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Journal Homepage : <https://www.journal.unrika.ac.id/index.php/jurnaltriaspolitika>**STATE IN THEOCRACY PERSPECTIVE: COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CALIPHATE AND VATICAN CHURCH GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM****Khairunnas¹, Maudy Noor Fadhlia^{2*}**¹ Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Universitas Sriwijaya, Indonesia² Department of International Relations, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Universitas Sriwijaya, Indonesia

Abstract : *This paper presents a rigorous comparative study of the Islamic Caliphate and the Vatican City State, which operates under the governance of the Roman Catholic Church. Both institutions are anchored in authoritative theological doctrine, yet their historical evolution, mechanisms of legitimation, and global reception have unfolded in sharply contrasting manners. The Caliphate, conceived as the apex of Islamic authority uniting political and spiritual oversight, underwent a sequence of crises, culminating in the formal abolition in 1924, resulting in an enduring contest over its contemporary significance. The Vatican, by contrast, has displayed remarkable durability, its papal leadership securing a distinctive role in secular diplomacy and international governance, sustained by a coherent apparatus that transcends the territorial confines. The core finding is that the Vatican's enduring stability stems from its successful transformation of theological mandate into widely recognized diplomatic legitimacy and transnational soft power. This contrasts with the Caliphate's decline, which was accelerated by its structural entanglement with territorial governance and military power, leading to perceptions of it as an anachronism. This study contributes a novel cross-civilizational analytical template, treating both entities as theocratic formations. It compares their historical processes, modes of theological authority, and patterns of political reception within their respective polities. The principal innovation resides in this comparative frame, which illuminates how religion is mobilized as institutional power and addresses the contrasting degrees of global endorsement each system receives. Employing a qualitative, descriptive-analytical framework grounded in a multiple case study methodology, this inquiry seeks to advance religious political theory by unraveling the nuanced interplay between religious institutions and the apparatus of the state.*

Keywords : *theocracy; caliphate; vatican; comparative politics; religious legitimacy.*

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**INTRODUCTION**

The genesis of the modern state continues to inspire contrasting interpretations within political theory, notably the contractual and the theological models. According to the former, the state emerges when individuals collectively sanction a governing apparatus to translate their pre-political wishes for security and justice into institutional form. Thinkers like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau articulated variants of this model, each converging on the conclusion that political legitimacy derives from the tacit or explicit willingness of the governed to internalize the terms of a reciprocal agreement (Doris & Sitohang, 2023). In marked opposition, theological traditions posit that the state incarnates an order ordained by the divine, charged with the guardianship of transcendent moral norms. Under this rubric, the sovereign's authority is not only political but also sacramental, linking territorial power with the maintenance of

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sacred values and thus complicating the boundary between governance and religious obligation (Handoyo & Supriyanto, 2023). The sustained existence of theocratic systems compels contemporary political theory to engage with these alternative sources of authority, moving beyond strictly rational-legal and charismatic authority to address traditional/sacral legitimacy and its implications in a post-secular global order.

Theology, understood as disciplined reasoning about revelation and inherited religious wisdom, contributes significantly to the architectural design of political order in diverse civilizations (Ramadhan et al., 2023). Within this framework, the moral imperatives articulated by various faiths are internalised not merely as guiding principles but as the seedbed from which laws and civic institutions germinate. Theocratic regimes illustrate this dynamic by elevating religious tenets into the highest juridical norm, thereby subordinating political choices to exegetical authority (Tlonaen & Saingo, 2023). Yet the process by which sacerdotal principles are interwoven with civil governance remains sensitive to the particular social, historical, and confessional imaginaries that inform each polity (Darajat, 2019). Analyzing these systems necessitates a conceptual engagement with theories of governance, focusing not just on the formal state apparatus, but on the authoritative processes and institutional networks through which divine authority is translated into effective political and social control.

Throughout history, two principal theocratic systems provided the foundation for supranational authority: the Caliphate in the Muslim world and the Papal States in the West under the Vatican. The Caliphate emerged following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, maintaining both the political and spiritual continuity of the Ummah. Successive centuries saw the Caliphate evolve through dynastic transitions (Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman), culminating in the Ottoman Caliphate as the pre-eminent Islamic polity and the epicenter of Islamic authority (Ihsan, 2022; Meriyati, 2018).

The Caliphate system has historically encountered multifaceted opposition. Following its abolition by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1924, the term and institution remain the focal point of contentious theological and political inquiry. The debate, spanning from conservative idealization to progressive dismissal, reveals a societal hesitance that perceives the Caliphate as potentially anachronistic amid globalization and the consolidation of modern state apparatuses (Hamdi et al., 2023; Mubarak & Razak, 2018).

