

## POLITICAL DELEGITIMISATION AND SOCIAL CRISIS DURING THE REIGN OF CALIPH UTHMAN BIN AFFAN RA (24-35 AH/644-656 CE)

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<b>Abstract</b>	<p><i>The reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan (24–35 AH / 644–656 CE) represents a formative period in Islamic history, marked by extensive territorial expansion and the emergence of profound internal tensions within the Muslim community. This article examines the social and political factors that contributed to the development of political delegitimation during the later years of Uthman's rule. Particular attention is given to the role attributed to Abdullah ibn Saba and to the mobilisation of opposition groups in Egypt, Kufa, and Basra. Employing a qualitative historical approach, the study analyses major classical sources, including Tarikh al-Tabari, al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah by Ibn Kathir, and al-Fitnah al-Kubra by Taha Husain, alongside selected modern historiographical interpretations. The analysis demonstrates that the crisis of Uthman's caliphate cannot be explained solely through administrative policies or personal leadership style. Rather, it emerged from an accumulation of socio-political grievances, regional dynamics, tribal competition, and the circulation of ideological narratives that challenged political legitimacy. By situating these factors within their broader historical and social contexts, this study highlights the value of a contextual, multidisciplinary approach to understanding political crisis and authority in early Islamic history.</i></p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Delegitimization, Caliph, Uthman Ibn Affan, Political, Crisis.</i></p>
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### INTRODUCTION

The reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan RA (24–35 AH / 644–656 CE) constitutes a pivotal phase in early Islamic history. This period witnessed unprecedented territorial expansion, extending Islamic rule across North Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, and parts of Central Asia. At the same time, the rapid growth of the Islamic polity introduced new social, political, and administrative challenges that tested the cohesion of the Muslim community.

Unlike the earlier period marked by the relatively centralised and austere governance of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab RA, Uthman's caliphate unfolded within a far more complex and heterogeneous social landscape.

The expansion of Islamic territories brought significant demographic change. New populations entered the Islamic polity, while garrison cities such as Kufa and Basra developed into major social and political centres. These transformations contributed to the

emergence of new social groups whose political expectations differed from those of the early Medinan community. In this context, administrative decisions made by the central authority were increasingly scrutinised and contested, particularly in regions geographically distant from Medina, such as Egypt and Iraq, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Major Early Islamic Cities Relevant to Opposition Movements during the Reign of Caliph Uthman (24–35 AH). Source: Authors' own illustration.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the principal centres of opposition, i.e., Egypt, Kufa, and Basra, were geographically distant from Medina, highlighting the centre–periphery dynamics that shaped political contestation during this period. The spatial distribution of these regions underscores the administrative challenges posed by rapid territorial expansion.

The later years of Uthman's reign were marked by escalating opposition that ultimately culminated in his assassination. Classical historical narratives often associate this crisis with accusations of administrative bias, especially regarding the appointment of officials from the Umayyad clan, as well as with growing unrest in key provincial centres. These developments raise important questions concerning the nature of political authority, legitimacy, and opposition in the formative period of Islamic governance.

This study addresses the following central questions: How did social change, regional dynamics, and political discourse interact to undermine the legitimacy of Caliph Uthman's authority? To what extent can the crisis be explained by structural factors, such as expansion and administrative transformation, and how should the role of individual actors and ideological movements be evaluated within this broader context?

To address these questions, this paper employs the concept of political delegitimation as an analytical framework. Rather than approaching the crisis solely as a moral failure or a sequence of isolated events, political delegitimation is understood here as a process through which authority is gradually contested and undermined through discourse, mobilisation, and collective grievance. This framework allows for an examination of how claims against political legitimacy were articulated, circulated, and amplified within specific social and regional settings.

Within this context, the figure of Abdullah ibn Saba occupies a prominent place in both classical and modern historiography. While accounts differ regarding his historical role and influence, narratives associated with Ibn Saba reflect broader patterns of ideological contestation and the use of religious language to challenge political authority. Analysing these narratives as part of a wider delegitimisation discourse enables a more balanced assessment that avoids reducing the crisis to a single cause or individual actor.

This study aims to analyse the social and political factors that contributed to political delegitimisation during the reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan RA. It focuses on three interrelated dimensions: the structural impact of territorial expansion, the role of regional opposition in Egypt, Kufa, and Basra, and the circulation of ideological narratives that questioned political legitimacy. By integrating classical Islamic sources with modern historiographical interpretations, the study seeks to provide a contextualised and multi-causal explanation of the crisis.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to a more nuanced understanding of early Islamic political history. By situating Uthman's reign within broader processes of social transformation and political contestation, the study offers insights into the dynamics of authority, opposition, and fragmentation that shaped the subsequent development of the Muslim community.

