



A Comparative Analysis of the Concept of Wilāyah in the Thoughts of Ayatullah Khamenei and Sayyid Qutb

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Abstract

Research Article

The concept of Wilāyat, recognized as one of the foundational principles in Islamic thought, has consistently garnered the attention of researchers. In this context, revisiting the perspectives of Sayyid Qutb and Ayatullah Khamenei on wilāyah, as two contemporary thinkers, holds particular significance.

This study employs a qualitative content analysis method with an inductive approach to identify overarching and basic themes, subsequently elaborating on the details within each overarching theme. The findings reveal that in Ayatullah Khamenei's thought, the concept of wilāyah revolves around "wilāyat al-faqīh" (guardianship of the Islamic Jurist), emphasizing the establishment of unity and cohesion within the Islamic Ummah, the formation of an Islamic government, and the struggle against global arrogance. Conversely, Sayyid Qutb perceives wilāyah as a means to achieve Muslim unity and confront modern ignorance, though he does not propose a specific operational framework for its realization. Moreover, differences in their approaches to issues such as jihad, Islamic sovereignty, and interactions with non-Muslims highlight Ayatullah Khamenei's more structured perspective in contrast to Sayyid Qutb's broader, more general viewpoint. This research underscores the importance of a comparative understanding of these two perspectives to enhance comprehension of contemporary Islamic movements.

Keywords: Ayatullah Khamenei, Sayyid Qutb, Ignorance, Wilāyah, anti-arrogance.

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Introduction

The concept of *wilāyah* within Islamic culture encompasses profound and multidimensional meanings, including guardianship, sovereignty, leadership, and trusteeship. It occupies a prominent position in the Holy Quran and Islamic narrations, regarded as one of the fundamental tenets of Islam. Throughout Islamic history, the explication and interpretation of *wilāyah*, particularly concerning the succession of the Prophet Muhammad (s), have evolved into one of the most critical theological and political discourses. ‘Allamah Ṭabāṭabā’ī, in *Al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, defines *wilāyah* as the right to manage and administer affairs, accompanied by closeness (Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1977, 13:317).

In the contemporary era, Muslim thinkers such as Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Khamenei and Sayyid Qutb have sought to analyze *wilāyah* from diverse doctrinal, social, and political dimensions. Ayatullah Khamenei, adopting an approach rooted in Quranic exegesis and emphasizing the unity of the Islamic Ummah, interprets *Wilāyah* as the bond among believers, asserting that Islamic society requires unity and cohesion. He categorizes *wilāyah* into two forms: the mutual *wilāyah* of believers over one another and the *wilāyah* of the “Waliullāh” (divinely appointed guardian). He critiques the reduction of the Imams’ *wilāyah* to mere affection, arguing that it constitutes a profound and spiritual connection between the Islamic Ummah and its leaders (Khamenei 2011, 407) .

In contrast, Sayyid Qutb, with a critical stance toward contemporary Islamic societies, presents *wilāyah* as a tool to combat modern ignorance and establish divine governance (Qutb 1981, 45). In his works, notably *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, he emphasizes that returning to Quranic principles and fostering a cohesive Islamic Ummah is the means to counter cultural and political threats.

Despite shared intellectual foundations, the approaches of these two thinkers in interpreting *wilāyah* have yielded divergent impacts on Islamic societies. Ayatullah Khamenei’s ideas are recognized as a paradigm for resistance movements and Islamic solidarity, whereas Sayyid Qutb’s

thoughts have, in some instances, led to extremist interpretations. The central question of this study is to explore the similarities and differences between these two perspectives and their effects on contemporary Islamic movements.

Numerous studies have examined various facets of Ayatullah Khamenei's and Sayyid Qutb's thoughts; however, a comprehensive comparative analysis remains largely uncharted. While some research has addressed their political and social positions, the linkage between *wilāyah* and political thought, particularly in shaping Islamic political systems, has rarely been investigated.

Given recent developments in the Islamic world and the confrontation with challenges such as fundamentalism, a comparative analysis of *wilāyah* in the thoughts of Ayatullah Khamenei and Sayyid Qutb can enhance understanding of its application in macro-level policymaking and political strategies in the modern era. This study aims to contribute to the rethinking of Islamic political and social theories and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these two approaches.

This article utilizes qualitative content analysis and a thematic approach to thoroughly examine the works of these thinkers. Thematic analysis serves as an effective tool for extracting key concepts from texts and presenting a systematic portrayal of perspectives (see, e.g., Creswell 2007, 89). In this research, overarching themes refer to patterns or topics encompassing multiple basic themes, considered general interpretations of the data and employed in the content analysis process to achieve a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the research subject.

To analyze Ayatullah Khamenei's views, his speeches from 1974 to 2024 (1353 to 1403 SH), written works, and Quranic exegeses were reviewed. Similarly, Sayyid Qutb's books, including *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* and *Ma'ālim fī al-Ṭarīq*, were examined as primary sources. Data were collected from identified analysis units, with the recording unit comprising sentences related to *wilāyah* extracted from these texts. The coding of phrases was inductive, and the classification and naming of themes were



based on sentences derived from the research texts' content. Subsequently, the final template of research themes was formulated.

1. The Concept of *Wilāyah* and Its Importance in Islamic Thought

The concept of *wilāyah* is one of the foundational principles in Islamic thought, examined from doctrinal, jurisprudential, and exegetical perspectives. Derived from the root “*walī*,” the term lexically denotes proximity and nearness, and in some contexts, it conveys meanings of affection, friendship, and assistance (Ibn Fāris 1984, 6:141; Ibn Manẓūr 1990, 15:411).

