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The Hijrah to Yathrib as a Socio-Political Strategy in the Formation of the Early Islamic Political Order

Hijrah ke Yatsrib sebagai Strategi Sosial-Politik dalam Pembentukan Tatanan Politik Islam Awal

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Abstract: *The Prophet's migration (Hijrah) to Yathrib is generally understood within a theological framework as an effort to preserve the Islamic mission from the pressures of the Quraysh. While this perspective is important, it tends to overlook the socio-political dimensions underlying the choice of Yathrib as the destination of the migration, rather than other regions in the Arabian Peninsula. This article aims to analyse the Hijrah to Yathrib from a socio-political perspective by positioning it as a strategic decision within the context of social structure, political conflict, and the need for political legitimacy. This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach based on a literature review of sirah sources, classical Islamic historiography, and modern academic scholarship. The findings indicate that Yathrib possessed a relatively open socio-political character, marked by fragmented power structures, ethnic and religious plurality, and a crisis of local leadership legitimacy, which enabled the emergence of an external authoritative figure such as the Prophet Muhammad. These conditions suggest that the Hijrah was not merely a geographical relocation, but rather a transformative process from a tribal-based society into a political community bound by a shared legal agreement. This article contributes to the enrichment of Hijrah studies by offering an alternative interpretation that frames the migration as an early form of socio-political transformation in Islamic history.*

Keywords: Yathrib (Medina); Political legitimacy; Pluralistic society; Early Islamic polity

Abstrak: *Peristiwa hijrah Nabi ke Yatsrib umumnya dipahami dalam kerangka teologis sebagai bentuk penyelamatan dakwah dari tekanan kaum Quraisy. Pendekatan tersebut, meskipun penting, cenderung mengabaikan dimensi sosio-politik yang melatarbelakangi pemilihan Yatsrib sebagai tujuan hijrah, bukan wilayah lain di Jazirah Arab. Artikel ini bertujuan menganalisis hijrah ke Yatsrib dari perspektif sosio-politik dengan menempatkannya sebagai keputusan strategis dalam konteks struktur sosial, konflik politik, dan kebutuhan akan legitimasi kekuasaan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif berbasis studi literatur terhadap sumber-sumber sirah, sejarah Islam klasik, dan kajian akademik modern. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa Yatsrib memiliki karakter sosial-politik yang relatif terbuka, ditandai oleh fragmentasi kekuasaan, pluralitas etnis dan agama, serta krisis legitimasi kepemimpinan lokal, yang memungkinkan hadirnya figur otoritatif eksternal seperti Nabi Muhammad. Kondisi ini menjadikan hijrah bukan sekadar perpindahan geografis, melainkan proses transformasi dari masyarakat berbasis kabilah menuju masyarakat politik yang diikat oleh kesepakatan hukum bersama. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada pengayaan studi hijrah dengan menawarkan pembacaan alternatif yang menempatkan hijrah sebagai transformasi sosial-politik awal dalam sejarah Islam.*

Kata Kunci: Hijrah; Yatsrib/Madinah; Legitimasi politik; Masyarakat plural; Negara awal Islam

Introduction

The Prophet's migration (Hijrah) from Mecca to Yathrib represents one of the most decisive events in Islamic history because it marked the transition from a marginalized phase of *da'wah* to the establishment of an organized social and political order. The significance of this event was later institutionalized through the adoption of the Hijrah as the starting point of the Islamic calendar, rather than the Prophet's birth or the first revelation. This indicates that the Hijrah was understood not merely as a physical migration, but as the beginning of a new collective existence. In classical Islamic historiography, the Hijrah is generally portrayed as a response to persecution and violence experienced by the Prophet and his followers in Mecca, as well as a form of divine assistance ensuring the continuity of the Islamic mission. This narrative is widely found in early *sīrah* works attributed to Ibn Ishaq and later redacted by Ibn Hisham, which emphasize the suffering of the Muslims and the protection promised by the people of Yathrib.[1]

The persecution narrative is important, but it does not fully explain why Yathrib was chosen as the destination of the Hijrah. The boycott of Banu Hashim, the deaths of Khadijah and Abu Talib, the failed appeal to Ta'if, and the plot against the Prophet's life explain the impulse to leave Mecca, yet they do not explain why the migration resulted in the formation of a new political community rather than merely a search for refuge. A community fleeing danger might have dispersed, sought

protection under a powerful patron, or attached itself to an existing tribal confederation. Instead, the Muslims entered Yathrib as the nucleus of a new community whose membership crossed inherited lines of lineage and tribe. This outcome requires an explanation that goes beyond the language of flight and rescue.

In modern scholarship, a methodological problem arises when the Hijrah is reduced solely to a religious event or a migration for survival. Such an approach tends to overlook the transformations in power structures, legal systems, and social relations that followed the migration. The Hijrah did not merely relocate the center of *da'wah*; it also transformed the Prophet's role from a religious leader into an authoritative figure within a broader socio-political order.[2] Therefore, this article does not reject the theological interpretation of the Hijrah, but seeks to widen its analytical scope. It argues that Yathrib was not simply a passive sanctuary, but an active social space whose internal contradictions created an opening for an external, cross-tribal authority.

