The Islamic State and Thomas Hobbes: Views on the State, Law, and the Role of Religion

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Abstract. *This article explains the concept of an Islamic state from the perspective of Thomas Hobbes' book Leviathan. Although Hobbes does not explicitly discuss the Islamic state, the basic principles of his theory of the absolute state, natural law, and the role of religion in a state provide a framework that can be used to explain the basic principles of the Islamic state. This article uses a qualitative approach with textual analysis methods on Hobbes' major work, Leviathan, as well as relevant literature on the concept of an Islamic state. Based on critical and interpretive readings of the text, this paper identifies and analyses the main themes related to absolute power and the role of religion in governance according to Hobbes. This analysis highlights how a state applying Islamic law (Sharia) can be compared to the concept of the state from a Hobbesian perspective, particularly in terms of absolute power and religious regulation to maintain order and peace. This article also discusses the relevance of Hobbes' natural law in the context of Islamic law and how the principles of universal justice and morality are applied. The findings of this article show that although there are fundamental differences in the sources of legitimacy and the role of religion, the basic principles of Hobbes' theory remain relevant in understanding the dynamics that occur in Islamic states, particularly in the modern world.*

Keywords: *Islamic State, Thommas Hobbes, Islamic Sharia, Power and Authority.*

Abstrak. *Artikel ini menjelaskan konsep negara Islam dalam perspektif Thomas Hobbes melalui buku Leviathan. Meskipun Hobbes tidak secara eksplisit membahas negara Islam dalam bukunya, namun prinsip dasar teorinya tentang negara absolut, hukum alam, dan peran agama dalam suatu negara memberikan kerangka yang dapat digunakan untuk menjelaskan pengertian negara Islam. Artikel ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis tekstual terhadap karya utama Hobbes, Leviathan, serta literatur yang relevan mengenai konsep negara Islam. Berdasarkan pembacaan teks secara kritis dan interpretatif, tulisan ini mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis tema-tema utama terkait kekuasaan absolut dan peran agama dalam pemerintahan menurut Hobbes. Analisis ini menyoroti bagaimana negara yang menerapkan hukum Islam (syariah) dapat dibandingkan dengan konsep negara dalam perspektif Hobbesian, khususnya dalam hal kekuasaan absolut dan peraturan agama untuk menjaga ketertiban dan perdamaian. Artikel ini juga membahas relevansi hukum alam ala Hobbes dalam konteks hukum Islam dan bagaimana prinsip keadilan dan moralitas universal diterapkan. Hasil artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun terdapat perbedaan mendasar dalam sumber legitimasi dan peran agama, namun prinsip dasar teori Hobbes tetap relevan dalam memahami dinamika yang terjadi di negara-negara Islam, khususnya di dunia modern.*

Kata Kunci: *Negara Islam, Thommas Hobbes, Hukum Syariah, Kekuasaan dan Otoritas.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hobbes, an English philosopher from the 17th century, is known for his theory that supports a sovereign state with absolute power to maintain order and prevent chaos. His main work, Leviathan, describes how humans in the state of nature live in fear and violence, which drives them to surrender individual freedom to a strong and central authority for the sake of security and peace. Hobbes stated that to avoid war of all against all (bellum omnium contra omnes), humans must submit to absolute power that can regulate their social and political lives effectively (Kleidosty & Jackson, 2017). Hobbes's view is very relevant in the context of countries facing chaos or disorder caused by internal conflict, where political stability can only be achieved through strong and centralized power (Nursanik & Mursidah, 2021).

Even though Hobbes lived in the context of Western history and culture, his basic principles about state and power can be applied to understanding various forms of government outside the Western world, including the Islamic world (Lindholm, 2023). While a considerable amount of literature has been published on studying Islamic states in recent years, relatively less attention, however, has been given to compare the concepts of Islamic states with a Western political thought as illustrated by the political views of Thomas Hobbes.

Islamic states, which base their laws and government systems on sharia or Islamic law, have different characteristics from modern secular states (Esposito, 1996). Not only does Sharia function as a moral guideline but also does serve as a legal basis that regulates various aspects of life, including criminal, civil, economic and social law (Nurhayati dan Hasan, 2015). Sharia includes rules based on the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as interpretations from ulama, which serve as Islamic guidance to ensure that people's lives are in line with Islamic principles (Nurwahidin dkk, 2021). In Islamic countries, the implementation of sharia often involves a separate judicial system and focuses on resolving disputes in accordance with religious law (Tibi, 2012). The role of ulama and religious institutions plays a significant role in interpreting and enforcing sharia, making religion a determining factor in influencing public policy making and government administration (Soroush, 2000).

