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Reinterpreting Justice in Al-Farabi's Political Philosophy: Relevance to Contemporary Islamic Human Rights Thought

Abstract: This study critically explores Al-Farabi's conception of justice in his political philosophy and evaluates its normative potential and conceptual limitations in the context of contemporary human rights discourse. The central research question investigates the extent to which Al-Farabi's vision of the *al-Madina al-Fadila* (Virtuous City) can serve as a philosophical framework for bridging classical Islamic values with modern human rights principles. Rather than assuming full compatibility, the study interrogates the tension between Al-Farabi's virtue-based, hierarchical model of justice and contemporary demands for equality, intersectional rights, and democratic participation. Employing a qualitative, library-based method and a philosophical hermeneutic approach, the research analyzes key texts—particularly *Ara' Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila* and *Tahsil al-Sa'ada*—alongside contemporary literature on Islamic legal reform and human rights theory. The findings demonstrate that Al-Farabi's emphasis on rational leadership, ethical governance, and communal well-being—while historically bounded—offers interpretive value for rethinking legal reform through *maqasid al-shari'ah* and contextual *ijtihad*. However, the study also underscores the epistemological challenges of adapting metaphysical frameworks to rights-based paradigms. It concludes that Al-Farabi's thought should inspire—not dictate—Islamic legal innovation by contributing ethical and rational principles that remain critically grounded within both Islamic tradition and contemporary socio-legal realities. Academically, this research contributes to the growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship at the intersection of Islamic philosophy, political theory, and human rights, offering a nuanced reappraisal of classical Islamic thought as a dynamic resource for ethical-legal reform in pluralistic modern societies.

Keywords: Al-Farabi, Human Rights, Islamic Civilization, Justice, Political Philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the relevance and applicability of Al-Farabi's political philosophy—particularly his concept of justice—to contemporary debates on Islamic legal reform and human rights.¹ The central aim is to construct a normative-practical framework that bridges classical Islamic jurisprudence with universal rights discourses, using Al-Farabi's ideal of the *al-madina al-fadila* (virtuous city) as a guiding model.² Unlike previous studies that remain largely theoretical or comparative, this research explores how Al-Farabi's principles of rational governance, ethical leadership, and communal welfare can inform legal reform strategies in Muslim-majority societies facing normative tensions between Sharia-based systems and modern human rights frameworks.³

In many contemporary Islamic legal contexts—such as family law disputes over gender equality, freedom of religion, or minority protections—tensions persist⁴ between international human rights norms and conservative interpretations of Islamic law. These frictions often surface in public debates, legislative reforms, and judicial decisions,⁵ as seen in case studies from countries like Tunisia, Indonesia, and Egypt. In such cases, resistance to reform is frequently justified through appeals to religious orthodoxy, while philosophical reinterpretations of justice are dismissed as secular or foreign. This study posits that Al-Farabi's framework offers a third path: a reformist model that remains rooted in Islamic intellectual tradition while embracing ethical rationalism and social justice.

¹ Majid Khadduri, *Maḥmūd Al-Adl Fī Al-Islām* (Damaskus: Dar al-Hasan, 1998), 89.

² Muhammad Mahdi, *Asas Al-Falasifah as-Siyasiyah Fill Al-Islām* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000), 17.

³ Agus Purnomo et al., "Dimensions of Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'Ah and Human Rights in the Constitutional Court's Decision on Marriage Age Difference in Indonesia," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 3 (July 30, 2023): 1397, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i3.13283>.

⁴ Anas Amin Alamsyah, "Menyelaraskan Nilai-Nilai Lokal Dan Global: Perspektif Filsafat Tentang Pendidikan Islam Di Era Globalisasi," *PROGRESSA: Journal of Islamic Religious Instruction* 7, no. 2 (2023): 189–200, <https://doi.org/10.32616/pgr.v7.2.472.189-200>.

⁵ Purnomo et al., "Dimensions of Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'Ah and Human Rights in the Constitutional Court's Decision on Marriage Age Difference in Indonesia."

Al-Farabi's notion of justice ('*adl*') is intimately linked to his broader philosophical project, which emphasizes *sa'ada* (happiness), virtue, and the rational ordering of society.⁶ Justice, in his view, is not merely a legal principle but the outcome of moral education, civic responsibility, and wise leadership.⁷ His ideal of the philosopher-king—who governs through reason and ethical vision—draws from both Platonic thought and Islamic theology, forming a distinctive model of governance that prioritizes the public good.⁸ Within this framework, law and governance must promote human flourishing, which includes both spiritual fulfillment and material justice.⁹ Such a view, if appropriately contextualized, can provide a compelling counterpoint to rigid legal formalism and reactive conservatism in Islamic jurisprudence.