### **METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES**

This study employs a qualitative historical methodology grounded in source-critical and interpretive analysis to examine the processes through which political authority was contested and delegitimised during the reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan RA. Rather than reconstructing events in a purely chronological or descriptive manner, the methodological approach seeks to identify patterns of political discourse, social grievance, and regional mobilisation within their broader socio-historical contexts.

By situating reported events within structural transformations accompanying rapid territorial expansion, the study moves beyond narrative description toward analytical explanation. The research integrates classical Islamic historiography with modern scholarly interpretations and applies systematic criteria for source evaluation, including transmission convergence, historiographical context, and thematic consistency.

This approach allows the study to assess not only what is reported in the sources, but also how and why particular narratives were preserved, emphasised, or contested within evolving intellectual and political traditions.

The overall methodological workflow adopted in this study is illustrated in Figure 2, which outlines the sequential relationship between research design, source selection, evaluative criteria, thematic analysis, and interpretive synthesis. Classical sources are first subjected to comparative and contextual examination before being engaged alongside modern historiographical scholarship.

Only after this layered source assessment is thematic interpretation undertaken, ensuring that analytical conclusions are grounded in critically examined evidence rather than unfiltered narrative transmission. The framework thus clarifies the distinction between descriptive reporting and analytical interpretation, enhancing transparency in the research process.

By visually mapping the interaction between data, evaluation, and interpretation, Figure 2 demonstrates the multi-layered structure of the study's methodology and reinforces its commitment to methodological rigour and scholarly accountability.