At the same time, the Vatican-centered governmental structure of the Catholic Church continues to flourish. The Pope concurrently heads the Vatican City State, and serves as the highest spiritual authority, exhibiting a remarkable durability and producing a transnational elite (Tawa et al., 2022). This dual-layered polity (known as sovereign entity), illustrates a constitutional model fundamentally different from that of the Caliphate, especially in its capacity to engage global problems (Harianto, 2023). The Vatican's legitimacy is acknowledged even by secular governments, evident in its participation in international diplomacy and its moral advocacy, underscoring its status as a respected theocratic actor (Setyawati & Purbiyati, 2021). Its capacity for constructive interaction with modern pluralism is a striking illustration of the harmonization of spiritual authority with social accountability.

The Caliphate's framework derives legitimacy from the Sharia, its contours delineated in the Quran and the corpus of Hadith. Recent field studies in Indonesia demonstrate that Islamic identity there is negotiable, shaped by shifting Sharia readings that infuse political life; the resultant field of contestation oscillates between radical and moderate agendas, exemplifying how communal identity and statecraft mutually inform one another (Oceania et al., 2024; Rubaidi & Setianingsih, 2021). By contrast, the Vatican, recognized as an international subject, exercises diplomacy, negotiating treaties and concordats while framing its interventions through the lens of moral theology; this posture generates both constraints and openings for the Church to broker wider political participation on the multilateral stage (Iqbal, 2016).

Comparative analysis of the Caliphate and Vatican governance structures is valuable insights yet remains underdeveloped in the scholarly corpus, particularly when framed within contemporary political theory. Present scholarship concentrates predominantly on ideological currents (fundamentalism or secularism) rather than the institutional and sociological contour of the two regimes in parallel. A recent bibliometric investigation confirms this, showing that discourse on the Caliphate (caliph, governance, power) is robust but fragmented from analysis of the Catholic Church or Vatican governance, indicating a lack of dialogical synthesis between these two theocratic templates.

This study introduced a novel cross-civilizational analytical template to fill this lacuna. Empirically, the comparison across two major religious traditions (Islamic and Catholic) is intended to distill institutional factors that account for differing outcomes of political survival. Conceptually, the study aims to enrich religious political theory by moving beyond descriptive history to investigate how two sacral systems operationalize traditional authority within the modern secular-rational political sphere. Therefore, this inquiry seeks to address the following explicit research question which is why has the Vatican been able to survive and thrive as a globally recognized theocratic entity with enduring diplomatic legitimacy, while the Caliphate, despite its profound historical and theological foundations, failed to sustain its institutional form and faces widespread contestation regarding its contemporary relevance.

In contrast, inquiries into the governance of the Vatican City-State tend, for the most part, to be situated within the frameworks of ecclesiastical scholarship or the literature of diplomatic relations. As a result, the polity's internal architecture is rarely examined as an operational, enduring theocratic system, leaving a gap in the literature regarding its functional sustainability in the contemporary era.