For the term “*mawlā*,” which shares the same root as “*walī*,” lexicographers have provided various meanings such as owner, servant, partner, and helper (Rāghib Iṣfahānī 1991, 885; Farāhīdī 1989, 8:365). Terminologically, *wilāyah* signifies guardianship and sovereignty in religious and social affairs, and it is elucidated in the Quranic verses and hadiths in various forms, such as “*wilāyah takwīnī*” (generative guardianship), “*wilāyah tashrīʿī*” (legislative guardianship), guardianship over the incapacitated, and guardianship over the Islamic community.

1.1. Dimensions of *Wilāyah*

In Shia thought, *wilāyah* is not merely a jurisprudential issue but a theological principle closely intertwined with Imamate. Conversely, most Sunni exegetes and theologians have interpreted *wilāyah* as affection and support, confining its scope to jurisprudential discussions (Jurjānī 1907, 8:360). This divergence is evident in the interpretation of Quranic verses. For instance, Ṭabarī in his exegesis and Rashīd Riḍā in *Tafsīr al-Manār* interpret *wilāyah* in verse 55 of *Sūrat al-Māʿidah* solely as support and assistance (Ṭabarī 2001, 6:343; Rashīd Riḍā 1905, 6:443).

From another perspective, “*wilāyah takwīnī*” expresses God’s absolute sovereignty over the universe and the causal relationship between the Creator and the creation. This form of *wilāyah* holds a special place in Islamic mysticism, interpreted as the human’s proximity to the Divine Essence (Ibn ‘Arabī 1997, 4:267). “*Wilāyah tashrīʿī*” denotes God’s right

to legislate laws and human authority to implement them, encompassing religious and social duties (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1996, 6:25). These two dimensions of *wilāyah* are repeatedly emphasized in the Holy Quran and the hadiths of the Infallibles (a). For example, the verse “Your guardian is only Allah, His messenger”³ (Quran 5:55) refers to the *wilāyah* of God, the Prophet (s), and those in authority (*Uli al-Amr*).

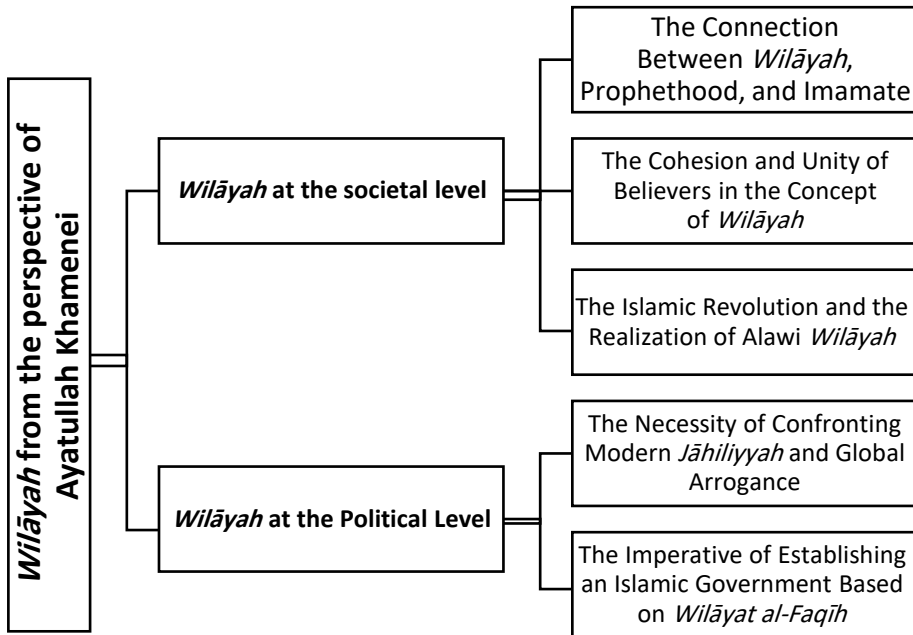
Many also emphasize that *wilāyah* is one of the main pillars of Islam, and without its acceptance, religious acts will be fruitless. For instance, in a hadith from Imam Baqir (a), it is stated: “Whoever worships Allah, the Majestic, the Glorious, with the expectation for reward, and works hard but without having an Imam for himself, his efforts will not find acceptance. Such person is lost and is straying and Allah dislikes his deeds”⁴ (Kulaynī 1987, 1:375). This issue is particularly elaborated in the Shia jurisprudential and social system, introducing the theory of “*wilāyah al-faqīh*”, which refers to the guardianship of a just jurist during the occultation of the infallible Imam (a) (Khomeini 1970, 26).

2. Elucidation of the Concept of *Wilāyah* from the Perspective of Ayatullah Khamenei

The concept of *wilāyah* in the thought of the Supreme Leader was examined, and the basic and overarching themes obtained are as follows:

³. « إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ » (المائدة/ ٥٥)

⁴. مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَحْيَى عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ الْحُسَيْنِ عَنْ صَفْوَانَ بْنِ يَحْيَى عَنِ الْعَلَاءِ بْنِ رَزِينٍ عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ مُسْلِمٍ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ أَبَا جَعْفَرٍ عليه السلام يَقُولُ: «كُلُّ مَنْ دَانَ اللَّهَ بَعَادَةَ يُجَاهِدُ فِيهَا نَفْسَهُ وَ لَا إِمَامَ لَهُ مِنَ اللَّهِ فَسَعْيُهُ غَيْرُ مَقْبُولٍ وَ هُوَ ضَالٌّ مُتَحَيِّرٌ وَ اللَّهُ شَانِيٌّ لِأَعْمَالِهِ...».



