted, particularly in the highest offices concerning the affairs of the ummah as a whole, such as the caliphate or the head of state, as understood from the hadith of Abu Bakrah. However, al-Mubārakfūrī also explains that some classical scholars did not prohibit women from participating in certain fields, such as education, social work or administration, provided that this did not contravene the principles of Sharia and that they maintained their dignity (Al-Mubārakfūrī, n.d.).

Given the overall views of these later classical scholars (khalaf), it is inaccurate to conclude that there is 'inconsistency' in the sense of normative contradiction; rather, it represents a spectrum of interpretation within the same epistemological framework. These differences can be traced through three main aspects, namely: (1) restrictions on political leadership (imāmah kubrā), (2) involvement in judicial office (qaḍā'), and (3) the level of participation in social and public activities.

Within the first spectrum, scholars such as Shihab al-Din al-Qastallani, Abd al-Rauf al-Manawi, Muhammad al-Sanani, and Muhammad al-Shawkani tend to maintain a restrictive stance by rejecting women's political leadership in general. The term 'strict' in this context refers to the rejection of women in positions of authority involving large-scale public decision-making, with arguments grounded in normative considerations (hadith texts), patriarchal social structures, and assumptions regarding gender-based differences in capacity.

However, in the second and third aspects, a shift towards a more moderate and functional position begins to emerge. This is evident in the views of Ahmad Ali al-Saharanfuri, who permits women to serve as judges in certain cases, particularly those relating to muamalah, on the basis of the validity of women's testimony in that field. Similarly, Muhammad al-Mubarakfuri opens up opportunities for women's participation in the fields of education, social affairs and administration, provided this does not contravene the principles of Sharia.

Thus, the term 'moderate' in this context refers to an approach that no longer interprets hadith prohibitions absolutely, but interprets them contextually and functionally based on the type of role and level of authority. Meanwhile, 'strict' refers to a literal reading that maintains restrictions on almost all forms of women's public leadership.

This analysis indicates that the thought of the later scholars is in a transitional phase: on the one hand, it still upholds the classical normative framework; on the other, it is beginning to allow limited scope for reinterpretation based on considerations of public interest and social change.

Contemporary Scholars in Explaining Hadiths on Women in the Public Sphere

The thought of contemporary scholars reveals a significant shift in the understanding of hadiths concerning women's public roles, with a tendency towards a contextual approach grounded in maqāṣid al-syarī'ah. Abd al-Halim Abu Shuqqah (1995), in *Taḥrīr al-Mar'ah fī 'Aṣr al-Risālah*, employs a historical-descriptive approach by compiling hadith narrations that demonstrate women's active involvement during the time of the Prophet. He concluded that

successful leadership is not determined by gender, but rather by an individual's competence and capacity (Abu Shuqqah, 1990).

Muhammad Imarah (d. 2020), in *al-Taḥrīr al-Islāmī li al-Mar'ah*, emphasises that Islam, from the time of the Prophet, has provided women with opportunities for political participation. He refers to the roles of female figures such as Ummu Salamah during the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, which demonstrate women's strategic contributions to political decision-making. For Imarah, women's involvement in consultation (shura) constitutes historical evidence that women are active participants within the socio-political structure of Islam (al-Mar'ah, 1968).

In *Min Fiqh al-Dawlah fi al-Islām*, Yusuf al-Qaradawi (2022) develops a normative argument that women, as legally accountable individuals (mukallaf), have rights and obligations equal to those of men in public life. He explicitly permits women to participate in modern legislative bodies, such as parliaments, both as voters and as elected representatives, on the basis of the principle of collective responsibility in enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil (al-Qaradawi, 1997).

Fadhl Murad, in *al-Muqaddimah fi Fiqh al-'Aṣr*, emphasises that women are not confined solely to the domestic sphere, but also have the legitimacy to play a role in modern politics, including in parliament, public leadership, and even the leadership structures of political parties. His approach demonstrates an integration of classical fiqh and contemporary political realities (Fadhl Murad, 2014).

Muhammad Mahmud al-Jarhi, in *al-Mar'ah wa Ri'āsat al-Dawlah bayna al-Fiqh al-Islāmī wa al-Wāqī' al-Mu'āṣir: Ru'yah Fiqhiyyah Wāqī'iyah Mu'āṣirah* argues that women's leadership, including as head of state, is fundamentally permissible in Islam. He emphasises that this issue does not fall within the realm of religious normative prohibitions, but rather is subject to the principles of consultation and the public interest, thereby opening the door to full legitimacy for women in the highest political offices (al-Jarhi, 2021).