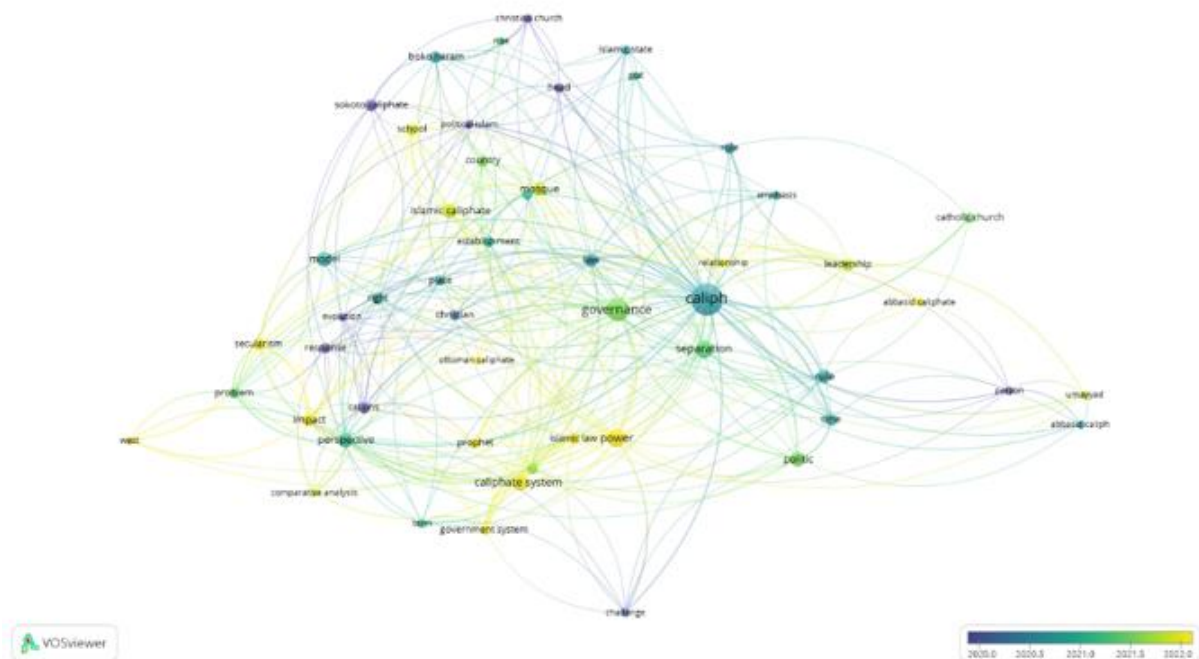


Figure 1. Bibliometric Analysis

Source: Processed using VOSviewer

This study's principal novel contribution is situated in three interacting domains. First, the cross-civilizational methodology enables a nuanced grasp of how religion is mobilized as a resource of authority and legitimacy, revealing both convergent and divergent operational logics. Second, the investigation into differential global acceptance serves as a critical theoretical focus. The Caliphate, frequently framed in contemporary discourse as archaic or exclusivist, encounters considerable skepticism. In contrast, the Vatican is broadly legitimized,

exerting considerable symbolic and political sway, a capacity underpinned by its transnational hierarchies and internal pluralism.

Against this theoretical backdrop, the present study pursues a methodical and wide-ranging comparison of two theocratic regimes whose doctrines are deeply embedded in their respective religious traditions yet have attained dissimilar trajectories of legitimacy and institutional maturation. Employing a comparative political inquiry intertwined with institutional analysis, the investigation seeks to generate original perspectives that advance the debate in religious political theory and to augment the corpus of scholarship concerning the interplay of religion and sovereign authority.

METHODOLOGY

This research deploys a descriptive-analytical qualitative method, operating within a comparative political studies framework. The study's core lies in the juxtaposing of the Islamic Caliphate and the Vatican City State as two primary and historically enduring models of theocracy.

The selection of these two cases is strategically justified to enable cross-civilizational analysis. By comparing models rooted in the Abrahamic traditions of Islam and Catholicism, the methodology moves beyond single-tradition studies to identify fundamental differences in institutional resilience. The comparison is driven by three core indicators: (1) Theological legitimacy which analyzes the doctrinal source and mechanism used to sanction the supreme leader and governmental authority; (2) Institutional architecture and succession which dissects the formal structure of the ruling body and the patterns of leadership transfer; and (3) Global reception and adaptation which examines the degree to which each system translated its internal legitimacy into external political recognition and diplomatic influence, particularly in relation to the modern secular nation-state system.

This juxtaposition illuminates how doctrinal legitimacy undergirds political authority and clarifies the factors (institutional flexibility or entanglement with territorial power) that account for the Caliphate's dissolution versus the Vatican's long-term survival. The research methodology is informed by a multiple case study design that facilitates this analysis. Data collection hinges entirely on secondary sources, triangulating archival chronicles, doctrinal exegesis, ecclesiastical magisterial pronouncements, and peer-reviewed scholarly literature. The analytical apparatus is qualitative and proceeds in three detailed stages, such as periodization and categorization, thematic coding and ideal-typing, as well as synthesized comparison. Through this process, the research aspires to clarify the mutual embedment of religion and politics within these two theocratic modalities and to gauge their continuing relevance for legitimacy in an expanding pluralistic world.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Islamic Caliphate began in 632 CE after Prophet Muhammad's death, led first by the Rightly Guided Caliphs. This initial phase established a principle of communal consensus in leadership (Kennedy, 2022). The system shifted decisively in 661 CE when Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan founded the Umayyad Dynasty, turning the caliphate into a hereditary monarchy centered in Damascus. The subsequent Abbasid Dynasty (750 CE) moved the capital to Baghdad, ushering in the Islamic Golden Age marked by vast intellectual and cultural advancements.

The Caliphate's political power was effectively destroyed by the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258 CE. Though the title survived symbolically, it was absorbed by the Ottoman Dynasty in 1517 CE, making the Ottomans the symbolic and administrative center of the Islamic world for four centuries. The institution was finally and formally abolished by Mustafa

Kemal Ataturk in 1924 CE as part of modern Turkey's secular reforms (Ahmad Akbar et al., 2025).