2.1. Elucidation of Overarching Themes

Ayatullah Khamenei has elucidated the significance of *wilayah* in Islamic society by drawing upon Quranic verses, hadiths, and rational arguments. In his thought, *wilayah* is not merely a jurisprudential principle but a foundational tenet of Islam, playing a pivotal role in fostering unity, cohesion, justice, and progress within the Islamic community. Through thematic analysis, *wilayah* in his perspective can be examined at two levels:

2.1.1. *Wilayah* at the Social Level

2.1.1.1. The Relationship of *Wilayah* with Prophethood and Imamate

Ayatullah Khamenei (2003) meticulously examines the lexical meaning of “*wali*,” tracing the root of *wilayah* to denote proximity and connection between two entities. He states: “The concept of *wilayah* carries a profound and intricate meaning. Fundamentally, *wilayah* denotes the closeness and connection between two entities. For instance, when two strands are tightly twisted together and cannot be easily separated, this is

referred to in Arabic as *wilāyah*. Thus, *wilāyah* signifies the bond, connection, and proximity of two things in a manner that is both intimate and unbreakable. All the meanings attributed to *wilāyah* in the Arabic language, such as love, guardianship, and other interpretations, totaling seven or eight meanings, derive from this foundational idea of closeness and connection between the two parties involved in *wilāyah*. For example, *wilāyah* can mean love because the lover and the beloved share a spiritual bond and connection, making their separation inconceivable” (Khamenei, Statements in a Meeting with State Officials, April 26, 1997, <https://khl.ink/f/2834>). This definition encompasses not only the lexical meaning but also the spiritual dimensions of *wilāyah*, including affection and guardianship, both interpreted based on the close and unbreakable bond between the guardian and the community.

In Ayatullah Khāmene’ī’s thought, *wilāyah* transcends sectarian approaches and is analyzed based on Quranic teachings. He endeavors to extricate the concept of *wilāyah* from historical disputes and address its Quranic meaning and purpose. As he articulates, *wilāyah* is one of the principles that fully defines the meaning of human worship; hadiths also refer to this connection. For instance, a hadith states that even extensive acts of worship without accepting the *wilāyah* of the guardian of God are fruitless (Khamenei 2011, 145).

He regards *wilāyah* as the continuation of the path of prophethood, stating that the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (s) aimed at the spiritual perfection of humanity and the attainment of noble character traits. This path is sustained through the establishment of an Islamic system and a society where God is at the helm. In such a society, laws, social relations, economics, and rights are defined based on divine principles (ibid).

2.1.1.2. Unity and Cohesion of Believers in the Concept of Wilāyat

A fundamental aspect of *wilāyah* in Ayatollah Khāmene’ī’s thought is the emphasis on unity and cohesion among believers. He considers this cohesion as the continuation of the Prophet Muhammad’s (s) role in



forming the Islamic Ummah, describing it as a strong, interconnected chain that no force can break. This solidarity requires robust discipline and a shared objective to preserve the front of truth against threats (Khamenei 2011, 142).

From his perspective, realizing Quranic *wilāyah* necessitates strengthening internal connections among Muslims and regulating external relations based on Islamic principles. Internally, the unity of believers is essential to prevent internal discord from weakening the front of truth. Externally, the Islamic Ummah must maintain its dignity and independence, avoiding the influences of foreign cultures. The verse “*O you who have faith! Do not take My enemy and your enemy for friends*”⁵ (*Quran, 60:1*) explicitly emphasizes preserving dignity and independence against enemies (Khamenei 2011, 413). Imam Khamenei views *wilāyah* as a factor preventing susceptibility to enemies, stating, “Only through strengthening internal bonds and standing independently against external threats can Islamic dignity be preserved.” This approach aids in maintaining Islamic dignity while preventing isolationism (ibid).

2.1.1.3. The Islamic Revolution and the Realization of ‘Alawī *Wilāyah*

The Islamic Revolution of Iran can be regarded as a turning point in the revival of the concept of *wilāyah*. This revolution adopted the path of Imam Ali’s (a) *wilāyah* and ‘Alawī governance as its primary framework, liberating the Iranian nation from the clutches of arrogant domination. Ayatullah Khamenei believes that if we are an Islamic Republic today and follow ‘Alawī governance, we must adhere to the characteristics of Imam Ali’s governance, which include complete adherence to God’s religion, insistence on establishing divine religion, justice, and God wariness (Imam Khamenei, Statements in a Meeting with the organizers of the National

⁵. «يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا عَدُوِّي وَعَدُوَّكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ» (الممتحنة/1)



Congress for the Commemoration of Tehran's 24,000 Martyrs, January 23, 2024, <https://B2n.ir/q46075>).

This path was not merely a political movement but an endeavor to restore the religious and cultural identity of society. Thinkers such as 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī in *Al-Mīzān* and Martyr Muṭahharī in *Nahj al-Balāghah and Leadership* have emphasized that *wilāyah* is the foundational principle for the continuity of Islamic society's life (Tabāṭabā'ī 1996, 6:201; Muṭahharī 2011, 132).