As little knowledge is currently available in understanding similarities and differences between the concepts of the Islamic state and the political views of Thomas Hobbes, some of the basic principles of authority and law expressed by Hobbes can be found in the concept of the Islamic state. For an instance of similarities, Hobbes emphasized the importance of absolute power to maintain order and prevent chaos, and Islamic states also emphasizes the importance of strong authority to enforce sharia, ensuring that society operates in accordance with religious principles (Tibi, 2012). Hobbes argued that absolute power is the key to maintaining peace and stability, which corresponds to the views of Islamic states that the implementation of sharia law requires undivided power to avoid conflict and anarchy (Kleidosty & Jackson, 2017). In a similar vein, the Hobbesian concept suggests that the state has control over religion to prevent division. Islamic states also often have a system of control over the interpretation and practice of religion to maintain social unity and order (Muhammad & Ramzan, 2019). Given that not much research appears to have been done into comparing these accounts, this article seeks to investigate the extent to which Hobbes's political perspectives on absolute state power and religious regulation can be applied to understanding Islamic states? How can Hobbes's concept of natural law be compared with sharia law in maintaining order and justice?

2. METHOD

This article uses a qualitative approach with a textual analysis method by selecting relevant Hobbes' main ideas from Leviathan, as well as a relevant literature on the concepts of the Islamic state. This method involves critical and interpretive readings of texts to identify and analyze the main themes related to absolute power and the role of religion in government according to Hobbes. Apart from that, this article also utilizes secondary sources from books, journal articles, and academic papers that discuss Hobbes' views and Islamic political theory. This analysis was carried out by comparing and contrasting the concepts found in Leviathan with the principles underlying the Islamic state, especially those

related to the implementation of sharia law and the legitimacy of power. Data obtained from the analysis of Hobbes' texts (Houten, 2002) and literature on Islamic states (Kavrakis, 2023) are then synthesized to provide a more nuanced understanding of how far Hobbes' political theory corresponds to the context of Islamic states. Thus, this methodology not only helps in understanding Hobbes's views on absolute power and the role of religion, but also provides some important insights into the dynamics and challenges faced by Islamic states in maintaining order and justice in society. Drawing this approach, it is expected that similarities and differences between Hobbes's view of the state and the concept of an Islamic state can be identified.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of Hobbes' views offers a meaningful knowledge by looking at the complex discussion of state authority and the role of religion in politics. Therefore, this article aims to answer these questions by exploring Hobbes's views on the state, law and religion, highlighting the extent to which Hobbes's perspectives are compatible with the concept and practice of the Islamic state. To do so, this article is divided into four main discussions. First, it discusses Hobbes's view of the state and absolute power. Second, it describes the Islamic state and absolute power. Third, natural law in the view of Hobbes and Sharia Law is compared. Fourth, it explores the role of religion in a Hobbesian state and the Islamic state.

3.1 Hobbes' View regarding the State and Absolute Power

Thomas Hobbes, through his most famous work, Leviathan, presented a political theory that supported absolute state power as a solution to avoid the chaos and conflict inherent in human nature. In Hobbes's view, a state of nature is a condition where there is no sovereign authority, so that every individual is free to do anything to maintain his/her life. This condition, according to Hobbes, is a situation of fear and violence, in which human lives become "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Wong, 2022). To get out of this situation, humans must agree to form a social contract that surrenders some of their individual freedoms to a sovereign and absolute power, called Leviathan (Lloyd, 2019).

Hobbes emphasized that absolute power is necessary to create and maintain order and prevent a return to the state of nature. According to Hobbes, only an undivided and absolute authority can enforce the laws and ensure that individual rights are respected. The state, as a representation of Leviathan, has the power to create, enforce, and interpret laws without any restrictions from other entities (Wicaksono, 2022). This view is different from the views of other philosophers such as John Locke who supported the division of power and checks and balances to prevent tyranny (Locke, 2022). The divergent views between Hobbes and Locke have become a theoretical reference differing realism and liberalism in International Relations discipline. While Hobbes's the Leviathan arguing that avoiding war requires a strong central authority – has been used in a classical reference in the realist tradition, Locke's ideas of individual freedom, liberty and equality before the law underpinning the fundamentals of limited government and the consent of the people – has been associated with the classical reference in the liberal tradition (Chou, M. & Poole, A., 2015).