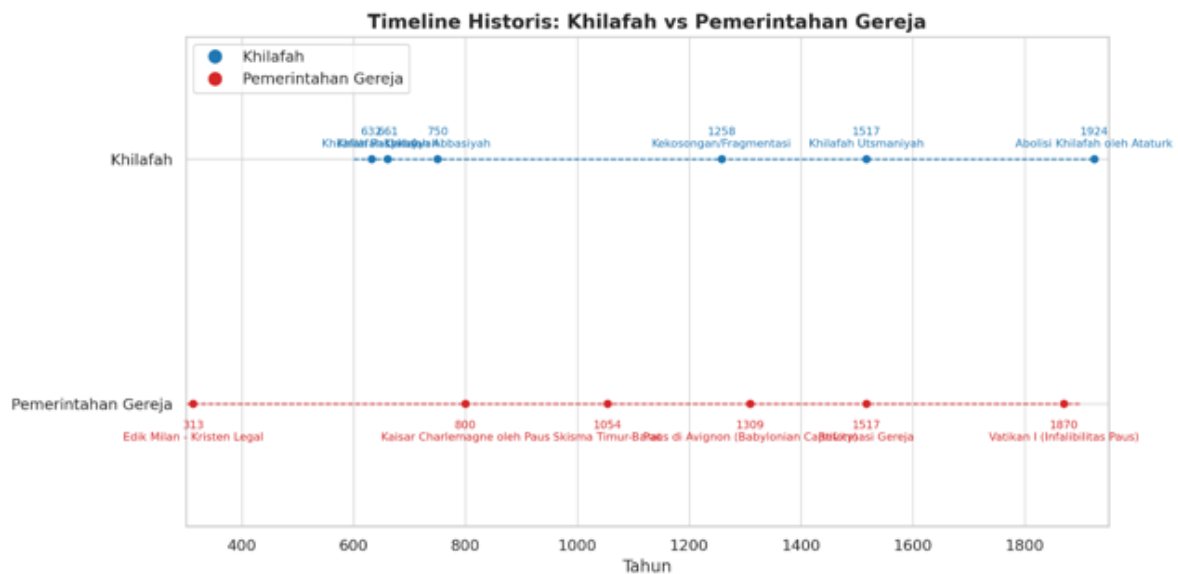


Figure 2. Historical Timeline: Caliphate vs. Vatican City

Source: Processed from different sources

The Catholic Church's political ascent began with the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, which legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire. The Church gained significant temporal influence, culminating in 800 CE when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne, symbolically linking the papacy to dynasty imperial power (Wilson & Djupe, 2020). However, the Church's unity factured with the East-West Schism in 1054 CE.

The papacy faced internal political crises, most notably the Babylonian Captivity (1309 CE), which placed the Pope under French political dominance. External crisis struck in 1517 CE with Martin Luther's Protestant Reformation, which challenged papal supremacy. The Church responded by defining the dogma of Papal Infallibility at the First Vatican Council in 1870 CE (Duffy, 2015).

Both the Caliphate and the Vatican began as spiritual institutions that consolidated temporal power. However, the Caliphate was dissolved, while the Catholic Church continues to thrive as a major supranational spiritual authority, illustrating the complex and contrasting fates of religious political power in history.

Key Characteristics and Institutional Structures of The Caliphate System and Vatican City State

The institution of the Caliphate integrates civil authority with spiritual guardianship in a manner distinctive to Islamic political thought. Historically, the office of the Caliph united the role of sovereign ruler with that of chief religious' leader of the umma, positioning the occupant as both enforcer of law and spiritual pastor. For instance, the period of the Khulafa al-Rashidun witnessed Caliphs such as Abu Bakr and Umar personally directing military campaigns, promulgating Islamic law, leading liturgical prayers, and providing interpretative rulings that informed state policy. This structural conjunction persisted under the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, albeit in the later centuries the hereditary character of rulership tended to overshadow the purely spiritual dimensions of the office (Kennedy, 2022). The Ottoman model consolidated both sultanate and caliphate in a single sovereign, wherein the title of Caliph was wielded to reinforce the sultan's political authority until the institution was formally dissolved in 1924.

The constitutional bedrock of Caliphal governance was Sharia, a legal and ethical system drawn from the Quran and the Hadith corpus. These primary texts generated the moral and legal norms that scholars (ulama) elaborated and integrated into the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. Nevertheless, the reading of Sharia evolved with time and geography, shaped by distinctive political exigencies and ongoing scholarly disputation. The resultant governance thus operated as a dynamic composite of scriptural command and pragmatic administration.