From the perspective of the Islamic Revolution, *wilāyah* is not an abstract concept but a socio-political framework for independence, progress, and resistance against the enemies of Islam. A unique aspect of Ayatullah Khamenei's perspective is his elucidation of Quranic *wilāyah* and, consequently, Shia *wilāyah*, without regard to the Shia-Sunni disagreement on the meaning of "walī." While some interpret "walī" as a guardian, others see it as a friend or ally. Ayatullah Khamenei employs logical and scholarly arguments to establish the authenticity of Shia *wilāyah* within the framework of Quranic *wilāyah*.

The general public's understanding of *wilāyah*, as one of the most important principles of Islam, includes accepting the leadership of the divine Imam and believing that the infallible Imams after the Prophet of Islam (s) have *wilāyah* over the people by God's decree. The political system of Islam and its governance methods are based on *wilāyah*, and the criterion for being a Muslim, after obedience to the Prophet of God (s), is acceptance of *wilāyah*.

For traversing the path of felicity, humanity has no choice but to follow and obey the commands of divine guides. Therefore, whenever Muslims have gathered around the axis of *wilāyah* and been its unquestioning followers, they have succeeded in achieving victory and happiness in this world and the hereafter.

In this regard, a Quranic verse states: "O you who have faith! Do not take My enemy and your enemy for friends, [secretly] offering them



*affection (for they have certainly defied whatever has come to you of the truth, expelling the Apostle and you, because you have faith in Allah, your Lord) if you have set out for jihad in My way and to seek My pleasure. You secretly nourish affection for them, while I know well whatever you hide and whatever you disclose, and whoever among you does that has certainly strayed from the right way”⁶ (Quran 60:1). This indicates the prohibition of alliance with opposing fronts. *Wilāyah* in Quranic terminology means the bond, alliance, and deep connection of a group of people who share a common thought and goal.*

The issue of *wilāyah* has three dimensions:

1. Preserving internal bonds among believers.
2. Severing any relationship with external opposing fronts.
3. Maintaining connection with the guardian and leaders.

Another Quranic verse states: “*Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down*”⁷ (Quran 5:55). Ultimately, the concept of *wilāyah* in a person means an increasing intellectual and practical dependence on the guardian and leader, ensuring that the individual remains on the correct and guided path.

2.1.2. *Wilāyah* at the Political Level

2.1.2.1. The Necessity of Combating Modern Ignorance and Global Arrogance

Assimilation into the culture of disbelief and arrogance has been a fundamental challenge for Islamic societies in the contemporary era, a

⁶ « يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا عَدُوِّي وَعَدُوَّكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ تُلْقُونَ إِلَيْهِم بِالْمَوَدَّةِ وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِمَا جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ الْحَقِّ يُخْرِجُونَ الرَّسُولَ وَإِيَّاكُمْ أَنْ تُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ رَبِّكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ حَرَجْتُمْ جِهَادًا فِي سَبِيلِي وَابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِي تُسِرُّونَ إِلَيْهِم بِالْمَوَدَّةِ وَأَنَا أَعْلَمُ بِمَا أَخْفَيْتُمْ وَمَا أَعْلَنْتُمْ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْهُ مِنْكُمْ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَبِيلَ السَّبِيلِ» (الممتحنة/١)

⁷ « إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ» (المائدة/٥٥)

trend that began during the Qajar era and peaked during the Pahlavi period. As Ayatullah Khamenei stated, the country, which was severely humiliated and backward during the Pahlavi and Qajar eras, embarked on a path of rapid progress; in the first step, it transformed the disgraceful tyrannical monarchy into a popular government and democracy (The “Second Phase of the Revolution” Statement addressed to the Iranian nation, February 11, 2019, <https://B2n.ir/a27996>).

According to Ayatullah Khamenei, in such circumstances, *wilāyah* was not merely a belief or an inner sentiment but a concept that needed to manifest in the social and political structure of society. The works of thinkers like Jalāl Āl-i Aḥmad in *Gharbzadigī* and ‘Alī Sharī‘atī in *Bāzgasht bi Khīshān* also analyze this cultural challenge and emphasize the necessity of reviving Islamic identity (Āl-i Aḥmad 1997, 45; Sharī‘atī 2007, 112). From the Quranic perspective, any acceptance of foreign dominance over Muslims is negated: “and Allah will never provide the faithless any way [to prevail] over the faithful”⁸ (Quran 4:141), clearly indicating the position of *wilāyah* as the axis of Muslim independence.

Ayatullah Khamenei refers to Western governance as “modern arrogant ignorance,” stating that this system of domination is crisis-prone and generates numerous crises. After World War I, the League of Nations was formed to prevent war and achieve peace and security, but wars continued, leading to World War II. After World War II, the victorious countries established the Security Council with the slogan of achieving international peace and security, but not only did peace and security not materialize, but more intense wars, various crimes, and numerous crises ensued (Imam Khamenei, Statements in a Meeting with Various Strata of People and Officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the Anniversary of ‘Eid al-Ghadīr, July 11, 1990, <https://khl.ink/f/2335>).

⁸. «وَلَنْ يَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ سَبِيلًا» (النساء/١٤١)



The crises of global management, insecurity, family, ethics, food, class disparities, and the war between the poor and the rich worldwide all stem from this modern ignorance. Modern ignorance not only produces crises but also creates them for its survival, advancing the mafia of wealth, power, lust, and crime. This system is also incapable of managing these crises. The solution and end to these crises lie in entrusting global management to righteous individuals based on justice and true peace, instead of atheism, distancing from God, and the dominance of the arrogant and oppressive system.