The normative-theological approach has made a significant contribution in preserving the spiritual and moral meaning of the Hijrah. However, when it becomes dominant, it can place the event beyond critical social and political analysis. Several modern scholars have noted that such an approach creates an overly rigid separation between the religious and political dimensions of early Islamic history, even though both were deeply intertwined in practice.[3] If the Hijrah is read only as obedience to divine command, the question of why that obedience took the institutional form of a written compact, defined membership, recognized leadership, and adjudicatory authority cannot be adequately addressed. A historical account need not deny the role of revelation, but it must still examine the concrete social structures through which revelation was received, negotiated, and institutionalized.

Although the literature on the Hijrah is abundant, most studies continue to focus on chronology, key figures, and moral lessons. Studies that specifically examine Yathrib as a socio-political space remain relatively limited. The question of why Yathrib was selected rather than other possible regions in the Arabian Peninsula has not been systematically analyzed within a political sociology framework.[4] Some studies discuss the social conditions of Yathrib, such as the conflict between Aws and Khazraj and the presence of Jewish communities, but these discussions often remain descriptive and are not directed toward analyzing political legitimacy, social integration, and the formation of authority.[5] Thus, the gap in Hijrah studies is not primarily a lack of information, but a lack of analytical framing. The relevant facts about Yathrib—tribal exhaustion after Bu'ath, religious plurality, an agricultural oasis economy, and the absence of a paramount chief—are well known, but they have rarely been treated as variables explaining why Yathrib was receptive to a political transformation that Mecca rejected.

Classical Islamic literature provides the foundational material for this inquiry. Works such as the *Sīrah* of Ibn Ishaq as edited by Ibn Hisham reconstruct the Hijrah through the pressures faced by Muslims in Mecca, the Pledges of 'Aqabah, and the Prophet's arrival in Yathrib.[6] Al-Tabari's *Tārīkh al-Rusūl wa al-Mulūk* also contributes important reports concerning the Hijrah and the social conditions of Yathrib. Yet these classical works generally do not clearly distinguish between historical description and structural analysis of the destination society. Their primary emphasis remains on religious legitimacy and moral exemplarity rather than on interpreting the Hijrah as a socio-political strategy.[7] For that reason, this study treats the classical sources carefully: not primarily as verbatim records of motives, but as testimony to broad social structures, such as tribal rivalry, intergroup relations, pledges of allegiance, and the emergence of a foundational compact.

Modern scholarship provides important tools for reinterpreting these materials. W. Montgomery Watt interprets the Hijrah as a rational response to the socio-political deadlock in Mecca and the opportunities available in Yathrib, arguing that the Prophet's success in Medina cannot be separated from the city's need for a unifying figure.[8] This perspective opens the way for analyzing the Hijrah as a historical event shaped by social and political logic.[9] Fred M. Donner further frames early Islam as a communitarian movement with both moral and political dimensions, showing that the Medinan community represented an early phase of Islamic institutionalization in which the Hijrah functioned as a mechanism for establishing a new order beyond tribal affiliation.[10] Nevertheless, Donner's analysis focuses more on communal dynamics than on the specific selection of Yathrib as a political space.[11] This article builds upon Watt and Donner by placing the spatial and comparative question at the center: why did this oasis, configured in this particular way, become the site where the Islamic message was institutionalized?

To answer this question, this article employs several socio-political concepts. The first is political legitimacy, understood not merely as power or tradition, but as social acceptance and collective recognition. The condition of Yathrib, marked by inter-tribal conflict, created a crisis of local leadership legitimacy and opened space for an external authoritative figure.[12] The second is the idea of social contract, used heuristically to understand the Pledges of 'Aqabah and the Constitution of Medina as reciprocal commitments between leader and community rather than as authority imposed by conquest or inheritance.[13] The third is conflict and social integration theory, which helps explain how prolonged rivalry between Aws and Khazraj weakened social cohesion and made new integrative mechanisms necessary.[14]

These concepts are strengthened by classical social theory. Max Weber's typology of authority is useful for understanding the Prophet's leadership in Yathrib as charismatic authority that was progressively routinized into a stable, rule-based order

through the Pledges of ‘Aqabah and the Constitution of Medina.[15] Émile Durkheim’s distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity clarifies the transition from segmentary tribal loyalty toward a community bound by shared norms and reciprocal obligations. Meanwhile, the social-contract idiom is used cautiously, not to impose Hobbesian or Rousseauian theories anachronistically, but to identify the structural feature of reciprocal and publicly avowed commitment in the ‘Aqabah pledges and Medinan compact. In this regard, the work of Patricia Crone, Martin Hinds, and Ernest Gellner helps keep the analysis grounded in the segmentary logic of tribal politics, mediation, and negotiated alliance.[16] Charles Tilly’s account of coercion, capital, and state formation provides a further comparative lens by reminding us that durable political orders are built not only through consent but also through the organization of force and resources.[17]

Based on this background, the central question of this article is: why was Yathrib chosen as the destination of the Prophet’s Hijrah, and what socio-political factors made the city more conducive to the formation of an Islamic political order than other regions of the Arabian Peninsula? This question is developed through three subsidiary concerns: first, what features of Yathrib’s social structure distinguished it from Mecca; second, how an external figure acquired legitimate authority within a fragmented and plural society; and third, in what sense the Medinan settlement can be understood as an early political community or proto-state formation rather than merely a religious congregation.