Throughout Islam's first millennium, mechanisms for Caliphal succession evolved in complexity, moving from consensus-based shura (most famously in Abu Bakr's elevation) to hereditary models adopted by successive Umayyad and Abbasid incumbents, who framed their legitimacy in competing interpretations of fiqh. These transformations, while aimed at stabilizing the polity, generated enduring debates regarding the authenticity of authority unmoored from the prophetic-tradition-based ideal of elective leadership. Such debates not only animated juristic discourse but crystallized sectarian identities, most prominently between the Sunni majority and the Shia minority, for whom the question of legitimate succession remained the core determinant of political and ecclesiastical legitimacy (Robinson, 2018).

Geopolitically the Caliphate embodied the doctrinal aspiration of one political and spiritual leadership for the entire ummah, yet the empire's ever-shifting frontiers, from the comparatively compact first-century Caliphate to the disaggregate hegemonies of later Abbasid and Ottoman times, meant that actual political unit and ideological ideal were seldom congruent (Hallaq, 2018). Even as the Abbasid revolution and the later Ottoman polity permitted competing dynasties and local powerbrokers, the ideal of unifying the dar al-Islam under a single Caliph survived as a legitimating trope, invoked in wars of succession and in the continuing vocation of political rhetoric (Kennedy, 2022).

Furthermore, Caliphal rule, despite its centralizing proclivities, historically nurtured a managed pluralism. Multiple schools of fiqh, overlapping but distinct, existed alongside divergent theological currents, generating a flexible legal landscape that permitted local adaptation in matters of governance, taxation, and personal status. Such pluralism, however, was not unqualified; its vitality was shaped by the administrative practices of the current dynasty, the character of rulers, and the pressure of contested frontiers, making tolerance a contingent rather than a permanent feature of the Caliphate's polity.

The Vatican City State constitutes a contemporary politico-spiritual organism governed by the papacy. The person of the Pope simultaneously assumes the office of the highest spiritual authority for the world-wide Catholic Church and the sovereign ruler of the Vatican City State. This dual office is codified by the Lateran Treaty of 1929 and thereby recognized in public international law (Margittay-Mészáros, 2024). It enabled the Pope to exercise jurisdiction over a defined territorial entity and a global religious communion.

The internal government of the Vatican is ordained by Catholic doctrine, the body of canon law, and papal encyclicals. These sources of law produce a framework that regulates the administration of the territory and also informs the Church's global pastoral and diplomatic mission. Canon law, as the formal legislative corpus of the Church, addresses issues of clerical discipline, doctrinal verification, and the governance of ecclesiastical persons and institutions, thereby merging legal and theological categories.

The continuity of the office is assured by the College of Cardinals, which, upon the death or resignation of any Pope, is summoned to a conclave for the purpose of electing the next Pope (Murphy, 2025). This electoral body, acting in secrecy and according to long-standing ecclesiastical custom, guarantees an orderly and internationally acknowledged transfer of the papal authority, thereby safeguarding the institutional coherence and temporal stability of the Church.

The Vatican's authority on the world stage derives predominantly from its spiritual and diplomatic capital rather than from any fixed geographical sovereignty. Operating through the

Holy See, it has established diplomatic ties with more than 180 sovereign states as well as with supranational bodies, and it exploits its claimed moral authority to intervene on humanitarian, ethical, and geopolitical fronts. The Roman Pontiff, regarded as the supreme pastor by an estimated 1.3 billion Catholics, further amplifies this transnational outreach (Pew Research Center, 2020).

The Church's internal pluralism is illustrated by its worldwide hierarchy of bishops and the variegated composition of the College of Cardinals, which mirrors the multinational character of its laity. Yet, with this cultural heterogeneity the Vatican preserves doctrinal uniformity through a clearly delineated central authority and a common theological heritage. Such an arrangement permits a degree of regional expression and adaptation while sustaining an overarching spiritual and administrative coherence (Zagano, 2017).

Table 1. Comparison of Caliphate and Vatican System

Aspect	Caliphate	Vatican City State
Political-Spiritual Authority	Combined, evolving across dynasties	Pope holds both roles
Legal Basis	Sharia (Qur'an + Hadith, via ulama)	Canon law + Fundamental Law + Papal encyclicals
Succession	Varied: election, designation, hereditary	Conclave of Cardinals
Territory vs. Influence	Historically expansive empires	Tiny territory but global moral/diplomatic reach
Pluralism	Multiple jurisprudential schools	Global Church leadership, synodal input

Source: (Ahmad Akbar et al., 2025; Romanko, 2024)

Legitimacy and Acceptance of the Caliphate and the Vatican

Throughout Islamic history, caliphal authority was justified by reference to its supposed continuity with prophetic command. Caliphs were commonly regarded as God's appointed representatives, charged with enforcing the Shari'ah and safeguarding the ummah's unity. This understanding derived from early Islamic doctrine, which contended that sovereignty ultimately resides with God, leaving human rulers legitimate only to the extent that they act under divine mandate and communal assent.

