

The Structure of Obligatory Command (Kutiba) in QS. Al-Baqarah: A Thematic Tafsir and Islamic Governance Perspective

Umar Choeroni^{1*}

¹ Faculty of Al Qur'anic Studies and Tafsir, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Surakarta, Indonesia

*Email: g108250007@student.ums.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines the structure of obligatory commands in the Qur'an through a thematic tafsir (tafsīr maudhu'ī) analysis of the term kutiba in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 178–179 and [2]: 183 - 184. Using qualitative library research, this article analyzes classical and contemporary exegetical sources to identify the normative pattern through which the Qur'an formulates binding obligations. The findings reveal five structural elements of Qur'anic obligation: determination of the subject, explicit formulation of obligation, specification of mandated acts, procedural guidance, and teleological orientation toward taqwā. By integrating tafsīr-uṣūl al-fiqh analysis with Islamic governance studies, this research argues that Qur'anic legal commands function not only as religious prescriptions but also as normative models for ethical governance, emphasizing legitimacy, accountability, and compliance. This hybrid perspective contributes to broader discussions on Islamic normative frameworks in both legal and governance contexts.

Keywords: kutiba, thematic tafsir, obligatory command, Islamic governance, QS Al-Baqarah

Introduction

This research employs qualitative library-based methodology to examine the Qur'anic formulation of obligatory commands through the use of the term kutiba in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 178–179 and [2]: 183 - 184.¹ The thematic tafsir (tafsīr maudhu'ī) approach is utilized to collect, analyze, and synthesize Qur'anic verses that employ kutiba as a marker of legal obligation. This method allows for a systematic understanding of the Qur'an's normative communication strategy.

Primary data sources include the Qur'an and authoritative classical and contemporary exegetical works, such as those of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Ibn 'Āshūr.² Data analysis proceeds through linguistic examination, exegetical contextualization, and thematic synthesis.

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to move beyond a purely legalistic reading of Qur'anic obligation by highlighting its structural, pedagogical, and governance-related dimensions. Understanding how obligations are framed in the Qur'an provides insights into normative legitimacy, compliance mechanisms, and ethical governance within Islamic thought.³

The concept of kutiba in the qur-an

Linguistically, the term kutiba derives from kataba, meaning “to write” or “to prescribe.” In Qur'anic legal discourse, kutiba signifies a binding obligation rather than a moral recommendation.⁴ Al-Zamakhsharī notes that the passive construction of kutiba indicates a fixed legal determination that transcends human discretion.⁵ This grammatical choice underscores the authoritative and non-negotiable nature of the command.

Within uṣūl al-fiqh, kutiba is consistently interpreted as denoting wujūb (obligation).⁶ The semantic association with “written law” conveys permanence, legal certainty, and normative authority. Consequently, the use of kutiba establishes clarity regarding the legal status of the command, preventing ambiguity in interpretation and implementation.

Analysis of QS Al baqarah [2]: 178–179 and [2]: 183-184.

QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 178–179 prescribes qīṣāṣ as a mechanism for safeguarding life and ensuring social justice.⁷ The verses articulate not only the obligation itself but also procedural principles such as proportionality, the possibility of pardon, and the ethical execution of diyah.⁸ These elements reflect a balance between justice and mercy within Islamic legal governance.⁹

QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 183-184 mandates fasting (ṣiyām) as a means of cultivating individual taqwā.¹⁰ Unlike qīṣāṣ, which operates within a communal legal framework, ṣiyām emphasizes personal discipline and moral consciousness.¹¹ Nevertheless, both commands share a common teleological orientation toward taqwā, indicating the Qur'an's integrated vision of individual and collective righteousness.

Structure of obligatory commands in the qur-an

Thematic analysis of the selected verses reveals five core elements in the Qur'anic structure of obligation.

First, the determination of the subject through the address “yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū” limits the command to believers who recognize divine authority.¹² Al-Ṭabarī emphasizes that this address signifies intentional targeting of morally responsible agents, while Ibn ‘Āshūr highlights its pedagogical role in preparing recipients psychologically and spiritually.¹³

Second, the explicit formulation of obligation through kutiba ‘alaykum establishes the binding legal status of the command. The passive form reinforces its finality and authoritative origin, ensuring normative clarity and compliance.¹⁴

Third, the specification of mandated acts—qīṣāṣ and ṣiyām—defines the scope of obligation. Explicit identification prevents misinterpretation and aligns with the uṣūl principle that legal responsibility requires clarity of action.¹⁵

Fourth, procedural guidance accompanies the obligation. In qīṣāṣ, this includes mechanisms of enforcement and ethical restraint; in ṣiyām, further verses elaborate technical regulations and exemptions.¹⁶ Such procedural clarity reflects principles of good governance, including transparency and operational guidance.¹⁷

Fifth, the teleological orientation toward taqwā situates obligation within an ethical framework. Fasting primarily fosters personal taqwā, while qīṣāṣ promotes communal taqwā through justice and social order.¹⁸ This dual orientation illustrates the Qur'an's comprehensive approach to moral governance.¹⁹

Implications for Islamic governance

The Qur'anic structure of obligation offers a normative model for Islamic governance. Clear identification of subjects, explicit legal status, defined responsibilities, procedural mechanisms, and ethical objectives correspond to core governance principles such as legitimacy, accountability, and rule compliance.²⁰

From a governance perspective, commands addressed to believers reflect the importance of legitimacy grounded in shared values. Procedural clarity enhances accountability, while teleological orientation ensures that governance remains ethically driven rather than merely regulatory.²¹ Thus, kutiba-based obligations can be understood as paradigmatic frameworks for managing responsibility within Islamic institutional and social systems.²²

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that Qur'anic obligatory commands are conveyed through a systematic and multidimensional structure. Through thematic tafsir of QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 178–179 and [2]: 183-184, five essential elements of obligation have been identified. Integrating tafsir–uṣūl al-fiqh analysis with Islamic governance studies reveals that Qur'anic commands function not only as religious laws but also as normative models for ethical and accountable governance. This hybrid approach enriches contemporary discourse on Islamic legal theory and governance ethics, particularly within academic forums such as ICIMS.

Footnotes

1. QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 178–179 and [2]: 183.
2. Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi‘ al-Bayān; Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm; al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmi‘ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān; al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb; Ibn ‘Āshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr.
3. Wael B. Hallaq, The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law.
4. Ibn Fāris, Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah.
5. Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf.
6. Al-Juwaynī, al-Burhān fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh.
7. QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 178.
8. Al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmi‘ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān.
9. Mohammad Hashim Kamali, Shari‘ah Law: An Introduction.
10. QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 183.
11. Al-Rāzī, Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb.
12. QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 178, 183.
13. Ibn ‘Āshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr.
14. Al-Amidī, al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām.
15. Al-Ghazālī, al-Mustaṣfā.
16. Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm.
17. OECD, Principles of Corporate Governance.
18. Al-Shāṭibī, al-Muwāfaqāt.
19. Jasser Auda, Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah.
20. UNDP, Governance for Sustainable Development.
21. Mark Bevir, Governance: A Very Short Introduction.
22. Tariq Ramadan, Radical Reform.

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