One important aspect of Hobbes' theory is the role of the state in regulating religion. Hobbes believed that religion, if not regulated by the state, could be a source of serious division and conflict. Therefore, he argued that the state must have control over religious practices to ensure that religion does not disrupt public order and political stability (Hara et al., 2022). In Leviathan, Hobbes states that state power must include the authority to determine recognized religious doctrine and ensure that religious practices do not conflict with the laws of the state (Neoh, 2023).

Hobbes' views on the state and absolute power have received various criticisms. Some critics argue that the model of absolute power proposed by Hobbes is prone to abuse of power and tyranny (Oktaviani & Pramadya, 2019). As Hobbes's theory argues for the strong central authority to provide peace and avoid wars, this has been used to justify authoritarianism (Teixeira Filho, 2023). However, supporters of Hobbes emphasize that this theory must be understood in the context of his efforts to find

practical solutions to the acute social and political conflict problems of his time (Lloyd, 2019). In the modern context, Hobbes' views remain relevant, especially in discussions of a strong state and the role of the state in regulating social and political lives to maintain order and security (Werner & Brown, 1969). Hobbes' further views on the state, absolute power and his criticism can be seen in Table 1 below:

Table 1

	State	Absolute Power	Critics
Thomas Hobbes	To regulate acts of chaos, a social contract must be created in the form of the State. The state cannot be blamed for the mistakes made.	The state must be run with absolute power like a monarchy.	Potential for abuse of power and tyranny. But even so Hobbes' thinking paved the way for modern politics.

3.2 Islamic State and Absolute Power

An Islamic state is a country whose constitution is based on Islamic law originating from the Koran. Islamic law, or sharia, covers various aspects of social lives including criminal law, civil law, family law, and public morality in which all aspects are regulated in accordance with the teachings of the Koran and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (Jaya, 2020). In the Islamic state, all laws and public policies must be consistent with the principles of sharia, which is considered a manifestation of God's will (Muktafi et al., 2022). Ulama and religious institutions often have an important role in interpreting and implementing sharia, ensuring that state laws remain in line with religious teachings (March, 2009). Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran are examples where sharia law serves as the basis of their constitution and legal system, reflecting their commitment to running a government based on Islamic principles (Byrd, 2017).

Islamic states, which base their laws and government systems on sharia or Islamic law, have unique characteristics compared to modern secular states. In Islamic countries, sharia functions as the main source of legislation that regulates various aspects of life, including political, economic and social life (Mudzakkir, 2016). Sharia law is considered a manifestation of the divine will and therefore has inviolable authority by humans. This gives the Islamic state strong legitimacy to enforce law and order based on religious principles (March, 2009).

The basic characteristic of a modern secular state lies in a separation between religion and state, where the constitution and legal systems are based on the principles of rationality and civil law that apply to all citizens regardless of their religions (Turam, 2004). Modern secular states tend to ensure that laws and public policies are not based on the teachings of a particular religion, but rather on universal values such as human rights, democracy and social justice (Byrd, 2017). In a secular state, religious institutions and the government operate separately, and religious freedom is guaranteed to all individuals, allowing for greater religious pluralism (March, 2009). Countries such as France and the United States are examples where secularism has been enshrined in a basic constitutional principle governing how the government operates and makes decisions that affect public life (Kurniawan, 2020).

Long-standing debates about the formation of the modern secular state and the secularization thesis that argues the decline of religion's public influence – can be traced to the Peace of Westphalia (1648) which ended the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) between Protestant and Catholic nations (religious conflicts cross borders), thus establishing the modern secular state on the basis on territory or border instead of religious rulers which are associated with borderless. In this regard, the nation-state and nationalism emerged to denote traits of the modern secular state (Soper, 2023). Following the Westphalian system of states, authority has been legitimized to exercise control over their own territories. As a result, religious rulers have been marginalized in international relations (Maliki & Prihatiningsih, 2023).

Turning now to the similarity, there has been agreement on what Hobbes viewed the need for absolute power to maintain order and prevent chaos. the Islamic state also emphasizes the importance of strong authority. In the context of an Islamic state, this absolute power is often exercised through leaders who have the authority to interpret and enforce sharia law (Tibi, 2012). The leaders, often in the form of a caliph or imam, act or claim as the highest authority ensuring that all aspects of society's life are in line with Islamic teachings

(Matthiesen, 2023). Further information can be seen in Table 2.