This management is what the Noble Prophet of Islam (s) promised to the people based on Islamic teachings. If global management is placed in the hands of righteous individuals based on true teachings such as Islamic democracy and the realization of justice, security, and peace, one can hope that human crises will end, and humanity will experience lasting security. The Holy Quran gives glad tidings that the world's structure, based on faith, righteous deeds, and the sovereignty of righteous people, can lead to this achievement, and the new Islamic civilization, based on faith, righteous deeds, the integration of science and technology, justice, and participation, can take shape under the management of the oppressed and barefoot (Imam Khamenei, Statements of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution on the Occasion of Mab'ath, March 1, 2022, <https://B2n.ir/b72083>).

2.1.2.2. The Necessity of Forming an Islamic Government under *Wilāyat al-Faqīh*

Those waiting for Imam Mahdi are discontent with the world's unfairness, where many innocent people suffer, are misled, or lack opportunities to worship God. Oppression and tyranny have always existed and continue today. Waiting for Imam Mahdi encourages us not to accept the current situation but to strive for an ideal life, which can only be achieved through his leadership and guidance. Waiting for the strong, powerful, and divine hand of Imam Mahdi means looking forward to the end of oppressive

powers with the assistance of humanity. This waiting embodies the hope for global justice, the promotion of monotheism, and the guidance of people towards the worship of God. It is essential for us to prepare ourselves for this moment. The establishment of the Islamic Republic has laid the groundwork for this important and historic movement. Every action taken to achieve justice in the world brings us one step closer to realizing this noble goal. This is the essence of waiting for Imam Mahdi (a) (Imam Khamenei, Leader's Speech on the Occasion of Imam Mahdi's Birth Anniversary, <https://B2n.ir/u34702>).

In Ayatullah Khamenei's thought, *wilāyah* is not only a religious principle but also the foundation for righteous global management. He believes that the structure of global management must be based on Islamic teachings, justice, and faith to resolve current crises and guide humanity toward lasting security (Imam Khamenei, Statements of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution on the Occasion of Mab'ath, March 1, 2022, <https://B2n.ir/b72083>). In this regard, the new Islamic civilization, relying on principles such as faith, righteous deeds, justice, and the proper use of science and technology, offers a practical model for global management (Mutahharī 2012, 153).

According to verse (55) of *Sūrat al-Mā'idah*,⁹ the sovereignty of the Islamic community must be in the hands of individuals who lead society with faith and righteous deeds. This system of *wilāyah* stands in opposition to tyrannical governments (*tāghūtī*), which, throughout Islamic history, particularly during the Umayyad and Abbasid eras, caused the deviation of society and the squandering of human potential (Imam Khamenei,

⁹ «إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاغِبُونَ» (المائدة/ ٥٥)

"Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down" (Quran 5:55)



Statements in a Meeting with State Officials, July 1, 1991, <https://khl.ink/f/2469>).

In Ayatullah Khamenei's thought, one of the fundamental dimensions of the concept of *wilāyah* is the necessity of maintaining a connection with the *walī*. For the realization of Qur'anic *wilāyah*, the existence of the *walī* is deemed essential. If an individual seeks to implement this form of *wilāyah* in an Islamic society, he must mobilize all internal forces to confront anti-Islamic powers externally. This requires the presence of a centralized point of power within the Islamic community, a point to which all forces are connected and from which they draw inspiration. The *walī*, as a vigilant and capable overseer, must have insight into the benefits and harms of society.

The Imam, as a leader appointed by God, can be identified by a specific name or sign. In this context, Imam Khomeini's statements regarding the jurist as the representative of the infallible Imam demonstrate that the principle of Quranic *wilāyah* is never emphasized without the existence of the Imam (Khamenei 2011, 446). *Wilāyah* in a person signifies an increasing intellectual and practical dependence on the *walī* of God. A society lacking *wilāyah*, even if it possesses potential talents and capabilities, may see these capabilities neutralized or wasted. In such conditions, human minds tend toward corruption and misguidance, and the grounds for oppression and tyranny are strengthened (ibid, 452).

Islam emphasizes that the reins of people's affairs should not fall into the hands of those who lead humanity to the abyss of Hell. History shows that societies in which virtuous individuals are unrecognized and the criteria for goodness are misunderstood fall into crisis. Power struggles and oppression narrow and invert the people's vision to the point where they perceive good as evil and evil as good (ibid, 463). Non-divine *wilāyah* is considered *ṭāghūt*. *Ṭāghūt* denotes rebellion against the natural and innate limits of human life. Those who distance humanity from growth and perfection are deemed *ṭāghūt*. Humans must pursue their own growth and

elevation, and any factor that inclines them toward laziness and complacency is an instance of *ṭāghūt* (ibid, 474).

In this contextual framework, Ayatollah Khamenei interprets migration (*hijrah*) as an escape from tyrannical systems and asserts that the guardianship of the jurist (*wilāyat al-faqīh*) represents a method of governance based on a religious system, offering a new path in contrast to Western approaches to state administration. Living under the *wilāyah* of *ṭāghūt* signifies a lack of free will. Tyrannical systems in Islamic history, such as the eras of Umayyad and Abbasid rule, ostensibly fostered numerous scientific and cultural movements, but these efforts were often in the service of *ṭāghūt* and to the detriment of the Islamic community and humanity (ibid, 492).