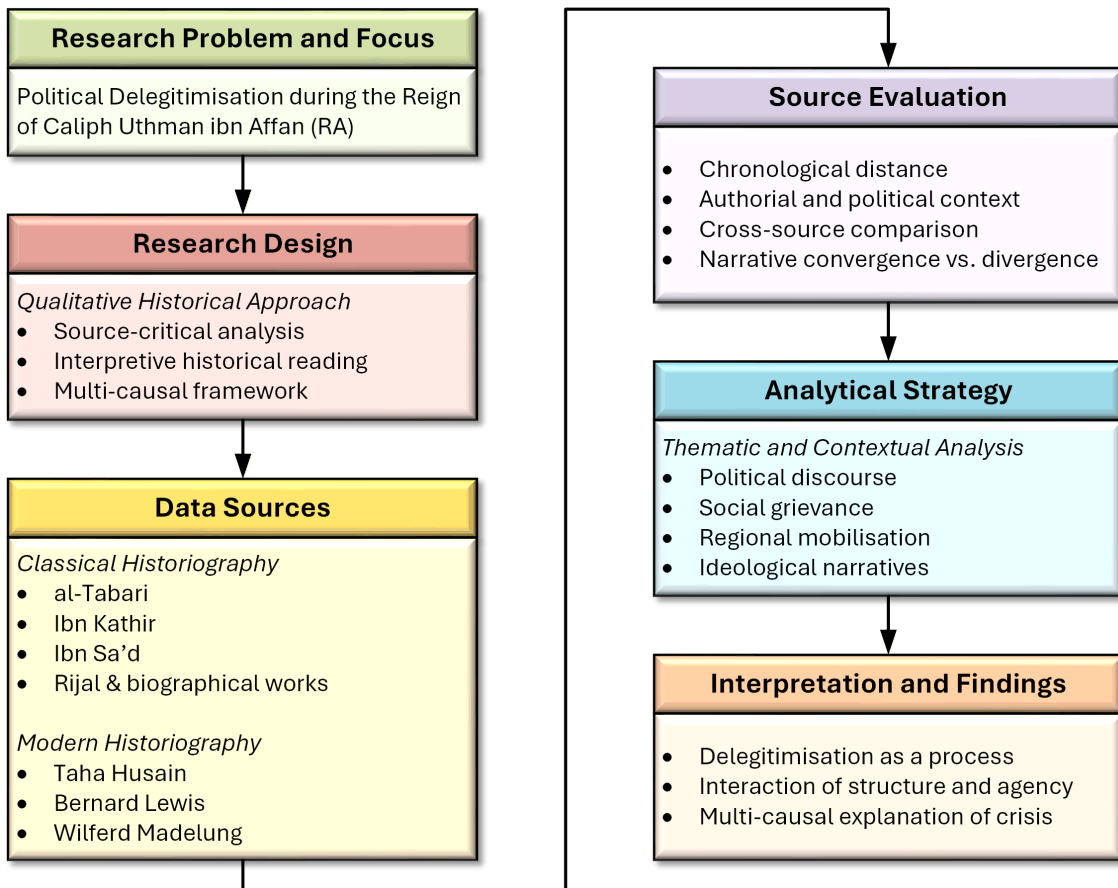


Figure 2. Analytical Framework and Methodological Workflow of the Study.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a qualitative historical research design grounded in source-critical and interpretive analysis. Rather than employing a purely descriptive narration of events, the research seeks to examine the processes through which political authority was contested and delegitimised during the reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan RA. The approach combines contextual historical analysis with thematic interpretation in order to identify patterns of political discourse, social grievance, and regional mobilisation reflected in the available sources.

The study's focus is not limited to reconstructing a chronological account of events. Instead, it aims to analyse how political legitimacy was articulated, challenged, and eroded within a rapidly expanding Islamic polity. This design allows for a multi-causal explanation of the crisis by situating individual actors, administrative decisions, and ideological narratives within broader structural and social transformations.

### PRIMARY SOURCES

The primary sources for this study consist of major classical works of Islamic historiography that document the political and social developments of the first Islamic century. Among the most significant are *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* by Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah* by Ibn Kathir, and *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* by Ibn Sa'd. These works provide detailed narrative accounts of the events surrounding Uthman's caliphate, including regional unrest, administrative practices, and the circumstances leading to his assassination.

These sources were selected based on their comprehensive scope, historiographical influence, and continued relevance in both classical and modern scholarship. While acknowledging that these works were compiled after the events they describe, they remain

indispensable for understanding how early Muslim historians conceptualised political conflict, authority, and communal unity. Where relevant, supplementary reports from biographical and rijal literature are also consulted to contextualise key figures and movements referenced in the historical narratives.

### **MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY**

In addition to classical sources, this study engages with modern historiographical scholarship that critically reassesses early Islamic political history. Particular attention is given to the works of scholars such as Taha Husain, Bernard Lewis, and Wilferd Madelung, whose studies offer divergent interpretations of the political crisis during Uthman's reign and the role attributed to figures such as Abdullah ibn Saba.

Modern scholarship is employed not as a replacement for classical narratives, but as an analytical lens through which those narratives can be re-examined. These studies raise important questions regarding narrative construction, political bias, and the retrospective shaping of historical memory. By engaging with these perspectives, the present study situates itself within ongoing academic debates and avoids treating classical accounts as unproblematic or monolithic representations of historical reality.

### **SOURCE EVALUATION AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGY**

Given the diversity and complexity of the sources, this study employs a comparative and critical approach to evaluating them. Reports are analysed by considering their chronological distance from the events described, the historiographical context of their authors, and the consistency of narratives across multiple sources. When conflicting accounts arise, priority is given to convergence among independent reports rather than to reliance on isolated or anomalous narratives.

To enhance methodological transparency, this study applies three principal criteria to evaluate disputed or controversial reports. First, preference is given to reports that appear across multiple independent historiographical traditions, thereby reducing reliance on isolated transmissions. Second, attention is paid to the chronological proximity of the reporting authority to the events described, with earlier strata of transmission considered analytically significant while still subject to critical scrutiny.

Third, narratives are assessed within their broader socio-political and historiographical contexts, including possible theological, political, or sectarian motivations that may have shaped their preservation or emphasis. Reports that appear primarily in later polemical literature are therefore analysed not solely as factual claims but also as discursive constructions reflecting evolving debates within early Islamic intellectual history.

Rather than attempting to establish definitive judgments on the historical certainty of every reported detail, the analysis focuses on recurring themes and patterns that reflect broader social and political dynamics. Narratives concerning figures such as Abdullah ibn Saba are therefore examined not only in terms of factual claims but also as expressions of ideological contestation, and are evaluated according to the above criteria of transmission multiplicity, chronological proximity, and historiographical context.

This approach allows the study to assess the function of such narratives in processes of political delegitimation, while remaining attentive to the limitations and debates surrounding their historical reliability.