Certain caliphal dynasties, including the Rashidun and Umayyad, gained widespread legitimacy when they were perceived to embody justice and adherence to Islamic precepts. Yet assertions of legitimate authority repeatedly confronted formidable challenges: the civil wars of the Second Fitna, the Shia counter-narrative of loss embodied in the tragedy of Karbala, Abbasid revolts against Umayyad hegemony, and the devastation wrought by Mongol incursions together underscore the fragility of that legitimacy in the face of both internal dissent and external threat (Bunzel, 2015).

In the present day, the institution of the Caliphate is frequently critiqued by Muslim intellectuals for its historical identification with autocratic rule, doctrinal exclusivism, and the outright dismissal of contemporary state systems. Contemporary scholars and theologians contend that the classical model is inoperative within pluralistic, democratic polities. In this view, mainstream Muslim commentary prioritizes the individual's moral and spiritual agency and regards the formal office of caliph as neither a binding obligation nor a practicable governance structure in current reality.

Though widely repudiated, small constituencies and isolated advocates still espouse the idea of a contemporary Caliphate. Such advocacy, however, is almost universally categorized

as peripheral. It commands neither popular consent among Muslims nor endorsement from political authorities and is typically regarded as inconsequential even in established circles of Islamic scholarship.

The Pope's authority derives from the uninterrupted line of bishops purportedly descending from Saint Peter and from the dogma of papal infallibility, formalized in the dogmatic constitution *Pastor Aeternus* during the First Vatican Council of 1870 (Iqbal, 2016). This doctrine maintains that the Pope, when issuing a formal ruling on faith or morals in the capacity of supreme pastor, is preserved from error. Ecclesiastically, the Holy See, the legal person synonymous with the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church, occupies the standing of a sovereign entity in international jurisprudence, notwithstanding its small geographic extent. It maintains formal diplomatic ties with approximately 180 sovereign states and engages with various multilateral institutions.

The Vatican's influence extends beyond diplomatic channels, resting chiefly on the leverage of moral persuasion. By means of encyclicals, third-party mediation in international disputes, and unceasing advocacy for human dignity, the Holy See shapes global discourses on war and peace, economic justice, environmental sustainability, and migratory policy, frequently positioning itself as an impartial moral interlocutor on prominent international platforms.

The postconciliar reforms have permitted the Church to interface with contemporary society without compromising essential dogmas. While disputes regarding the extent of papal infallibility and the distribution of internal authority continue, the Catholic community's readiness to engage on themes of social justice, scientific inquiry, and interreligious dialogue has enlarged its resonance across varied cultural settings.

Cohesion within the Catholic Church is sustained by a hierarchical framework that simultaneously accommodates local particularities. The Roman Pontiff exercises primacy in concert with the College of Cardinals and synodal bodies of bishops, who in turn honor the distinctive traditions of churches. This structural integration provides the Church with a uniform presence throughout the world, thereby fortifying its legitimacy and intellectual consistency.

Table 2. Mechanism of Caliphate and Vatican System

Mechanism	Caliphate	Vatican City State
Theological Legitimacy	Divine mandate, continuation of prophetic authority	Apostolic succession, papal infallibility
Historical Global Acceptance	Varied acceptance; challenged by revolts/invasions	Diplomatic recognition by other states; global observer status
Modern Rejection	Viewed as authoritarian, incompatible with nation-states	Modernizing yet doctrinally stable; embraced in dialogues
Organizational Debate	Minority calls for revival vs. plurality of views	Internal debates handled through synodal structures, maintaining unity

Source: (Ahmad Akbar et al., 2025; Romanko, 2024)

Comparative Analysis: Divergence and Convergence

The comparative study of the Caliphate and the Vatican City State discloses both irreducible differences in their historical trajectories and administrative formats, as well as noteworthy similarities in their governing theocratic doctrines.

Divergence: Territoriality, Adaptability, and Legitimacy

A key axis of difference pertains to the Caliphate's territorial imperative and the Vatican's transnational orientation. While the Caliphate aspired to a comprehensive spiritual suzerainty over the ummah, it depended concretely upon a bounded geographical expanse and the mobilisation of military force to legitimise its temporal jurisdiction. From the early Righteous Caliphs through the expansive Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman empires, the Caliphate's claim to legitimate rule was, in practice, inseparable from its occupation of territory and its control over human and material resources (Ihsan, 2022; Meriyati, 2018). The decline of the Caliphal institution, marked by the military loss of salient territories and its formal abolition in the early 20th century, reveals a model where spiritual and temporal prerogatives were sustained only as long as the physical presence of the state was intact. This structural entanglement with material power rendered the Caliphate susceptible to the geopolitical pressures of the modern nation-state system, ultimately leading to its failure to maintain traditional legitimacy without territorial sovereignty.