As those enamored with Western methods and considering Western values fundamental sought, in the early years, to govern Islamic society according to those same Western methods—if we had made or were to make the mistake of forgetting the Islamic criterion in matters of governance and societal management and moving toward prevalent worldly forms, the meaning of our Islamic society would be lost. This point is decisive (Imam Khamenei, Statements in a Meeting with State Officials, July 1, 1991, <https://khl.ink/f/2469>).

The most important link between spirituality and *wilāyah* is exemplified in the concept of accepting *wilāyah*: “Regarding the acceptance of *wilāyah*, there are two fundamental domains: one is the domain of the human soul, where a person can grant divine will authority over their soul and bring it under the *wilāyah* of Allah. This is the first and essential step, and without it, the second step will not be realized. The second aspect and stage is to bring the living environment under the *wilāyah* of Allah, meaning that society moves with divine *wilāyah*. No *wilāyah* of money, tribe, force, or erroneous traditions and customs should obstruct the *wilāyah* of Allah or challenge it... In the Islamic world, Amīr al-Mu’minīn [Imam Ali] (a) is beloved by all hearts, and everyone accepts



him, except for a few unhealthy individuals who are rare. Even in the non-Islamic world, those who know him love him. This is solely because he succeeded in establishing the guardianship and divine will over his own existence, his inner self first, and then over his living environment and the realm of governance, in the most complete manner” (Imam Khamenei, Statements in a Meeting with Government Officials, June 9, 1993, <https://khl.ink/f/2672>).

Wilāyah signifies divine governance in which there is no trace of self-centeredness, monarchy, or selfish authority. If such elements are present, it is not *wilāyah*. The distinction between divine governance and guarantees versus non-divine ones lies in the fact that divine guarantees are intrinsic. If someone holding a position lacks the necessary qualifications, the bond is inherently severed from them. This is a matter of great significance. The foundation of divine *wilāyah* is rooted in complete submission to the commands and prohibitions of the Lord, standing in direct contrast to material rulers and human governments (Imam Khamenei, Statements in a meeting with government officials, April 5, 1999, <https://khl.ink/f/2937>).

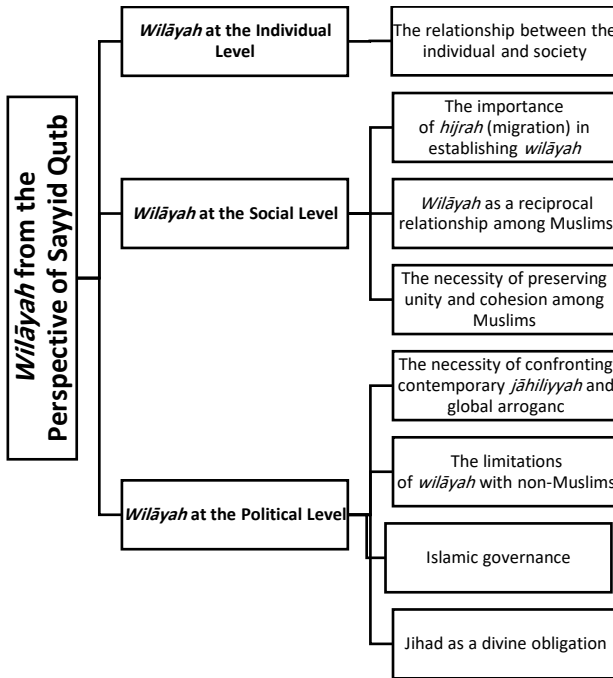
3. The Concept of *Wilāyah* from the Perspective of Sayyid Quṭb

Sayyid Quṭb (1906–1966), a contemporary Islamic writer, theorist, and thinker, is recognized as one of the most influential figures in shaping the political and religious thought of the Islamic world. By presenting a revolutionary Islamic ideology, he sought to introduce the fundamental principles of Islam as a solution to the social and political problems of the contemporary world. In his works, Sayyid Quṭb elucidated the position of Islam as a comprehensive system for life and emphasized the necessity of combating modern ignorance (Quṭb 1981, 45).

From his perspective, Islam is not merely a religion but an intellectual and practical system capable of guiding humanity toward justice and liberation from oppression. He stressed the importance of Muslim unity and the return to Quranic principles to create a new Islamic civilization

(Qutb 1964, 112). Sayyid Qutb’s ideas have inspired many Islamic movements in the twentieth century and have had a profound impact on the intellectual discourses of various Islamic currents.

The concept of *wilāyah* in Sayyid Qutb’s thought was examined, and the basic and overarching themes obtained are as follows:



3.1. Elucidation of Overarching Themes of *Wilāyah* in the Thought of Sayyid Qutb

3.1.1. *Wilāyah* at the Social Level

Sayyid Qutb’s ideas on the necessity of preserving Islamic unity and identity against external influences and inter-sectarian relations reflect his endeavor to redefine the Islamic community as an independent and resilient *ummah* in the face of external threats. He believed that Muslims must return to the authentic principles of Islam and avoid dependence on



foreign cultures to create a cohesive environment that safeguards their religious and social identity (Quṭb 1964, 112). Quṭb emphasized that modern ignorance and Western cultural domination pose a significant threat to the Islamic *Ummah*, which can only be countered through unity and adherence to Quranic teachings (Quṭb 1981, 67).