The main objective of this article is to analyze the Hijrah to Yathrib as a strategic decision within the context of social structure, political conflict, and the need for leadership legitimacy. It aims to broaden the understanding of the Hijrah as a process of social transformation that goes beyond physical migration. The study does not replace the theological account with a reductively sociological one, but shows how theological and structural readings can illuminate different dimensions of a single historical event. Academically, the article contributes to Hijrah studies by offering a socio-political spatial analysis of Yathrib. Its novelty lies in arguing that the selection of Yathrib was neither accidental nor merely a response to invitation, but aligned with the objective need to establish legitimacy, authority, and integration within a plural society. In this sense, the Hijrah may be read as an early instance of proto-state formation in Medina.[18]

Positioned in this way, the study makes three contributions. First, it treats Yathrib as an active social agent rather than a passive backdrop. Second, it makes the comparison between Mecca and Yathrib analytically central by showing how a closed hegemonic order rejected a message that an open and fragmented society received and institutionalized. Third, it treats the Medinan order as a contested and provisional achievement rather than a frictionless ideal, thereby integrating internal

opposition, negotiation, and coercion into the analysis. Through this approach, the article seeks to enrich the study of early Islam and contribute to broader discussions on religion, society, political legitimacy, and the formation of durable political order.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a historical-analytical method to examine the Prophet Muhammad's Hijrah to Yathrib as a socio-political process rather than merely a religious migration. The historical method is used to reconstruct the social and political conditions preceding the Hijrah, while socio-political analysis interprets these historical data through the concepts of political legitimacy, social integration, social contract, and state formation. This approach enables the study to explain how Yathrib's social structure provided favorable conditions for the emergence of a new political community without neglecting the theological significance of the Hijrah itself.[19]

The analysis combines three complementary procedures. First, source criticism is employed to assess the authenticity, provenance, transmission, and possible bias of classical historical reports. Second, historiographical analysis examines how historical narratives were constructed by their compilers and the intellectual contexts in which they were produced. Third, contextual reading interprets these texts within the broader socio-political conditions of seventh-century Arabia. The combination of these procedures allows the study to move beyond descriptive historical narration toward a structural explanation of the Hijrah while minimizing both uncritical acceptance of traditional reports and excessive historical skepticism.[20]

The study relies on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consist of classical Islamic historical works, particularly *Sīrah Nabawiyyah* of Ibn Ishaq as edited by Ibn Hisham and *Tārīkh al-Rusūl wa al-Mulūk* of al-Tabari, which provide historical accounts of the social, political, and inter-tribal conditions of Yathrib before and after the Hijrah.[21] Secondary sources include scholarly works on early Islamic history, sociology of religion, political anthropology, and Islamic political thought. These include studies by Watt, Donner, Hodgson, Lapidus, Crone, al-Azmeh, Arjomand, and recent journal publications that discuss the Constitution of Medina, the socio-political structure of Yathrib, and the formation of the early Islamic polity.[22]

Data were collected through an extensive literature review and analyzed using historical-critical and socio-political interpretation. Historical accounts were compared across multiple sources to identify convergent evidence and reconstruct the structural conditions surrounding the Hijrah. Where historical reports differ, priority is given to broadly corroborated structural evidence rather than isolated narrative details. The analysis then applies the concepts of political legitimacy, social

integration, and social contract to explain how tribal fragmentation, leadership crises, and religious pluralism in Yathrib facilitated the formation of a new political order under the Prophet Muhammad. Rather than treating the Hijrah simply as a chronological historical event, this study interprets it as a process of strategic socio-political transformation.

The scope of this study is limited to the socio-political factors underlying the selection of Yathrib as the destination of the Hijrah and the establishment of the early Medinan community. It does not examine the jurisprudential dimensions of Hijrah or later developments in Islamic political history except where necessary for historical explanation. Accordingly, the conclusions are confined to the level of social structures, political institutions, and patterns of legitimacy that can be reasonably reconstructed from the available historical sources.

Social Structure and Political Conflict in Pre-Hijrah Yathrib

Prior to the Prophet's arrival, Yathrib was a society characterized by social and political instability. Its social structure was marked by the presence of two major Arab tribes, Aws and Khazraj, who were engaged in prolonged conflict. This rivalry culminated in the Battle of Bu'ath, a violent confrontation that weakened the traditional authority of both tribes and left deep social scars. Such conditions created what political sociology terms a vacuum of authority, namely the absence of a legitimate and widely accepted power structure. The Battle of Bu'ath is pivotal to the argument because of what it destroyed and what it failed to produce. It destroyed the rough parity that had allowed the two confederations to coexist, exhausting both without delivering decisive victory to either; and it failed to produce a paramount chief who could impose order, leaving the oasis with the memory of catastrophe and no institution capable of preventing its recurrence. A society in this condition is primed for an integrative solution that the existing structure cannot generate from within.

It is illuminating to read this configuration through the segmentary logic emphasized by anthropological accounts of tribal society. In a segmentary order, cohesion is achieved through balanced opposition: lineages unite at higher levels of segmentation against external threats and divide at lower levels in internal disputes. Such a system can absorb a great deal of conflict, but it has no mechanism for generating a standing, supra-tribal authority, because any lineage that attempted to rule would immediately provoke the coalition of the others. The deadlock of the Aws and Khazraj is the predictable terminus of this logic under conditions of sustained internecine war: the parties could neither defeat one another nor unite under either of their own, because to unite under one lineage was precisely what the system forbade. The structural escape from this trap is an arbiter who belongs to no

local lineage and therefore threatens none—a role for which an external, religiously sanctioned figure was uniquely fitted.