While existing literature has acknowledged the potential of Al-Farabi's ideas in shaping Islamic ethics and politics, few studies have systematically applied his philosophical principles to the challenge of aligning Islamic legal traditions with contested human rights issues. Most contributions focus either on the intellectual underpinnings of his thought or the political barriers to reform.¹⁰ This study distinguishes itself by offering an application-oriented engagement with Al-Farabi's concept of justice, demonstrating its practical relevance through selected contemporary legal dilemmas and reform debates.¹¹ In doing so, it adopts a normative-analytical approach, drawing from both classical sources (e.g., *Ara'*

⁶Jamalul Muttaqin, "Al-Farabi : Politik Sebagai Jalan Kebahagiaan," *An-Nur : Jurnal Studi Islam* 14, no. 2 (2022): 129–144.

⁷Y Sonafist and Henny Yuningsih, "Islamic Law, the State, and Human Rights: The Contestation of Interfaith Marriage Discourse on Social Media in Indonesia," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 22, no. 2 (December 28, 2023): 381, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v22i2.10934>.

⁸Endang Sriani, Farid Hasan, and Sukron Ma'mun, "Violation of Human Right for Collateral Fraud in Sharia Financial Institution Based on Fiduciary Guaranty Law and Rahn Law," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 22, no. 1 (June 15, 2023): 133, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v22i1.9157>.

⁹Fahrudin Ali Sabri et al., "Navigating Stigma and Discrimination: Betrothal Challenges Faced by Descendants of Leprosy in Madura, Indonesia," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 8, no. 2 November (November 9, 2023): 553, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v8i2.6905>.

¹⁰Muhamad Hasan Sebyar, "Harmonization of Islamic Legal Institutions and Customary Law in Marriage Dispensation Cases at The Panyabungan Religious Court," *MILRev : Metro Islamic Law Review* 2, no. 2 (2023): 155, <https://doi.org/10.32332/milrev.v2i2.7809>.

¹¹Abid Nurhuda, "Kepemimpinan Negara Dalam Diskursus Pemikiran Politik Al-Farabi: Book Review," *Tolis Ilmiah: Jurnal Penelitian* 5, no. 1 (2023): 71, <https://doi.org/10.56630/jti.v5i1.338>.

Ahl al-Madinah al-Fadilah) and recent academic discourse on Islamic legal pluralism and human rights theory.

The main research question posed is: How can Al-Farabi's concept of justice be reinterpreted to support Islamic legal reforms that are compatible with contemporary human rights principles? To answer this, the study conducts a critical literature review, textual analysis of Al-Farabi's works, and case-based reflection on legal reform efforts in selected Muslim-majority countries. By integrating philosophical ideals with empirical challenges, this study aims to offer a coherent and actionable model of justice that respects Islamic heritage while advancing legal equity in pluralistic societies.

In sum, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on Islamic legal reform by contextualizing Al-Farabi's political philosophy within present-day socio-political realities. It offers a reformist perspective that neither abandons tradition nor uncritically adopts Western legal norms but instead seeks a principled synthesis through ethical reason. In an era of global legal convergence and cultural contestation, revisiting Al-Farabi's legacy may help Muslim societies navigate the complex terrain of law, rights, and justice with intellectual integrity and practical wisdom.

METHOD

This study adopts a normative legal research methodology combined with a philosophical and conceptual approach to examine Al-Farabi's political philosophy—particularly his concepts of *justice* (*'adl*) and *happiness* (*sa'ada*)—within the context of contemporary Islamic legal reform and the discourse on human rights. To operationalize this approach, two main strategies are employed: philosophical-textual analysis and historical-philosophical interpretation. The philosophical-textual analysis focuses on Al-Farabi's significant works, especially *Ara' Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila* and *Tahsil al-Sa'ada*, utilizing both classical Arabic manuscripts and reputable annotated translations. These primary sources are selected based on their authenticity, thematic relevance to justice, and their significance in Islamic legal and political thought. The historical-philosophical interpretation situates Al-Farabi's ideas within the broader context of classical Islamic

intellectual history, assessing their potential to be recontextualized in modern legal settings. Data collection is conducted through a systematic literature review of both primary texts and secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journals, academic monographs, and legal case studies from Muslim-majority countries addressing real-world tensions between Sharia and international human rights norms—such as gender equality, freedom of religion, and minority protections. The analysis involves philosophical content analysis to extract the conceptual foundations of Al-Farabi's thought and normative-comparative analysis to explore its applicability to legal reform. Furthermore, the study engages critically with existing scholarship to identify gaps and articulate its original contribution. This methodology is thus designed not merely to describe Al-Farabi's thought but to provide an analytical and normative framework capable of guiding Islamic legal reforms that are more inclusive of justice and human rights principles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Justice in Al-Farabi's Thought and Its Implications for the Renewal of Islamic Law

Al-Farabi's conception of justice reflects a sophisticated interplay between metaphysical order and political organization. Rather than treating justice as an abstract, universal ideal detached from social conditions, Al-Farabi situates it within the concrete dynamics of power, leadership, and moral development within the city (*madinah*).¹² In contrast to classical Greek notions that often treat justice as an intrinsic moral virtue, Al-Farabi suggests that justice emerges from the balance of forces within society—between strength and weakness, fear and cooperation—ultimately shaped by the structure and purpose of political governance. His philosophy bridges metaphysical cosmology and civic order, illustrating how justice in the ideal city mirrors the harmony of the cosmos. In this framework, justice is not merely distributive or punitive but deeply tied to human perfection, happiness (*sa'ada*), and the city's collective ability to align itself with higher