3.1.1.1. *Wilāyah* at the Social Level as a Reciprocal Relationship Among Muslims

Sayyid Quṭb stressed the primacy of divine friendship and *wilāyah* in all circumstances. In his view, if an individual prioritizes love for family, relatives, or children over faith in God, this act equates to a deviation from true faith and is incompatible with Islamic principles. He believed that believers, by relying on divine *wilāyah*, can withstand hardships. In contrast, disbelievers rely on the *wilāyah* of Satan and promote values that are subject to constant change and instability (Quṭb 1981, 146).

3.1.1.2. The Importance of the Concept of Migration (*Hijrah*) in Establishing *Wilāyah*

In his interpretation of the relationships between the Muslims of Medina and those who had not yet migrated to the Islamic territory, Sayyid Quṭb emphasizes a specific responsibility and relationship. He states that this responsibility only applies when individuals join the Islamic faith and become part of the Muslim community. This connection is expressed in the verse: “As for those who have believed but did not migrate, you have no heirdom in relation to them whatsoever until they migrate”¹⁰ (Quran 8:72) (Quṭb 1981, 465).

In particular, migration (*hijrah*), which is presented in the Quran as a condition for both general and specific *wilāyah*, means abandoning the land of polytheism and moving to the land of Islam. Sayyid Quṭb believes that Muslims who are capable of *hijrah* but refrain from doing so for personal interests are deprived of *wilāyah*. He stresses that upholding

¹⁰. ﴿وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلَمْ يُهَاجِرُوا مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ وَلَايَتِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ حَتَّى يُهَاجِرُوا﴾ (الانفال/ ٧٢)

covenants and interactions within the Islamic community is essential for preserving strategies and sustaining the Islamic movement (ibid).

3.1.2. *Wilāyah* at the Political Level

3.1.2.1. The Necessity of Combating Contemporary Ignorance (*Jāhiliyyah*) and Global Arrogance

Sayyid Quṭb divides societies into two types: “*Jāhiliṯ*” and “Islamic.” He believes that contemporary societies, especially in the West and even in Islamic countries, are afflicted with a more complex *Jāhiliyyah* than that of the pre-Islamic era. He attributes this *Jāhiliyyah* to the distancing from Islamic values and teachings and emphasizes that societal change must begin with inner transformation, leading to a collective movement to establish a society based on Islamic law (Quṭb 1981, 45).

He considers colonial powers as one of the primary causes of the decline of Islamic societies and identifies countries such as the United States, Britain, and France as powers that have sought to exploit Muslims and weaken the Islamic *ummah*. Consequently, he deems any contract or cooperation with these countries illegitimate (Quṭb 1964, 141). He also highlights the historical enmity of Jews towards Islam, asserting that Jewish actions, from promoting moral corruption to warmongering, have aimed at undermining the Islamic *ummah* (Quṭb 1975, 30).

3.1.2.2. The *Jāhiliyyah* of Non-Muslims According to Sayyid Quṭb

In his theories, Sayyid Quṭb analyzes contemporary *Jāhiliyyah* and compares it to pre-Islamic *Jāhiliyyah*. He argues that modern *Jāhiliyyah* is more dangerous due to its complexity and concealment in deviating from God. Quṭb defines *Jāhiliyyah* as “human servitude to humans,” meaning that people submit to human laws and norms instead of obeying God. He emphasizes that even if an individual acknowledges God but practically relies on secular systems, they are still following a form of *Jāhiliyyah* (Quṭb 1994, 31). From his perspective, an Islamic society must be entirely shaped by divine principles and laws, and no compromise with *Jāhiliyyah* is acceptable (ibid, 247).



3.1.2.3. *Jihād* as one of the Main Concepts of *Wilāyah*

Sayyid Qutb regards *jihad* as a fundamental tool for realizing an Islamic society and establishing governance. He believes that a true Muslim is one who engages in *Jihād* for the exaltation of Islam. This concept is prominently featured in his works, such as *Ma'ālim fī al-Ṭarīq*, with an emphasis on the importance of *Jihād* in confronting Zionism and disbelievers (Qutb 1964, pp. 60-62). He views *Jihād* as a combination of action and speech, asserting that the sword and the book must complement each other (ibid, 62).

He considers the People of the Book a serious threat to the Islamic world and points to their alliance with polytheists against Muslims. He regards this alliance, from the time of the Crusades to the occupation of Palestine, as a destructive factor for the Islamic *ummah* (Qutb 1981, pp. 466-467). Sayyid Qutb deems *Jihād* not only for defense but also as a necessary struggle to counter Western colonialism in lands such as Palestine and Algeria (Qutb 1964, 114). He also believes that friendship with the People of the Book is incompatible with Quranic teachings and historical experiences (Qutb 1981, 467).

3.1.2.4. Islamic Governance

Sayyid Qutb holds that all governances must rely on the will of God, with Allah recognized as the foundation of every governance. He believes that governance should be tangibly and realistically present in people's lives. However, in response to the fundamental question of who holds legitimate governance in the contemporary era, he does not provide a complete and specific framework, leading to a gap in his theory (Qutb 1964, 248). Sayyid Qutb does not specify a clear model for determining the leader and focuses more on the necessity of divine sovereignty and combating *Jāhiliyyah* (Qutb 1964, 141).