However, the application of absolute power in the Islamic state is not without challenges. One of the main issues concerns on how to maintain a balance between strong state power and the individual rights as well as freedoms guaranteed by sharia (Esposito, 1996). In some cases, Islamic states have been criticized for using absolute power to limit freedom of expression and human rights (Abshar et al., 2021). This criticism highlights the need for checks and balances' mechanisms in government to prevent abuse of power, even though this is contrary to the concept of absolute power promoted by Hobbes (Lloyd, 2019). For example, countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia implement a model of government in which strong state power is supported by sharia law (Wahyuddin, 2018). Although this model aims to create a just and moral society in accordance with Islamic teachings, there has been an ongoing debate about the extent to which state power should be used to regulate private life and individual freedom (Soroush, 2000). In this context, Hobbes's analysis of the need for strong authority and the role of religion in maintaining order can provide valuable insights for understanding and evaluating the governance (Werner & Brown, 1969).

Table 2

Islamic State	Absolute Power
Islamic states also have the concept of absolute power, but absolute power is originated from Islamic law (sharia)	In the Hobbesian state, absolute power is sourced from the principles of rationality and civil law which apply to all citizens regardless of religion.
Both have the potential to commit abuse of power and tyranny	

3.3 Nature State in the View of Hobbes and Islamic Sharia

In his work Leviathan, Thomas Hobbes developed the concept of nature state as the basic principles necessary to ensure peace and order in society. According to Hobbes, natural laws are rules discovered through human reason that teach how individuals must act to maintain their lives and freedom. This natural law includes basic rights such as the right to life, freedom from violence, and the right to seek peace (Karimi S, 2024). Hobbes argued that humans are naturally in a state of war of all against all, and only through surrendering their rights to a sovereign authority can they achieve security and order (Jespersen, 2020).

In the context of Islamic sharia, the basic principles regulated by sharia also function to maintain justice and order in an Islamic society. Sharia is considered a divine law that provides comprehensive guidance regarding the moral, social, and legal aspects of life (Davids, 2017). Like Hobbes's state of nature, Islamic sharia emphasizes the importance of basic individual rights, such as the right to life, honor and justice. Sharia also includes universal principles such as compassion, justice, and the protection of individual rights, reflecting Hobbes's goal of state of nature to create a safe and just society (Ramizah Wan Muhammad, 2020).

Although the sources and legitimacy of natural law and sharia law are different, they both have the same goal of ensuring the welfare and security of society. Hobbes's state of nature is based on human rationality and the need to avoid chaos, while Islamic sharia is based on divine revelation which aims to guide humans towards a just and moral life (Tibi, 2012). In practice, Islamic sharia is implemented through the legal system and government of an Islamic country that seeks to uphold the principles of justice and morality in accordance with Islamic teachings (Pashayeva, 2022).

The analysis of Hobbes's concept of natural law and sharia law shows that despite differences in source and legitimacy, these two legal systems have similarities in the basic principles they uphold. These two legal systems aim to create a just, peaceful and orderly society (Werner & Brown, 1969). Thus, the concepts developed by Hobbes can provide a new perspective in understanding and evaluating the application of sharia law in the context of a modern Islamic state (Huda et al., 2023). Table 3 depicts the contrasting concepts of state of nature between Hobbes's view and the Islamic Sharia.

Table 3

	Hobbes	Islamic Sharia
State of Nature	This originates from thinking about human rationality and the reality of events that occur. The basic goal is justice for humanity.	This originates from God through holy books interpreted by Ulama. Its basic aim is justice for humanity.

3.4 The Role of Religion in Hobbesian States and Islamic States

Thomas Hobbes saw religion as an element that had the potential to cause conflicts in society if it was not properly regulated by the

state. In Leviathan, Hobbes argues that the state must have control over religious practices to ensure that religion does not disrupt public order and political stability. Hobbes believed that without state authority to regulate religion, differences in beliefs could lead to division and chaos (Karimi S, 2024). Therefore, he stressed the importance of the state establishing official religious doctrine and ensuring that all religious practices are in line with the state law (Lloyd, 2019).

In the context of the Islamic state, the role of religion is much more central and integral element of the state compared with the Hobbesian concept of the state. In the Islamic country, sharia is not just religious law but also the basis of the state law (Esposito, 1996). The Islamic state functions to enforce Islamic Sharia and ensures that all aspects of society's life are in line with the principles of the Islamic religion (Hizbullah & Haidir, 2021). This includes regulations regarding worship, morality, as well as criminal and civil law, all of which are rooted in Islamic teachings (March, 2009).

However, as in Hobbes' view, Islamic countries also face challenges in managing the role of religion to maintain order and stability. Strict control over religious interpretation and practice is seen necessary to prevent the emergence of sects or movements that could threaten state authority and create instability. This has been illustrated in some modern Islamic countries where the government has great influence over religious institutions and regulates religious activities to ensure alignment with state policy (Kolo & Abbas Bashar, 2024). In Saudi Arabia, the government controls and supervises religious activities through the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Da'wah, and Counseling to ensure that religious teachings and practices are in line with state ideology and do not threaten political stability (Ghafur et al., 2018).