### **HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW**

The political crisis that unfolded during the reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan has long occupied a central place in both classical Islamic historiography and modern academic scholarship. Early Muslim historians such as al-Tabari, Ibn Sa'd, and Ibn Kathir provide extensive narrative accounts of the events leading to the emergence of opposition, regional unrest, and the eventual assassination of the caliph.

These works present the crisis through chronological reporting that integrates political developments, social tensions, and biographical details of key actors. While these

sources differ in emphasis and narrative detail, they collectively reflect an early historiographical effort to explain internal conflict within the Muslim community while preserving broader concerns for communal unity and moral order (Ibn Kathir, 1988; Ibn Sa'd, 1990; al-Tabari, 2012).

Despite their foundational importance, classical narratives are not free from historiographical challenges. They were compiled generations after the events they describe and often rely on transmitted reports shaped by the political, theological, and social concerns of later periods. For this reason, modern scholars emphasise the need for critical engagement with classical texts, including attention to narrative conventions, authorial context, and the selective preservation of reports (Abu Ahmad Muhammad bin Hasan, 2016).

Rather than being treated as transparent records of historical reality, these works are increasingly understood as interpretive constructions that reflect early Muslim attempts to make sense of political fracture and violence within a sacred historical framework. Modern historiography has further complicated the discussion by reassessing key figures and explanatory models found in classical accounts.

Taha Husain's influential study challenges the historicity and explanatory weight commonly attributed to Abdullah ibn Saba, arguing that many reports concerning him may represent retrospective attempts to externalise responsibility for internal conflict (Husain, 2005). From this perspective, Ibn Saba functions less as a historically verifiable instigator and more as a symbolic figure employed to explain the origins of discord within the early community.

Such arguments have prompted broader methodological debates concerning source reliability, political bias, and the construction of causality in early Islamic history. Other modern historians adopt a more cautious and nuanced position. Madelung (1997) and Shaban (1976), while recognising the contested nature of Ibn Saba's role, emphasise that ideological mobilisation and factional competition were nevertheless real features of the period.

They argue that political conflict during Uthman's reign cannot be reduced to either individual manipulation or purely administrative grievances. Instead, it emerged from the interaction of structural expansion, shifting tribal relations, and evolving expectations of political authority. From this perspective, narratives associated with figures such as Ibn Saba are best analysed as part of wider processes of political contestation rather than as isolated causes of crisis.

To complement historical analysis, sociological approaches offer additional insight into the dynamics of conflict and delegitimisation. Lewis Coser's theory of social conflict highlights how struggles over power, status, and the distribution of resources often intensify during periods of rapid social change (Coser, 1961). Applied to the Uthmanic context, this framework helps explain how territorial expansion and administrative transformation generated new social stratifications and competing interests, particularly in provincial centres such as Egypt, Kufa, and Basra.

These tensions created conditions in which political authority could be challenged through both discourse and collective mobilisation. Taken together, existing scholarship demonstrates that the crisis of Uthman's caliphate cannot be adequately explained through a single narrative or methodological lens. Classical sources preserve indispensable historical material, yet require careful contextual reading.

Modern historiography introduces critical perspectives that challenge inherited explanations, while sociological theory illuminates the structural dimensions of political conflict. Building on this body of literature, the present study situates political delegitimisation during Uthman's reign within a multi-causal, interdisciplinary framework, seeking to bridge narrative historiography and analytical interpretation.

## **SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF DELEGITIMISATION**

The reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan coincided with a period of rapid territorial expansion that fundamentally transformed the administrative and social structures of the early Islamic polity. During his twelve-year caliphate, Islamic rule extended across North Africa, Armenia, and parts of Central Asia, bringing diverse populations and regions under a single political authority.

While this expansion consolidated the political reach of the caliphate, it also generated new administrative demands that differed markedly from those faced during earlier, more centralised phases of Islamic governance (al-Tabari, 2012; Subarman, 2015). The management of distant provinces, the appointment of governors, and the coordination of fiscal and military affairs increasingly required the delegation of authority, thereby altering the relationship between the centre and the periphery.

Within this evolving administrative context, governance practices became subject to greater public scrutiny, particularly in newly established or rapidly growing regions. Some of Uthman's administrative decisions, including the replacement of certain governors, were interpreted by segments of the population as favouring members of the Umayyad clan.

Modern scholarship suggests that such perceptions should be understood within the broader framework of state consolidation rather than as isolated policy failures (Samudera et al., 2025). Nevertheless, in an environment characterized by expanding political participation and heightened expectations of accountability, these decisions contributed to debates over the legitimacy and fairness of governance.