By contrast, the Vatican, limited to a territory of less than 0.5 square kilometres, exercises a far-reaching influence that transcends territorial boundaries. Its authority is anchored in a global jurisdiction over a billion Catholics and is sustained by diplomatic networks, doctrinal continuity, and symbolic capital rather than by military or expansive territorial control. The papacy exercises authority that surpasses territorial confines, while the Vatican, constituting the Holy See, possesses diplomatic recognition enabling dialogue with sovereign states worldwide. Its interventions draw upon ethical and spiritual mandate rather than upon control over land (Setyawati & Purbiyati, 2021; Tawa et al., 2022). The phenomenon illustrates institutional resilience on state-centric territoriality, offering a modern variant that diverges in significant respects from the earlier Islamic Caliphate.

A critical point of contrast lies in each polity's relationship with contemporary secular orders. Historically, the Caliphate sought a total harmonization of the political and religious spheres in which the Shari'a was envisioned as the exclusive normative horizon for statecraft and societal conduct (Rubaidi & Setianingsih, 2021). Contemporary discussions regarding the Caliphate's revival often cite its ostensible discord with the nation-state's legal pluralism and democratic principles, which prompts rejection from substantial segments even of the Muslim populace (Hamdi et al., 2023). The Caliphate's conceptual rigidity regarding the fusion of political and sacred spheres ultimately proved ill-suited for external acceptance in a pluralistic world. By contrast, the Holy See, while manifestly a theocratic polity, has successfully negotiated its sovereignty with the imperatives of modern secularism. Its diplomatic network spans secular republics and monarchies alike, it champions the principle of religious freedom, and it enters multilateral forums on peace, justice, and human rights, thereby exercising diplomatic leverage without insisting on the political hegemony over sovereign states (Harianto, 2023; Setyawati & Purbiyati, 2021). This capacity for adaptive engagement with secular frameworks, coupled with the transnational nature of its leadership (Tawa et al., 2022), secured the Vatican a unique form of modern diplomatic legitimacy and political durability, a course that sharply contrasts with the Caliphate's current ideological isolation.

Convergence: Doctrinal Core and Supreme Authority

Notwithstanding the sharply differentiated historical trajectories and contemporary international receptions of the Caliphate and the Vatican, both theocratic models articulate a common doctrinal core. At the outset, each system claims its legitimating authority as a transmission of divine will, identifying its chief ruler as an agent of transcendental mandate. In the Caliphate, this mandate is construed as the unbroken extension of Muhammad's dual mandate of spiritual and temporal rule in the Vatican, its basis rests in the uninterrupted apostolic transmission, with the Pope designated as Vicar of Christ on earth (Ihsan, 2022).

Both polities further fulfil their theocratic claims by drawing upon an explicit corpus of sacred texts and juridical norms, which they regard as binding moral and legal benchmarks. For the Caliphate, the Quran and the Hadith furnish the primary legislative and ethical lexicon for the Vatican, the corpus of Catholic doctrine and the Canon Law constitute the complementary juridical foundation (Iqbal, 2016; Rubaidi & Setianingsih, 2021). Crucially, each model incumbency simultaneously entails spiritual and, to differing degrees, temporal authority, thereby exemplifying the doctrinally prescribed inseparability of religion and state within their respective theocratic configurations. These shared principles confirm their classification as theocratic systems, despite their vast differences in institutional function and global efficacy.

Broader Implications and Theoretical Contributions

This study's comparative analysis of the Caliphate and the Vatican offers significant broader implications for political theory and contemporary global discourse. Our findings move beyond challenging a monolithic understanding of theocracy to identify the institutional variables crucial for the survival and influence of religious governance in the modern world.

The distinct trajectories of the two models hold profound practical relevance for understanding religion-state relations, democracy, and global pluralism. The Vatican presents a case where a sacral system successfully decoupled its spiritual authority from the traditional reliance on large-scale territorial control and military power. This transition allowed the Holy See to transform its theological mandate into widely accepted diplomatic legitimacy and transnational moral authority (Setyawati & Purbiyati, 2021). This model provides a critical data point for debates on governance in a globalized era, demonstrating that religious actors can operate effectively as essential non-state actors in multilateral forums, advocating for universal values like peace and human rights without demanding political subservience from sovereign states (Harianto, 2023).