A comparison between the role of religion in a Hobbesian state and the Islamic state shows that although both emphasize the importance of state control over religion, the goals and approaches used are different. In the Hobbesian state, control over religion is intended to prevent conflict and maintain stability as can be seen in the history of England under the rule of Oliver Cromwell in the 17th century (Harris, 2016). Cromwell, influenced by Hobbesian views, regulated religion through policies that restricted different religious practices and ensured that religious teachings recognized by the state did not give rise to social and political divisions (Gray et al., 1971). Cromwell's government attempted to suppress sectarianism and ensure that religion did not become a source of conflict that could disrupt the stability of the country (Lloyd, 2019). But the power of both is built on fear (Murtianto, 2022).

Meanwhile, in the Islamic state, this control aims to uphold divine law and form a society that is in accordance with religious teachings. An example can be seen in the case of Saudi Arabia, where the government strictly monitors and regulates religious practices according to the Wahhabi interpretation of Sunni Islam. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs in Saudi Arabia is responsible for ensuring that all religious activities, including sermons in mosques and religious education, are in line with official state teachings (Esposito, 1996). The Saudi Arabian government also implements sharia law in its judicial system, ensuring that society lives in accordance with officially recognized Islamic principles (Lavie, 2022).

Nevertheless, both models of governance face challenges in managing the relationship between state and religion, especially in complex and diverse modern contexts. In Hobbesian model that seek to maintain secularism, the challenge arises from maintaining state neutrality towards all religions, while ensuring that public policy is not discriminatory against certain religious groups (Munajah, 2021). An example of this challenge can be seen in France, where the state's policy of laïcité or secularism has faced criticisms both from religious groups who feel their rights are being restricted, and from secular groups who want a stricter separation between religion and state (Bowen, 2010). Table 4 provide further details about comparing the role of religion.

On the other hand, Islamic countries that seek to enforce sharia law also face challenges in balancing the application of religious law with the demands of modernity and human rights. Countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia often face international pressures for legal

reforms that are in harmony with global human rights standards, particularly regarding women's rights, religious freedom, and criminal penalties deemed to violate universal humanitarian principles (Cole, 2023). Apart from that, within the country, there is also debate and tension between conservative groups who support traditional interpretations of sharia and reformist groups who want a more modern and inclusive interpretation (Nurtina, 2019).

These two models of the state system must also adapt to increasing globalization and the influence of democratic ideas and human rights that demand transparency, accountability and respect for individual freedoms. In the context of the Hobbesian model, this challenge may require a revision of policies that overly restrict religious expression to prevent radicalization and extremism, while maintaining public order (Lloyd, 2019). In Islamic countries, this could mean finding ways to reinterpret sharia law that allow for the integration of human rights principles without compromising underlying religious values (Hashemi & Qureshi, 2022).

Table 4

	Hobbesian	Islamic State
The Role of Religion	Religion has the potential to cause conflict because it must be regulated by the state. Religion must be separated from public affairs.	Religion regulates levels of life such as economic, social, political, and even individual human behavior.

4. CONCLUSION

Although Hobbes does not explicitly discuss the Islamic state, the basic principles of his theory regarding the need for strong state power and control over religion to maintain order and prevent chaos are relevant to understanding the dynamics of the Islamic state. Hobbes argued that absolute authority is necessary to avoid a natural state full of conflict and uncertainty, which goes along with the Islamic state's belief in the importance of enforcing sharia law by a sovereign authority to create a just and moral society. Islamic states face challenges in balancing the implementation of sharia law with the demands of modernity and human rights. As in the Hobbesian view, Islamic states must manage the relationship between religion and state carefully to prevent social divisions and ensure political stability. However, the ultimate goal of religious control in Islamic countries is different, namely to enforce divine law and shape society in accordance with religious teachings.

In the modern context, both Hobbesian model and Islamic states need to continually adapt their policies to address evolving challenges, including globalization, pluralism, and demands for human rights. Both models of the state system must seek a balance between enforcing strong state authority and respecting for individual rights to maintain social stability and justice. Thus, Hobbes' views on the state and absolute power offer valuable insights in analyzing and understanding the Islamic state, especially in the complex and diverse modern context. This study shows that although there are fundamental differences in the sources and legitimacy of power, the basic principles of Hobbes's theory can be applied to evaluate the dynamics of Islamic states and the challenges they face.

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