Territorial expansion also intensified tribal and regional dynamics within the Muslim community. Garrison cities such as Kufa and Basra developed into important political and social centres, inhabited by diverse tribal groups whose interests did not always align with those of the Medinan elite. These cities fostered new forms of political expression and collective identity, shaped by military service, settlement patterns, and competition for influence (Amirulkamar & Januar, 2021).

The growing prominence of provincial actors meant that political authority was increasingly negotiated rather than simply accepted, particularly in regions geographically distant from the centre of power. Economic factors further contributed to the socio-political context in which delegitimation emerged. The expansion of Islamic territory brought substantial increases in state revenue through taxation and war booty, necessitating systems of redistribution that balanced the needs of the capital with those of the provinces.

Differences in access to resources and perceptions of unequal distribution became sources of tension, especially between the Hijaz and newly incorporated regions such as Egypt and Iraq (Wahyuni et al., 2025). These economic disparities did not automatically result in opposition, but they provided a material backdrop against which political grievances could be articulated and mobilised.

Taken together, these administrative, regional, and economic developments created a complex social environment in which political authority was increasingly contested. Delegitimation during Uthman's reign did not arise from a single cause but from the interaction of structural transformation, regional interests, and evolving expectations of governance. Understanding this socio-political context is essential for analysing how opposition narratives gained traction and how political legitimacy was challenged in the later years of the caliphate.

## **POLITICAL DELEGITIMISATION DISCOURSE AND MOBILISATION**

One of the figures most frequently associated with political delegitimation during the reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan is Abdullah ibn Saba, described in classical Islamic sources as originating in Yemen and having converted from Judaism. According to these accounts, Ibn Saba articulated claims that challenged the legitimacy of Uthman's authority by promoting an elevated conception of Ali ibn Abi Talib's political entitlement and by framing Uthman's leadership as a deviation from prophetic precedent (Ibn Kathir, 1988; al-Shalabi, 2013).

These narratives portray Ibn Saba as an itinerant agitator who travelled across key regions of the caliphate, including the Hijaz, Kufa, Basra, and Egypt, where he disseminated oppositional discourse and mobilised discontent among segments of the population. Classical historiography further suggests that Ibn Saba's activities were particularly influential in Egypt, where he is said to have established networks of followers and encouraged collective opposition to the caliphate (al-Baladhuri, 1996; Ibn Sa'd, 1990).

Central to this discourse was the claim that political authority should remain within the Prophet's family, a position articulated in religious language that resonated with existing grievances over administration, resource distribution, and regional representation. Within this framework, delegitimisation did not operate merely as personal opposition to Uthman but as a broader narrative that redefined the criteria of political legitimacy in the early Islamic polity.

The historical reliability and explanatory weight of Ibn Saba's role, however, have been the subject of sustained scholarly debate. Taha Husain argues that while Ibn Saba may have existed, it is analytically problematic to attribute the complex political conflicts of Uthman's reign to a single individual or external instigator. From this perspective, references to Ibn Saba function as retrospective explanatory devices that shift responsibility away from internal social and political tensions within the Muslim community (Husain, 1985).

Bernard Lewis similarly cautions against literal readings of such accounts, suggesting that narratives surrounding Ibn Saba reflect deeper structural tensions between the Qurayshi elite and newly incorporated groups within the expanding Islamic state (Lewis, 2002). Wilferd Madelung adopts a more differentiated position by acknowledging the presence of groups identified as the Saba'iyya, while emphasising their marginal status within the broader political landscape of the period.

He argues that these groups neither represented the mainstream supporters of Ali ibn Abi Talib nor constituted the primary drivers of opposition against Uthman (Madelung, 1997). This interpretation underscores the importance of distinguishing between ideological discourse, historical agency, and later historiographical representation when assessing the role attributed to Ibn Saba.

From a sociological perspective, Ibn Saba can be analysed as a symbolic representation of political agitation in a society undergoing rapid structural transformation. Periods of social transition often create discursive space for alternative claims to authority, particularly when established norms are perceived as insufficient to address emerging political and economic realities.

The early Islamic community of the mid-seventh century faced precisely such conditions, as expansion altered tribal hierarchies, administrative practices, and expectations of governance. Within this context, delegitimisation discourse functioned as a mechanism through which dissatisfaction was articulated and organised, whether driven by a single actor or diffuse networks of opposition (Sukrisna, 2023).