This fragmented social condition in Yathrib differed significantly from that of Mecca. In Mecca, the power structure of the Quraysh was relatively stable and hegemonic, leaving little room for radical socio-political transformation. In contrast, Yathrib was experiencing an internal crisis that necessitated a unifying figure.[23] The contrast is the analytical hinge of this study. Mecca was a commercial republic of sorts, dominated by a confident merchant oligarchy whose religious prestige, custodianship of the sanctuary, and trading networks were mutually reinforcing. A movement that challenged the gods of the sanctuary challenged at once the theology, the economy, and the standing of the ruling clans, and the oligarchy possessed both the unity and the means to resist it. Yathrib offered the mirror image: an economy based on agriculture and divided among competing groups, a religious landscape already pluralized by the presence of monotheist communities, and an elite too fractured to present a united front. The same message that threatened everything in Mecca answered a need in Yathrib.

The Qur'an alludes to this condition of conflict and subsequent transformation. In Surah Āl 'Imrān (3:103), God states:

وَاعْتَصِمُوْا بِحَبْلِ اللّٰهِ جَمِيْعًا وَّلَا تَفَرَّقُوْاۚ وَاذْكُرُوْا نِعْمَتَ اللّٰهِ عَلَيْكُمْ اِذْ كُنْتُمْ اَعْدَاۤءً فَاَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوْبِكُمْ فَاَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهٖٓ اِخْوَانًاۚ

"And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. And remember the favor of Allah upon you when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together, and you became, by His favor, brothers."

Exegetes interpret this verse as referring directly to the pre-Islamic conflict between Aws and Khazraj. Ibn Kathir explains that the enmity mentioned in the verse reflects their prolonged conflict, while their unity emerged through Islam and the Prophet's leadership in Medina. Beyond this classical reading, modern exegesis sharpens the verse's social import. In line with Fazlur Rahman's insistence that Qur'anic injunctions be grasped through the socio-historical situation they addressed, the command to "hold fast" and not become divided can be read as a response to a concrete crisis of social fragmentation rather than an abstract exhortation to piety. Muhammad Asad similarly renders the "rope of God" as the bond of a covenanted community, underscoring that cohesion here is constituted through shared commitment rather than common descent. Read in this way—and against the contextual, intentionalist hermeneutics advanced by scholars such as Mohammed Arkoun and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd—the verse functions not merely

as a legitimating proof-text but as evidence of a deliberate reorientation of solidarity away from lineage and toward a normative political community. From a socio-political perspective, this verse indicates that Yathrib possessed structural preconditions conducive to social transformation: prolonged conflict had weakened traditional tribal loyalties and opened space for new forms of solidarity based on shared values and moral leadership.[24]

The imagery of the verse repays attention for the present argument. The "rope" is a single shared object grasped jointly by a plurality of hands; it binds not by dissolving the distinctness of those who hold it but by giving them a common point of attachment external to all of them. This is a precise figure for the kind of integration achieved at Medina, in which the constituent groups were not fused into an undifferentiated mass but were tied to a shared normative order that none of them owned and all of them held. The movement the verse describes—from enmity to brotherhood by way of a common attachment—is, in Durkheimian terms, the movement from a solidarity of likeness to a solidarity of shared commitment, and it is exactly the transition that the structural conditions of Yathrib made both necessary and possible.

This crisis is also reflected in reports describing how the people of Yathrib anticipated the arrival of a prophetic figure to resolve their conflicts. Such narrations indicate a collective readiness to accept a new form of leadership that transcended tribal boundaries. Whatever the precise historicity of the individual reports—some of which bear the marks of later confessional shaping—their cumulative testimony to a mood of expectancy and exhaustion is plausible and structurally intelligible. A society that has fought itself to a standstill and can find no internal arbiter is a society that may well look outward for one. Thus, the Hijrah cannot be understood as a mere geographical coincidence, but rather as a response to a social structure already primed for transformation.

Crisis of Local Leadership Legitimacy and the Need for an External Authoritative Figure

A key socio-political factor in the selection of Yathrib was the crisis of local leadership legitimacy. The prolonged conflict between Aws and Khazraj eroded public trust in traditional tribal leadership. No single figure or group was able to secure stable cross-tribal allegiance. In such conditions, internal leadership lost its binding force and political legitimacy.[25]

It is useful to distinguish, with Weber, between the grounds on which authority may claim to be legitimate. Traditional authority rests on the sanctity of immemorial custom and the standing of those who exercise it by inheritance; in Yathrib, this was precisely what the war had discredited, since the customary chiefs had led their

peoples into mutual ruin without resolution. Rational-legal authority, resting on impersonal rules and offices, did not yet exist as a developed form. What remained available was charismatic authority—legitimacy grounded in the extraordinary qualities and mission attributed to a particular person. The crisis of traditional legitimacy in Yathrib is therefore not incidental to the Prophet's acceptance but a condition of it: a society in which inherited authority still commanded confidence would have had no opening for a charismatic claimant, whereas a society in which inherited authority had collapsed had both the vacancy and the motive to entertain one.