Conversely, the Caliphate's collapse, rooted in its structural and conceptual entanglement with a vast, centralized, military-supported state, serves as a cautionary institutional example. Its contemporary rearticulation often struggles with acceptance in the context of legal pluralism and democracy precisely because it is perceived as incapable of relinquishing the comprehensive political mandate tied to its historical territorial structure (Hamdi et al., 2023). Therefore, the practical implication is that for traditional religious authority to remain relevant and legitimate in a pluralistic, post-Westphalian order, it requires institutional adaptability and a willingness to operate within, rather than strictly against, secular diplomatic frameworks.

Limitations and Future Research

A primary limitation of this research is its reliance on secondary sources and institutional analysis, focusing heavily on the formal structures and diplomatic histories of the two entities. Consequently, the study does not fully explore the sociological dimensions of legitimacy, such as the grassroots political movements (both for and against the Caliphate) or the lived experiences and dissenting voices within the global Catholic community, which may influence institutional stability. Based on these limitations, future research should pursue the following directions. First comparative study with operational theocracies. Apply the institutional resilience framework to contemporary, operational state models, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran or the State of Israel, to test how religious law and authority interact with national sovereignty and regional geopolitics. Second, analysis of grassroots legitimacy, conduct field studies examining the discursive and political legitimization struggles of Caliphate revivalist movements versus local perceptions of the Vatican's moral authority among lay Catholics and non-Catholics. This would provide necessary qualitative depth regarding the efficacy of theocratic claims on the ground. Third, governance indicator development. Develop a set of

quantitative or qualitative institutional indicators to measure the degree of territorial entanglement versus transnational flexibility in other historical and contemporary religious polities.

CONCLUSION

The comparative study of the Caliphate and the Vatican yields substantial implications for the historiography of theocracy and for the analysis of its current political reverberations. Our research contests any reductionist view of theocracy as a singular model, revealing instead a continuum where ecclesiastical power informs governance, yet manifests through markedly distinct institutional architectures, legitimacy procedures, and degrees of planetary recognition. The Vatican's sustained recognition as a sovereign actor within a secularized international order is set against the Caliphate's episodic expansion, its eventual dissolution, and its present fractious reputation frequently tied to militant excess or historical sidelining. Such a contrast intimates that the viability and durability of a theocratic order in contemporary conditions may correlate less with territorial breadth than with diplomatic dexterity, responsiveness to shifting transnational norms, and the capacity to project moral influence beyond geographically bounded constituencies.

This analysis notably enriches ongoing scholarship regarding the legitimacy of religious governance and the intricate dynamics binding religion and the state. The Vatican's extensive diplomatic recognition and its moral authority, even in predominantly secular polities, exemplify how foundational theological legitimacy can be translated into diplomatic acceptance and subtler forms of statecraft. Such efficacy stands in marked contrast to the contemporary predicament of the Caliphate, which, despite being deeply rooted in Islamic history and doctrine, continues to encounter significant barriers to wide political recognition in the present political landscape. These contrasting trajectories underscore the argument that, although robust internal theological frameworks remain indispensable, the outward environment, including international relations, societal acceptance of pluralism, and the capacity to harmonise religious ideals with the principles of state sovereignty, decisively shapes the longevity and global reception of theocratic governance. The Vatican's enduring authority illustrates the strategic importance of institutional durability, responsive leadership, and a calibrated engagement with secular power. The model thus provides instructive guidance for how religious authority can both contest and cooperate with a plural global order, preserving its legitimacy while expanding its influence.

The study's cross-civilizational design constitutes a significant theoretical advance, addressing a recurring deficiency in political science, where analyses of theocratic regimes frequently remain isolated and context-bound (an observation reinforced by the bibliometric survey presented in the introduction. By systematically contrasting the Islamic Caliphate with the Catholic Vatican, the work deepens the comparative appreciation of religion as a generator of power and a matrix of legitimacy, revealing how contrasting theological predicates can yield dissimilar institutional architectures and varying extents of global political engagement. The tripartite analytic schema) historical dynamics, theological legitimacy, and political acceptance, furnishes a robust heuristic for forthcoming comparative inquiries into religion and state. Situated within this contrastive viewpoint, the research foregrounds the sociological substrate of theocratic orders, disclosing how cultural and institutional contexts mediate the outward shape and political reception of religious rule, and how, importantly, the management of internal pluralism can be reconciled with an ostensible unity of spiritual purpose, a phenomenon particularly evident in the Vatican's global jurisdiction. Consequently, the study enhances the broader theoretical conversation surrounding political theology, illustrating the complex, variegated interplay between confessional allegiance and institutional governance in the present global order.

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