At the same time, many classical scholars affirmed the historical presence of Ibn Saba and cautioned against uncritical acceptance of his followers' narratives. Works of rijal and heresiographical literature, including those by Ibn Hajar, al-Juzjani, Ibn Qutaibah, and Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, reference Ibn Saba or groups associated with him in discussions of doctrinal deviation and political extremism (Ibn Hajar, 2010; al-Juzjani, 1985; Ibn Qutaibah, 1999; al-Ash'ari, 2006).

These assessments, while shaped by their own theological frameworks, indicate that the memory of Ibn Saba occupied a significant place in early Muslim reflections on political disorder and ideological fragmentation. Taken together, the figure of Abdullah ibn Saba should be understood neither as the sole architect of political delegitimisation nor as a purely fictitious construct.

Rather, he occupies a complex position within Islamic historiography as a narrative focal point through which broader processes of ideological mobilisation, social grievance, and contested authority were articulated. Analysing his role within the wider dynamics of

delegitimisation discourse allows for a more balanced interpretation of the political crisis during Uthman's reign, one that recognises both individual agency and structural transformation.

### **REGIONAL CENTRES OF OPPOSITION: EGYPT, KUFA, AND BASRA**

During the latter years of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan's reign, Egypt, Kufa, and Basra emerged as principal centres of political tension and opposition. Although each region possessed distinct social and political characteristics, they shared common experiences of administrative change, regional grievance, and evolving expectations of political participation. These factors contributed to the development of coordinated opposition to the central authority in Medina and played a decisive role in the broader process of political delegitimisation (Wananda & Mawardi, 2025; al-Tabari, 2012).

Egypt occupied a particularly strategic position within the caliphate, both as a source of revenue and as a key administrative centre. Under the governorship of 'Amr ibn al-'As, the province had maintained relative stability and strong ties to Medina. However, the replacement of 'Amr with 'Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarh, a relative of Uthman, became a focal point for political dissatisfaction among segments of the population.

Classical sources indicate that this transition was interpreted by some as evidence of preferential governance, despite Ibn Abi Sarh's prior administrative experience and earlier appointment under Caliph Umar (Ibn Hisham, 2007; Ibn Khayyat, 1977). Within this context, opposition discourse gained traction by linking administrative grievances to broader claims of injustice and mismanagement, thereby framing resistance as a response to perceived political marginalisation (al-Tabari, 2012).

Kufa, by contrast, functioned as a highly dynamic political and intellectual centre shaped by tribal diversity and competition. Its population comprised tribes from both northern and southern Arabia, whose rivalries often intersected with questions of governance and authority. Political tension in Kufa intensified following changes in governorship, including the replacement of Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas and the subsequent appointment of al-Walid ibn 'Uqbah.

In contrast, classical accounts record al-Walid's earlier service under the first two caliphs and his recognised administrative competence; disputes surrounding his governance became entangled with broader struggles over influence and representation within the city (Ibn Hajar, 2010; al-Tabari, 2012). These disputes did not arise in isolation; they reflected Kufa's broader role as a space in which political claims were openly negotiated and contested.

Basra exhibited similar patterns of tension, though shaped by its own regional circumstances. As a garrison city largely populated by participants in the eastern conquests, Basra developed strong expectations for political recognition and economic reward. Discontent emerged when segments of the population perceived an imbalance between their military contributions and their access to political authority.

The prominence of Qurayshi elites within the administrative structure, including figures such as 'Abdullah ibn 'Amir al-Kurayyiz, became a focal point for regional grievance (Qutaibah, 1981; al-Athir, 2013). At the same time, classical sources attest to Ibn 'Amir's significant role in territorial expansion and provincial development, highlighting the complexity of local responses to governance rather than a uniform opposition narrative (Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, 2019).

Although opposition in Egypt, Kufa, and Basra developed within distinct local contexts, communication and coordination between these regions gradually intensified. Groups from these centres eventually converged in Medina in 35 AH, initially presenting their actions as a political petition to address grievances. The escalation of events that followed, culminating in the siege of Uthman's residence and his assassination, marked a critical rupture in early Islamic political history (Maimun, 2023).

This convergence illustrates how regional discontent, when combined with delegitimising discourse and weakened mechanisms of mediation, transformed local

grievances into a systemic crisis that profoundly affected the unity of the Muslim community.