From a political sociology perspective, this situation created an opening for an external authoritative figure, one not tied to local genealogical conflicts. Such a figure would have a greater chance of being accepted as a neutral mediator. The value of externality is structural rather than personal: an arbiter drawn from within the Aws could never be trusted by the Khazraj, and vice versa, because in a segmentary order every internal candidate is already a partisan. Only a figure standing outside the local genealogies could occupy the position of impartial mediator, and only such a figure could ask the warring parties to subordinate their lineage loyalties to a shared order without thereby seeming to subordinate one lineage to another. This explains why the Prophet's leadership was accepted in Yathrib, while in Mecca it was rejected by the Quraysh elite, who perceived it as a threat to their established authority. The same externality that made him suspect to a confident oligarchy made him acceptable to a divided oasis.

The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of legitimate leadership in Surah al-Nisā' (4:59):

يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْٓا اَطِيْعُوا اللّٰهَ وَاَطِيْعُوا الرَّسُوْلَ وَاُولِى الْاَمْرِ مِنْكُمْۚ

"O you who believe, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you."

Exegetes such as al-Tabari interpret this verse as establishing the principle of political legitimacy grounded in obedience to divine and prophetic authority. In Medina, the Prophet functioned not only as a spiritual leader but also as a political authority (*ulil amr*) whose legitimacy derived from both moral integrity and revelation.[26] The verse is notable for the structure of obligation it sets out. It does not collapse the political into the religious but layers them: obedience is owed to God, to the Messenger, and to those entrusted with authority, in a graded order that already distinguishes the office of governance from the source of its sanction. Read against the Medinan situation, the verse furnishes a normative grammar for a community that was learning to be governed by an authority at once moral and

political, and that needed a principle of obedience capable of binding groups whose prior loyalties had been exclusively to lineage.

The need for an external authoritative figure is also evident in the Pledges of ʻAqabah, where representatives of Aws and Khazraj consciously transferred leadership authority to the Prophet. This demonstrates that his legitimacy was not imposed but granted through collective agreement—something unlikely to occur in regions with stable and hegemonic power structures.[27] The act of transfer is decisive for the analysis. Authority that is seized differs in kind from authority that is conferred, and the ʻAqabah pledges record a conferral: delegations from the very lineages that had been at war came, on their own initiative, to invite and to bind themselves to a leader from outside their quarrels. This is consent in the strong sense—not the passive acquiescence of the conquered but the active commitment of parties who recognized in an external arbiter the solution their own structure could not provide.

The Role of Ethnic and Religious Plurality in the Emergence of a Collective Legal System

Another defining feature of pre-Hijrah Yathrib was its relatively high degree of social plurality. The city was inhabited by diverse groups, including the Arab tribes of Aws and Khazraj and several Jewish communities such as Banu Qaynuqaʻ, Banu Nadir, and Banu Qurayzah. This diversity was not merely demographic but also normative, as each group maintained its own values, legal traditions, and political interests.[28]

The normative character of this plurality is essential to the argument and is easily underestimated. The Jewish tribes of Yathrib were not simply an additional ethnic element; they brought with them a developed scriptural and legal tradition, a literacy and a familiarity with covenantal monotheism that distinguished the religious atmosphere of the oasis sharply from that of Mecca. A population accustomed to the idea of a community constituted by adherence to a revealed law was, in an important sense, pre-adapted to the form of community that the Prophet would establish. The very plurality that might appear an obstacle to unity thus furnished part of the cultural material out of which a law-based rather than a lineage-based order could be built.

In socio-political terms, such a plural society could not be effectively governed through a single tribal authority. Instead, it required a collective legal system agreed upon by all groups. This made Yathrib a conducive environment for the emergence of a law-based political order rather than one based on majority dominance.[29] The logic is again structural. Where no single group commands the strength to impose its will, order can be secured only by agreement, and agreement among differentiated

parties tends toward a framework of mutual rights and obligations rather than toward the simple dominance of one party over the rest. Plurality, under these conditions, does not merely tolerate a law-based settlement; it positively requires one, because it forecloses the alternatives of hegemony and fusion.

The Qur'an provides a normative foundation for managing diversity. Surah al-Hujurāt (49:13) states:

يٰٓاَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اِنَّا خَلَقْنٰكُمْ مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ وَّاُنْثٰى وَجَعَلْنٰكُمْ شُعُوْبًا وَّقَبَاۤىِٕلَ لِتَعَارَفُوْا ۚ اِنَّ اَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ اَتْقٰىكُمْ

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another…"

According to al-Qurtubi, this verse affirms that diversity is a divinely ordained reality intended to foster social relations governed by justice and moral principles. The verse is striking in its inversion of the tribal value system. Lineage and tribe, the very markers around which the segmentary order organized both solidarity and enmity, are here redescribed as instruments of mutual recognition rather than grounds of superiority, and the sole axis of honour is relocated from descent to righteousness. This is a normative revolution with direct political consequences: it delegitimizes the lineage pride that had fuelled the Bu'ath wars and supplies an alternative basis for esteem that is in principle open to all groups alike, Arab and Jewish, Muhajir and Ansar, noble and humble.

Similarly, Surah al-Mā'idah (5:8) emphasizes justice across group boundaries, even toward those with whom there is enmity.

وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلٰٓى اَلَّا تَعْدِلُوْا ۗاِعْدِلُوْا ۗهُوَ اَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوٰى ۖ

"And do not let the hatred of a people lead you to act unjustly. Be just; that is closer to righteousness (taqwā)."

These principles were institutionalized in Medina through the Prophet's actions, such as establishing brotherhood between the Muhajirun and Ansar. This was not merely symbolic but had concrete socio-economic and political implications, forming the basis of a new collective order.[30] The institution of brotherhood (*mu'ākhāt*) deserves emphasis as a deliberate technology of integration. By pairing emigrants who had left their property and kin in Mecca with helpers who possessed land and standing in Medina, the Prophet created bonds of mutual obligation that cut directly across the lines of descent, substituting a chosen and covenanted kinship for the inherited kinship of the tribe. Materially it solved the immediate problem of resettling a propertyless immigrant population; structurally it enacted in miniature

the very transformation the whole project required, the replacement of solidarity by blood with solidarity by shared commitment.

Thus, the plural nature of Yathrib was not an obstacle but a prerequisite for the development of a political system based on mutual agreement, later embodied in the Constitution of Medina. The order that emerged was not the victory of one group over the others but a framework within which differentiated groups could be bound together precisely as differentiated—an organic rather than a mechanical solidarity, achieved through law rather than through likeness.

The Pledge of ʻAqabah as the Foundation of Political Mandate

The Hijrah to Yathrib was preceded by a structured socio-political process, most notably the Pledges of ʻAqabah. These pledges served as the foundation of the Prophet's political legitimacy in Yathrib. In early Islamic political terms, *bayʻah* was not merely an oath of faith but a social contract entailing protection, obedience, and recognition of authority.[31]

The development of the pledges across successive seasons traces a recognizable arc from religious adherence to political commitment. The earlier pledge, sometimes described as the pledge of women, bound its takers to ethical and devotional obligations—to associate nothing with God, to refrain from theft, adultery, infanticide, and slander, and to obey in what is right. The later pledge added to these the undertaking of protection and defence, the commitment to stand by the Prophet against attack as the takers would stand by their own. The progression is precisely the progression from a confessional to a political bond, and it is the moment at which the movement acquired the one attribute a religious congregation can lack but a polity cannot: a body of adherents committed to its collective defence.

The second pledge, in particular, included commitments of political and military protection, marking a transition from a non-territorial religious movement to a territorially grounded leadership. This is the threshold at which, in Tilly's terms, the question of coercion enters: a community that can call upon its members for collective defence has begun to organize the means of force, and the capacity to do so is among the constitutive features of durable political order. The Qur'an underscores the significance of such pledges in Surah al-Fath (48:10):

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُبَايِعُونَكَ إِنَّمَا يُبَايِعُونَ اللَّهَ ۚ يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ

"Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you are actually pledging allegiance to Allah…"

From a socio-political perspective, this indicates that the Prophet's authority was built upon a sanctified social agreement rather than coercion. The pledges represent an early form of political contract in which mutual obligations between leader and community were clearly defined.[32] The verse performs an important legitimating

function by anchoring a human compact in a divine one: the hand pledged to the Prophet is figured as a hand pledged to God. Sociologically, this is the mechanism by which a charismatic and contractual bond is sacralized and thereby rendered more durable than an ordinary alliance, for an agreement understood as ratified by God carries an obligation that no merely prudential calculation can lightly dissolve. The 'Aqabah pledges thus combine, in a single act, the consensual basis of a social contract and the sacred sanction of a covenant—a combination that gave the nascent Medinan order a stability that purely tribal alliances, perpetually liable to renegotiation, conspicuously lacked.

Hijrah as a Transition from Tribal Society to Political Community

One of the most fundamental implications of the Hijrah was the transformation of social structure from a tribal society to a political community bound by collective membership and shared law. Pre-Hijrah Arab society was dominated by kinship ties and tribal loyalty, with fragmented authority and no unified legal system.[33]

The depth of this transformation can be appreciated only by recalling how comprehensive the tribal principle had been. In pre-Islamic Arabia the tribe was at once the unit of identity, the source of protection, the agent of vengeance, the framework of law, and the horizon of loyalty. A person without a tribe was a person without standing or safety. To propose a community whose primary bond was not descent but shared faith and shared law was therefore not to adjust one institution among many but to challenge the organizing principle of social existence itself. The audacity of the Medinan project lies precisely here: it did not reform the tribal order from within but supplied an alternative basis of belonging alongside and above it.

In Medina, tribal identity was not abolished but subordinated to a broader identity—the ummah. This identity was both normative and political, binding individuals and groups within a shared framework of rights and obligations. In political sociology, this marks the emergence of an early political society where legitimacy and loyalty are based on shared values rather than lineage.[34]

The point that tribal identity was subordinated rather than abolished is crucial and is often lost in idealized accounts. The clans of the Aws and Khazraj did not cease to exist; the Constitution of Medina in fact addresses them by name and preserves many of their internal functions, including responsibility for blood-money within the clan. What changed was the level at which ultimate loyalty and ultimate adjudication were located. The clans remained as components, but they were now components of a larger whole that claimed precedence in matters of common defence, intergroup dispute, and relations with outsiders. This layering—older solidarities retained but encompassed within a new and superordinate one—is the characteristic form of the transition from segmentary society to political community,

and it explains both the achievement and the fragility of the Medinan settlement, since the encompassed loyalties did not disappear and could be reactivated under strain.