From the thinking of these contemporary scholars, a rather marked epistemological shift is evident when compared to classical scholars and their successors. Whereas in earlier periods the discourse was dominated by a normative-restrictive approach emphasising the limitations on women's roles, the contemporary period has seen a transformation towards a contextual-functional approach.

The main indicators of this shift can be seen in three areas. Firstly, the expansion of women's legitimacy in the political sphere, including within legislative bodies and even in state leadership. Secondly, a shift in the basis of argumentation from normative texts alone towards an integration of legal principles, early Islamic history, and modern social realities. Thirdly, the emphasis on the principles of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah—such as justice, the public interest, and equality of responsibility—as the foundation for determining the law.

Islam and the Role of Women in the Public Sphere in the Modern Era

Women's participation in the public sphere in the contemporary era shows a significant upward trend, as reflected in various cross-sectoral academic studies. In the political sphere,

women's representation in parliaments worldwide has seen a gradual increase, although it has not yet reached parity. A study in *Electoral Studies* indicates that this increase is heavily influenced by affirmative action policies such as gender quotas and more inclusive electoral systems (Krook, 2010). Nevertheless, women's representation still faces structural barriers, including institutional bias and deeply entrenched patriarchal norms.

In the context of government leadership, women are beginning to fill executive positions, including as heads of state and ministers, although their numbers remain limited. Research in *the European Journal of Political Research* confirms that women's access to executive office is largely determined by the dynamics of political parties, national political culture, and institutional policy support. This suggests that increased representation of women depends not only on individual capacity but also on the political structures that enable such participation (Thames & Williams, 2013).

In the field of education, women have made more progressive strides. A study in *World Development* reveals that the rate of women's participation in higher education globally has surpassed that of men, particularly in developing countries. This increase contributes to the transformation of women's social roles, as access to education is directly correlated with enhanced economic capacity and political participation (King & Winthrop, 2015).

Meanwhile, in the economic sector, women's participation continues to rise, although gender disparities remain evident. Research in *World Development* and *Feminist Economics* indicates that women tend to be concentrated in the informal sector and face barriers to accessing economic resources, including credit and asset ownership (Kabeer, 2012). This underscores that increased participation is not always accompanied by equality in the distribution of economic power.

Furthermore, women's involvement in social and religious organisations is also a key indicator of public participation. A study in *the Journal of Civil Society* shows that women play a significant role in social movements, particularly in the fields of education, health and community advocacy (Jad, 1970). This participation demonstrates that women are not merely the objects of policy, but also active agents in social transformation. Overall, these developments indicate that women's participation in the public sphere has expanded significantly, although structural equality has not yet been fully achieved.

Within this framework, the thinking of contemporary figures provides diverse theoretical justifications; for instance, Muhammad Husein argues that an understanding of religious texts cannot be separated from the context of the times. With regard to women's leadership, contemporary reality shows that many women have successfully assumed leadership positions and are able to carry out their duties effectively. This indicates that leadership success is not determined by gender alone, but rather by individual competence (Muhammad, 2021).

Meanwhile, Amina Wadud argues that there is no subjective difference in value between men and women in the Qur'an. Both hold an equal standing as human beings accountable before Allah. Therefore, there is no indication that women inherently face greater

limitations than men (Zahra, 2024).

Furthermore, Fatima Mernissi shifts the analysis to the sociological realm by demonstrating that gender inequality in Muslim societies is largely caused by patriarchal social constructs rather than the teachings of Islam itself. This approach is significant as it reveals that restrictions on women are not inherent in the text, but rather the result of gender-biased historical interpretations (Taufik, 2022).

Yusuf al-Qardhawi also explains that an Islamic state is not an absolute theocracy, but rather a civil (*madani*) state founded on the principles of popular choice, the oath of allegiance (*bai'at*), and consultation (*musyawarah*). Power within this system is limited and accountable, as it is bound by Sharia and open to public scrutiny through the mechanism of 'enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil' (*amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*). Thus, the legitimacy of leadership does not rest on factors of lineage or gender, but rather on social consensus, public responsibility, and the ability to realise the public good (al-Qardhawi, 1997).