### **CONSEQUENCES OF POLITICAL DELEGITIMISATION: HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES**

The political delegitimation that culminated in the assassination of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan cannot be understood solely as a discrete political conflict or as a struggle among elite actors. Rather, it represented the outcome of cumulative social transformations that accompanied the rapid expansion of the early Islamic polity. During Uthman's reign, the Muslim community was undergoing a transition from a relatively cohesive religious society centred in Medina to a vast and administratively complex political order encompassing diverse regions, populations, and interests (Dalimunthe, 2024; al-Tabari, 2012).

This structural transformation reshaped expectations of authority and intensified pressures on existing mechanisms of political legitimacy. From a historical perspective, Uthman ibn Affan is consistently portrayed in classical sources as a leader characterised by restraint, generosity, and a preference for conciliation. While such qualities had contributed to stability in earlier contexts, they were increasingly perceived by segments of the population as insufficient in addressing mounting regional grievances and political unrest.

Sociological theories of conflict suggest that periods of rapid social change often expose imbalances between central authority and peripheral actors, thereby generating tensions that can undermine political legitimacy (Coser, 1961). During the later phase of Uthman's caliphate, territorial expansion widened the gap between the political centre in Medina and the provincial regions, reducing the effectiveness of traditional forms of mediation and accountability.

The consequences of delegitimation were not confined to political institutions but extended into the religious and social fabric of the Muslim community. Earlier caliphal leadership had been marked by a strong fusion of moral authority and political firmness, particularly in regulating familial and tribal interests. During Uthman's reign, greater emphasis on compassion and kinship solidarity coincided with heightened sensitivity to issues of fairness and public accountability.

Accusations directed against Uthman, including criticism of his administrative decisions and even of religious practices such as the additional call to prayer on Fridays, reflect the extent to which political authority had become subject to public contestation (al-Bukhari, 2001; Ibn Kathir, 1988). These developments indicate a shift in the religious orientation of political critique, whereby acts previously understood as legitimate exercises of authority were reinterpreted through the lens of suspicion and delegitimation.

The assassination of Uthman had far-reaching implications for the unity of the Muslim community. It marked the erosion of the normative consensus that had underpinned the Rashidun caliphate and set a precedent for resolving political disputes through coercion rather than consultation. Subsequent conflicts during the caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Talib and beyond illustrate how the collapse of political legitimacy at the centre contributed to enduring fragmentation along political and theological lines (Alfarizi, 2021; Murad, 2012). In this sense, delegitimation functioned not merely as a rhetorical challenge to authority, but as a catalyst for structural disintegration.

### **NORMATIVE-THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS IN CLASSICAL ISLAMIC THOUGHT**

The following discussion shifts from historical analysis to normative reflection as preserved within the Islamic intellectual tradition. While the preceding analysis has examined structural, political, and sociological dimensions of delegitimation, classical Muslim scholars also interpreted these events within a moral and theological framework grounded in Qur'anic and Prophetic guidance.

From a socio-religious perspective, the events surrounding Uthman's death also shaped Muslim reflections on internal conflict and moral responsibility. Classical scholars frequently emphasised that internal discord posed a greater threat to the community than

external opposition, a view grounded in prophetic traditions warning of times when truth and falsehood would become difficult to distinguish (Amhazun & Rasyid, 1999).

The narrative memory of Uthman's assassination thus served both as a historical explanation for subsequent political turmoil and as a moral framework for cautioning against unchecked political agitation and ideological manipulation (Lubis, 2017). Within this tradition of moral reflection, poetic and literary expressions played a significant role in shaping communal memory. A well-known poem attributed to al-Hasan ibn Ali RA captures the emotional and ethical response to Uthman's assassination and reflects the enduring perception of the event as a profound moral rupture:

*What do you desire from my fellow believers?  
May Allah's hand bless his wrinkled, dry skin.  
You have killed a beloved of Allah in his own home,  
Indeed, you have committed evil and tyranny.*

*Have you not kept your covenant with Allah?  
Have you not fulfilled your promise to Muhammad, peace be upon him?  
Is there none among you who has ever suffered a misfortune,  
That every event you use to fulfil your promise?*

*Woe to all those who conspire in evil!  
Their lives will never know peace after killing the righteous Uthman.*

Placed within a historical framework, such expressions illustrate how the consequences of political delegitimation extended beyond institutional breakdown, shaping ethical discourse, collective memory, and enduring debates on authority, justice, and unity within Islam.

## **DISCUSSION**

The analysis of political delegitimation during the reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan demonstrates that the crisis was neither an inevitable outcome of administrative change nor the product of a single conspiratorial actor. Rather, it emerged from the interaction among rapid socio-political transformation, regional grievances, and the circulation of delegitimising discourse, which gradually eroded confidence in central authority.