The Qur'an affirms this transformation in Surah al-Anfāl (8:72), emphasizing solidarity based on faith and collective commitment rather than tribal affiliation. Similarly, Surah al-Hashr (59:9) highlights the new ethos of social openness and collective belonging in Medina. These principles signify the emergence of a legal-political community rather than a purely religious one. The verses are notable for the social relations they single out for praise: the readiness of the helpers to share their wealth with the emigrants, to prefer others to themselves, to extend protection and standing to those who possessed neither lineage nor property in the oasis. What is being valorized is not piety in the abstract but a concrete reordering of material and social obligation away from kin and toward the covenanted community—the practical content of organic solidarity.

Thus, the Hijrah represents a structural transition that could not have occurred in Mecca due to its rigid tribal hierarchy. Yathrib's fragmented and pluralistic society, however, provided the necessary conditions for such a transformation.[35] The counterfactual is instructive. Had the Prophet remained in Mecca, even with a growing body of adherents, the surrounding structure would have continued to define the limits of the possible: a confident oligarchy, an intact tribal hierarchy, a sanctuary economy with everything to lose. The transformation required not only a message and a leader but a social environment in which the old structure had already loosened its grip. Yathrib supplied that environment. The selection of the destination was, in this sense, a selection of the conditions under which transformation could occur, and it is for this reason that the choice of Yathrib must be read as strategic rather than incidental.

Contestation, Negotiation, and the Limits of Integration

The account offered so far risks presenting the Medinan order as more harmonious than it was, and a more critical reading must acknowledge that integration in Yathrib was contested, incomplete, and frequently coercive. The political order established after the Hijrah did not eliminate older loyalties so much as overlay them, and the resulting community remained internally divided. The presence of those the sources describe as *munafiqun* (the "hypocrites"), associated with figures such as 'Abd Allah ibn Ubayy, indicates an internal opposition that resented the displacement of established local leadership. Read sociologically, this opposition reflects the predictable resistance of pre-existing elites to a newcomer whose authority threatened their own, rather than a marginal moral failing.

The figure of Ibn Ubayy is in this respect not an anomaly but an illustration of the general logic of the transition. He is reported to have been on the verge of recognized paramountcy in Yathrib before the Prophet's arrival, a man whose path to local leadership was foreclosed precisely by the integrative solution the rest of the oasis embraced. His subsequent opposition is exactly what a structural account would predict: the same conferral of authority on an external arbiter that relieved the warring lineages threatened the one local figure who stood to gain from continued fragmentation. To read his "hypocrisy" as a defect of character is to miss the political sociology of the situation, in which his resistance expresses the interest of a displaced elite rather than a private vice.

The relationship between the nascent Muslim polity and the Jewish tribes of Medina—Banu Qaynuqa', Banu Nadir, and Banu Qurayzah—illustrates these limits most sharply. Although the Constitution of Medina initially incorporated these groups into a single political community with mutual defensive obligations, the arrangement proved unstable, and successive conflicts led to the expulsion of Banu Qaynuqa' and Banu Nadir and the violent fate of Banu Qurayzah. Whatever the contested details preserved in the sources, these episodes demonstrate that the integration achieved was partial and conditional, sustained as much by shifting balances of power and the threat of force as by consensual agreement. A socio-political analysis must therefore treat the Constitution of Medina not as a finished social contract but as a provisional and renegotiated settlement among unequal parties.

This is the point at which the Tillyan emphasis on coercion becomes indispensable as a corrective to an over-consensual reading. Durable political orders are built not only by agreement but by the capacity to organize force and to determine who may legitimately exercise it, and the trajectory of the Jewish tribes in Medina traces the consolidation of that capacity in the hands of the new polity. To acknowledge this is not to pronounce on the justice of particular episodes, which the contested sources are poorly placed to adjudicate, but to insist that the analysis remain realistic about the means by which the Medinan order was actually secured. A community that began as a compact among plural groups did not remain a compact among equals; the balance of power shifted, the terms were renegotiated under duress, and integration proved to have limits enforced ultimately by coercion as well as by consent.

Recognising these tensions strengthens rather than weakens the article's central argument. The Prophet's leadership is better understood as the work of a skilled political actor managing competing interests—balancing Muhajirun and Ansar, neutralizing internal rivals, and negotiating with and at times confronting the Jewish tribes—than as the frictionless realization of an ideal. Analyzing the Hijrah as a

process of contested authority-building, complete with resistance and the exercise of power, renders the account more historically credible and more analytically useful than a purely normative narrative of unity. An origin story without friction explains nothing, because it presents the outcome as inevitable; an account that restores the friction can explain how a particular outcome was achieved against resistance, at a cost, and within limits, and it is such an account that this study has sought to provide.

Reinterpreting Early Islamic State Formation: A Socio-Political Perspective

The findings demonstrate that the Hijrah to Yathrib was not merely a response to persecution in Mecca but a strategic socio-political decision shaped by the structural conditions of the destination society. Yathrib's fragmented tribal structure, crisis of political legitimacy, religious pluralism, and the political commitment established through the Pledges of 'Aqabah collectively created favourable conditions for the emergence of a new political order.[36] Rather than functioning merely as the backdrop of the Hijrah, Yathrib actively shaped the institutionalization of the early Muslim community.