4. Comparative Analysis of the Concept of *Wilāyah* in the Thought of Ayatullah Khamenei and Sayyid Qutb

Ayatullah Khamenei explicates the concept of *wilāyah* within the framework of the theory of “*wilāyat al-faqīh*” (guardianship of the Islamic Jurist), according to which, during the occultation of Imam Mahdi (a), the leadership of the Islamic community should be entrusted to a fully qualified jurist. He views *wilāyah* as a combination of political, religious, and social leadership aimed at guiding Muslims within the framework of Islamic law. Sayyid Quṭb also emphasizes the importance of *wilāyah* as the solidarity of Muslims but interprets this concept more in a doctrinal and collective sense. Rather than focusing on individual leadership, he concentrates on the necessity of creating a unified Islamic society under divine law. However, differences are as follows:

Ayatullah Khamenei defines Islamic so within an institutionalized system based on a legal structure, with social justice, *wilāyat al-faqīh*, and popular participation as its pillars (see Khamenei 2011, 412). On the other hand, Sayyid Quṭb attributes sovereignty absolutely to God and deems the return to servitude and divine sovereignty essential but does not clarify the executive methods for realizing this idea (see Quṭb 1964, 247).

Both thinkers adopt a critical stance towards the West but pursue different approaches. Sayyid Quṭb regards the West as a source of corruption in Islamic societies and rejects any interaction with it. He divides the world into two realms: “*Dār al-Islām*” (the Abode of Islam) and “*Dār al-Kufr*” (the Abode of Disbelief), emphasizing the necessity of jihad to confront Western jāhiliyyah (ignorance) (see Quṭb 1981, 62). In contrast, Ayatullah Khamenei, while emphasizing resistance against global arrogance, advocates conditional interaction with the international system to preserve Islamic interests and expand Islamic discourse (Khamenei 2011, 412).

Ayatullah Khamenei stresses the use of political and social tools to realize *wilāyah* and highlights the role of the clergy in guiding the Islamic community. His theory of *wilāyat al-faqīh* is recognized as a means to confront global arrogance and establish Islamic governance. *Wilāyah*, in



his words, is a governance that, while possessing authority and the dignity, resolve, and decisive decision-making of a ruler, shows no signs of tyranny, selfishness, arbitrariness, or self-aggrandizement (see Imam Khamenei, Statements in a Meeting with Government Officials, April 5, 1999, <https://khl.ink/f/2937>).

Ayatullah Khamenei's thought has led to the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran and served as a model for Islamic resistance movements such as Hezbollah in Lebanon. In contrast, Sayyid Qutb's ideas have inspired movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and contributed to strengthening Islamic identity against colonialism, but in some instances, they have given rise to radical currents that have used his concepts to justify violence (see Qutb 1981, 467). Sayyid Qutb emphasizes *jihād* as the primary tool for realizing divine sovereignty. Although this approach has inspired revolutionary movements, it has in some cases led to extremism and violent interpretations (see Qutb 1964, 60).

In contrast to Sayyid Qutb who does not propose a specific theory about the legitimate government, Ayatullah Khamenei defines the concept of *wilāyah* within the framework of the theory of "*wilāyat al-faqīh*," wherein the leadership of the Islamic community during the occultation of the infallible Imam is entrusted to a fully qualified jurist. He considers *wilāyah* a combination of religious, political, and social leadership aimed at guiding Muslims within the framework of Islamic law. This theory, given its hierarchical structure, obliges the leader to meet comprehensive jurisprudential, scholarly, and ethical qualifications (see Khamenei 2011, 412).

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of the thoughts of Sayyid Qutb and Ayatullah Khamenei on *wilāyah* reveals that both thinkers view this concept as a tool to confront contemporary *Jāhiliyyah* and establish Islamic law. However, there are fundamental differences in their approaches and the social and political outcomes of their theories. Ayatullah Khamenei links the concept



of *wilāyah* with the theory of “*wilāyat al-faqīh*” (guardianship of the Islamic Jurist), providing a structured framework for Islamic governance, while Sayyid Quṭb emphasizes the general concepts of *wilāyah* and the struggle to return to divine values.

From a doctrinal perspective, Ayatullah Khamenei regards *wilāyah* as the continuation of prophethood and a means to guide the Islamic community, considering the role of the “*walī al-faqīh*” essential in this regard. Sayyid Quṭb sees *wilāyah* as a means to separate the Islamic community from modern *jāhiliyyah* and realize divine values but does not present a practical model for its implementation. This difference in perspective has also influenced the practical implications of these theories.

From a social and political standpoint, Ayatullah Khamenei’s theory of *wilāyat al-faqīh* emphasizes the cohesion and solidarity of the Islamic *ummah*, offering a sustainable model for governing Islamic society. In contrast, Sayyid Quṭb’s approach to *wilāyah*, with its focus on *jihād* and fight, has in some cases led to violence and division among Islamic groups. Ayatullah Khamenei’s thought has resulted in the creation of Islamic resistance movements such as Hezbollah and Hamas, while Sayyid Quṭb’s views have inspired revolutionary groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and some extremist currents.

The difference in their approaches to interaction with the international system is also a significant point of distinction. Ayatullah Khamenei accepts conditional interaction with the contemporary world to preserve Islamic interests, whereas Sayyid Quṭb completely rejects interaction with non-Islamic systems. This methodological disparity has led to differences in how Islamic goals are achieved and their impact on international relations.

Overall, the thoughts of these two thinkers demonstrate that the interpretation of *wilāyah* in Islam can follow different paths depending on social and historical conditions. Ayatullah Khamenei’s theory, by establishing an institutionalized and implementable governmental system,



has responded to modern challenges, while Sayyid Quṭb's ideas have been more oriented towards revolutionary mobilization and the revival of Islamic identity. A comparative examination of these perspectives indicates that leveraging the strengths of both theories can aid in designing comprehensive approaches to address the challenges of the Islamic world.

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