This finding aligns with broader theories of political legitimacy, which emphasise that authority weakens when institutional expansion outpaces mechanisms of communication, accountability, and consensus-building. From a structural perspective, the expansion of the Islamic polity created new political realities that differed significantly from those of the early Medinan community.

While the preceding argument has focused on historical causation and socio-political dynamics, Islamic scripture also provides a normative ethical framework through which governance and justice are understood within the Muslim tradition. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasises justice and balance as foundational principles of governance. Allah Taala says:

﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ ۗ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴾

Which means, "Indeed, Allāh orders justice and good conduct and giving [help] to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded" (al-Quran. al-Nahl: 90).

As the caliphate expanded geographically and demographically, the practical application of justice required new administrative forms that were not always clearly

understood or uniformly accepted across regions. In this context, perceptions of inequality, rather than demonstrable injustice alone, became central to political contestation.

The delegitimisation of Uthman's authority was further intensified by the transformation of political criticism into moral accusation. Administrative decisions, including appointments and fiscal distribution, were increasingly framed as ethical deviations rather than policy choices made within an evolving imperial structure. This shift from procedural critique to moral indictment reflects a broader discursive transformation in which opposition movements sought legitimacy by invoking religious symbolism and claims of normative purity.

Such dynamics are consistent with sociological interpretations of conflict in transitional societies, where ideological narratives often crystallise diffuse grievances into mobilising frameworks. The figure of Abdullah ibn Saba must be understood within this discursive environment. Whether viewed as a historical individual with limited influence or as a symbolic construct amplified by later historiography, the narratives associated with Ibn Saba illustrate how ideological language was deployed to challenge political legitimacy.

Importantly, this study supports the view that such narratives gained traction not solely because of their intrinsic persuasiveness, but because they resonated with existing regional dissatisfaction and uncertainty. In this sense, delegitimisation was a collective process rather than the achievement of a single agitator. The Qur'an warns explicitly against the social consequences of unverified accusations and the spread of destabilising information. Allah Taala says:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْحَبُوا عَلٰى مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ﴾

Which means, "O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful" (al-Quran. Al-Hujurat: 6).

This verse provides a normative framework for understanding how failure to practise *tabayyūn* (verification) contributed to the escalation of political tension and collective misjudgement during Uthman's reign. Prophetic teachings similarly emphasise the danger of internal discord and the sanctity of communal unity. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ warned:

{ لَا تَرْجِعُوا بَعْدِي كُفَّارًا يَضْرِبُ بَعْضُكُمْ رِقَابَ بَعْضٍ }

Which means, "Do not return after me as disbelievers, striking the necks of one another" (Hadis. Al-Bukhariyy-Muslim).

While the hadith addresses the moral gravity of internal violence, its relevance here lies in highlighting how unchecked political delegitimisation can transform disagreement into an irreversible rupture. The assassination of Uthman thus represents not merely the fall of a ruler, but the collapse of a shared political ethic grounded in restraint, consultation, and mutual trust.

Its consequences extended beyond the immediate crisis, shaping enduring patterns of political fragmentation and theological divergence within the Muslim community. By situating these developments within their socio-political and discursive contexts, this study underscores the necessity of analysing early Islamic conflicts through multi-causal and interdisciplinary lenses rather than reductive or moralising explanations.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that political delegitimisation during the reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan constituted a decisive turning point in early Islamic history, arising not primarily from administrative policy failures but from the cumulative effects of rapid territorial expansion, socio-economic transformation, regional grievance, and the strategic use of delegitimising discourse that undermined political authority.

The role attributed to Abdullah ibn Saba, whether understood as a historical actor or as a symbolic representation of ideological mobilisation, reflects broader dynamics of political agitation rather than a singular causal explanation. Conflicts in Egypt, Kufa, and Basra reveal how centre-periphery tensions and communication constraints facilitated the escalation of dissent into collective action, culminating in the assassination of the caliph and the fragmentation of communal unity.

From a moral and religious perspective, these events reaffirm the central Islamic principles of justice, unity, *ḥusn al-ẓann*, and *tabayyūn* as safeguards against internal discord. This study contributes to Islamic historiography by clarifying the interrelationship among power, religion, and society in the formative period of the caliphate. Future research is recommended to incorporate non-Arab and local narratives to further enrich the understanding of early Islamic socio-political dynamics.

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