The findings of this study indicate that the expanding role of women in the public sphere is the result of an interplay between hadith texts, the interpretations of scholars, and the changing times. The shift in perspective—from one that was formerly restrictive and protective to one that supports women's participation—demonstrates that Islamic law is dynamic and not rigid. This process of intellectual evolution occurs through a systematic process of *ijtihad* (Kholishudin & Ilmi, 2023). Firstly, understanding the linguistic meaning of the words in the hadith text. Secondly, scholars seek the underlying rationale (*'illat*) behind the emergence of the ruling (Yahya et al., 2025). It is this search for the rationale (*'illat*) that is key to understanding the primary objectives of Sharia (*maqāṣid*), namely to bring about good and the public interest for society. Thirdly, scholars examine the actual circumstances on the ground (*taḥqīq al-manāt*) to ascertain whether contemporary conditions align with the rationale behind the law (Kholishudin & Ilmi, 2023). Through this stage of *ijtihad*, the understanding of the hadith is no longer perceived as rigid, but rather becomes flexible and in line with the needs of the times. Therefore, women's leadership and participation in the public sphere are no longer regarded as a violation of religious principles, but rather as a matter of *ijtihad* assessed on the basis of the principles of justice, individual capability, and the common good (Anggraini et al., 2024).

Tabel 1. Typology of Interpretations of Women's Leadership in Islam: Salaf, Khalaf, and Contemporary Perspectives

Period	Characteristics of Interpretation	Basis of Argument
Salaf	Emphasising restrictions on women's participation in public life (<i>imāmah kubrā</i> and <i>qaḍā'</i>) on the grounds of safeguarding morality (<i>sadd al-dzari'ah</i>). Viewing women's public involvement as limited to functional and emergency roles (<i>khidmah insāniyyah</i>), such as in healthcare, education for other women, and aid on the battlefield.	the absence of precedents for women's political leadership in early Islam, as well as patriarchal socio-cultural assumptions regarding differences in physical capacity, rationality, and decisiveness between men and women.

Khalaf	Divided into two spectrums: maintaining the rejection of top-level leadership by constructing women as a public ' <i>aurat</i> ' (al-Manāwī & al-Ṣan'ānī), whilst beginning to open up limited judicial/muamalah leadership roles (al-Sahāranfūrī) as well as administrative and social roles (al-Mubārakfūrī).	Combines the preservation of the classical normative framework (<i>qiwāmah</i>) with considerations of social <i>welfare</i> and the flexibility of Islamic law. Begins to distinguish between the realm of absolute prohibition (head of state) and functional roles based on the validity of testimony.
Contemporary	Reconstructing the interpretation of hadith by re-evaluating political and legislative (parliamentary) leadership, right up to the head of state, as areas <i>subject to ijtihad</i> . Positioning women's public engagement not as a deviation, but as a form of participation <i>in enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil (amar makruf nahi munkar)</i> .	Rooted in the principle of equality of religious obligations (<i>musāwah fi al-taklīf</i>), the exploration of historical accounts of female Companions' political involvement, and the harmonisation of texts with modern socio-political realities based on <i>maqāṣid al-syarī'ah</i> (public interest, justice, and individual capacity).

The findings of this research reinforce the view that there is both continuity and transformation in the way scholars understand the role of women: from a protective paradigm emphasising moral guardianship towards a participatory paradigm emphasising social responsibility. This epistemological shift demonstrates that Islamic thought is dynamic, adaptive, and constantly engaged in dialogue with social change without losing its theological foundations. As stated by Mir-Hosseini and Wadud, the development of Islamic interpretations of gender is not a form of secularisation, but rather a manifestation of Islam's internal renewal that affirms its relevance in the modern world (Shanneik, 2024).

4. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the scholars' debate regarding women's leadership does not merely revolve around the dichotomy of 'permissible' and 'prohibited', but reflects epistemological dynamics within the Islamic tradition. An analysis of hadith commentaries from the Salaf period to the present day reveals a shift from a normative-protective approach towards a functional-contextual approach grounded in the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. The main contribution of this research lies in affirming that differences in scholars' views form part of a historical and contextual process of *ijtihad*; consequently, women's leadership is not a fixed matter but remains open to reinterpretation based on the principles of justice and the public good. However, this study is still limited to a textual analysis of hadith commentaries and has not yet integrated empirical data on a broad scale. Therefore, further research is required

using an interdisciplinary approach to strengthen the relevance of these findings within the context of modern Muslim societies.

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