These findings carry important socio-political implications for understanding the formation of the early Islamic polity. They suggest that the emergence of political authority in Medina cannot be explained solely through theological narratives but should also be understood through the interaction between charismatic leadership, social integration, negotiated legitimacy, and institutional development. Weber's concept of charismatic authority explains how the Prophet's leadership was socially recognized and later institutionalized through *bay'ah*, legal norms, and communal governance. Durkheim's theory of social solidarity illuminates the transformation from tribal cohesion toward a broader religious community, while the segmentary and contractual perspectives associated with Crone, Hinds, and political anthropology explain how negotiated commitments enabled cooperation among previously competing groups. Tilly's perspective further demonstrates that durable political order depends not only on consent but also on the organization of coercive capacity. Together, these perspectives provide a coherent explanation for the emergence of the Medinan polity.[37]

From this perspective, Medina is more appropriately understood as a proto-state than a fully developed state. It possessed several essential political characteristics, including recognized leadership, a defined community, legal norms, dispute-resolution mechanisms, and an emerging capacity for collective defence.[38] At the same time, it lacked the bureaucratic institutions and permanent administrative structures characteristic of later states. The concept of a proto-state therefore more

accurately captures Medina's historical position between a segmentary tribal society and a fully institutionalized political order.

This interpretation also challenges the common assumption that religion and politics were inseparable by theological necessity in early Islam. Instead, the Medinan experience suggests that their institutional integration emerged from concrete historical circumstances. Religious leadership acquired political authority because Yathrib required an actor capable of mediating conflict, establishing legal order, and integrating diverse communities. The relationship between religion and politics should therefore be understood as the product of historical negotiation rather than an immutable political doctrine.

The study's principal contribution is to shift analytical attention from the external pressures experienced in Mecca toward the internal socio-political readiness of Yathrib itself. The Hijrah is interpreted as the convergence of the Islamic mission with the structural opportunities offered by the receiving society.[39] By positioning Yathrib as an active social agent rather than a passive destination, this study introduces a socio-political spatial interpretation that complements prevailing theological and descriptive accounts of the Hijrah. It demonstrates that the institutional success of the Prophet's leadership depended not only on religious authority but also on the socio-political conditions that enabled Islamic values to be translated into legal and political institutions.[40]

More broadly, these findings contribute to contemporary discussions of political legitimacy, state formation, and conflict resolution. The Medinan experience illustrates how religion can serve as a normative resource for integrating plural societies experiencing crises of legitimacy without reducing political authority to purely theological claims. In this respect, the Hijrah represents both a religious migration and a strategic process of socio-political transformation that reshaped a fragmented society into an organized political community.[41]

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Prophet’s Hijrah to Yathrib cannot be adequately understood merely as a theological response to persecution or as a defensive migration. Rather, it constituted a strategic socio-political decision shaped by the structural characteristics of Yathrib itself. The city’s fragmented tribal order, crisis of political legitimacy, ethnic and religious plurality, and absence of a stable supra-tribal authority created favourable conditions for the emergence of a new political community under the Prophet’s leadership. In this context, the success of the Hijrah was not determined solely by the religious message it carried, but equally by the socio-political configuration of the destination that made institutional transformation possible.

The analysis further shows that the formation of the Medinan polity resulted from the interaction between charismatic leadership, negotiated legitimacy, and institutional innovation. The Pledges of ʿAqabah and the Constitution of Medina represented mechanisms through which tribal loyalties were gradually reconfigured into a broader political community founded upon shared rights, obligations, and legal commitments. Nevertheless, the Medinan experience also reveals that political integration was neither complete nor free from contestation. Internal opposition, negotiations with competing groups, and conflicts involving the Jewish tribes demonstrate that the consolidation of the new order depended not only upon collective consent but also upon changing relations of power and, at certain moments, the exercise of coercive authority. The emergence of the early Islamic polity should therefore be understood as a negotiated and contested process rather than as a linear or idealized political transformation.

This article contributes to Hijrah studies by shifting the analytical focus from predominantly theological and descriptive interpretations toward a socio-political spatial analysis of Yathrib. Unlike previous studies that primarily explain the Hijrah through persecution narratives or religious obligation, this study argues that the socio-political structure of Yathrib functioned as an active historical variable in the establishment of the first Islamic political order. By integrating classical Islamic historiography with theories of political legitimacy, social integration, and proto-state formation, the article offers a broader conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between religion, political authority, and social transformation in early Islam.

Beyond its historical significance, the findings also contribute to contemporary discussions on religion and politics by illustrating that durable political integration within plural societies depends upon the construction of legitimate institutions, negotiated consensus, and inclusive legal frameworks rather than the dominance of a single social or religious group. At the same time, the Medinan experience reminds us that such political settlements remain historically contingent, continuously negotiated, and vulnerable to changing configurations of power.

Future research may extend this perspective through comparative analyses between Medina and other processes of early state formation in Late Antiquity, as well as through closer source-critical and socio-legal examinations of the Constitution of Medina. Such approaches would further enrich our understanding of how religious movements evolve into enduring political communities and how sacred authority becomes institutionalized within complex social structures.

Endnotes

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