¹² Abu Nashr Alfarabi, *Arou Ahli Madinah al Fadilah* (tt: tt, 1906), 112.

truths accessed through rationality.¹³ This synthesis reveals how Al-Farabi's notion of justice can inform the renewal of Islamic law by offering a model where ethical governance is rooted in rationality, collective well-being, and cosmological harmony rather than mere legalism or authoritarian power.

Al-Farabi envisions an Islamic political society not grounded in the prescriptive norms of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), nor in the pragmatic ethics of monarchical rule, but in a rational, metaphysically informed conception of the virtuous city (*al-madinah al-fadilah*), drawing significantly from a moderated Platonic tradition.¹⁴ His political philosophy is structured around the idea of harmony—between the parts of the soul, the classes of society, and the cosmic order—echoing the classical ideal that justice entails each part performing its proper function. In Al-Farabi's writings, natural human differences are analogized with cosmic differences, suggesting that the appropriate organization of society mirrors the celestial hierarchy.¹⁵ This is evident in his claim that every member of the virtuous city should be assigned one profession or task according to their aptitude, echoing Plato's view on justice as each individual fulfilling their natural role.¹⁶ Yet, Al-Farabi's adaptation is not merely imitation; he recontextualizes the Platonic model to fit an Islamic philosophical and ethical framework, emphasizing rational perfection and communal well-being over divine command theory or legal formalism. Such a vision offers an intellectual foundation for Islamic legal reform, in which justice is pursued not through rigid textualism but through the rational cultivation of a just political order aligned with both human and cosmic nature.¹⁷

Al-Farabi begins his analysis of social structures by observing that human groupings—whether tribes, cities, or nations—are often shaped by dynamics of power and domination. He notes that groups may seek to overpower others in pursuit of security,

¹³ Al-Farabi, *As-Siyasah Al-Madaniyah* (Damaskus: Darul al-Masyriq, 1994), 32.

¹⁴ Abdul Salam, *Al-Falsafah As-Siyasiyyah 'Inda Al-Farabi* (Beirut: Darul at-Tali'ah, 1997), 82.

¹⁵ Al-Farabi, *As-Siyasah Al-Madaniyah*. 70.

¹⁶ Alfarabi, *Fusuul Al Muntazi'ah* (Beirut: Dar al-Masyriq, 1993), 75.

¹⁷ Humaidi Humaidi, "Hubungan Harmonis Antara Sains Dan Agama Dalam Pemikiran Al-Farabi Dan Ikhwan Al-Shafa," *Kordinat: Jurnal Komunikasi Antar Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam* 17, no. 1 (2018): 142–166, <https://doi.org/10.15408/kordinat.v17i1.8106>.

honor, and material well-being. In such early stages of political association, justice is not grounded in moral equality or universal rights but emerges as a function of control: the dominant group defines what is “just” in accordance with its interests. In contrast, the subjugated group is expected to accept this arrangement as legitimate. However, this should not be mistaken for Al-Farabi’s normative endorsement of oppression as justice. Instead, he is describing the **degenerate forms of political association**, where justice is reduced to a tool of exploitation. This descriptive account serves as a philosophical diagnosis of flawed societies, setting the stage for his contrastive vision of the **virtuous city**, where justice is redefined as the fulfillment of natural potential and collective rationality. Thus, Al-Farabi’s discussion of power-rooted justice functions not as an ideal but as a **critical foil**—a contrastive background that illuminates his conception of true justice rooted in metaphysical harmony and rational governance.

Moreover, Al-Farabi observes that in societies governed by power hierarchies, acts of domination are often disguised as benevolence. Slavery and subjugation, when framed by the dominant group, are portrayed not as injustices but as beneficial to the oppressed—a distorted moral logic that equates submission with virtue. In such political contexts, justice is no longer a universal moral ideal but a construct tailored to legitimize the status quo. Al-Farabi points out, for instance, that allocating greater wealth and honor to those already powerful is perceived as a fair act, reinforcing the existing social hierarchy.¹⁸ However, this depiction is part of his critical analysis of **non-virtuous societies**, where the semblance of justice merely serves the interests of the ruling elite. Far from endorsing such systems, Al-Farabi aims to **expose their deficiencies**, thereby highlighting the necessity of a rational, virtuous city in which justice is redefined as the realization of human potential, not the perpetuation of inequality.

Al-Farabi further articulates that everyday notions of justice often emerge not from intrinsic moral commitments but from practical considerations rooted in fear and

¹⁸ Fathorrahman et al., “Dynamics of Thought in the Fiqh of Civilization Halaqah at Pesantren Affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Yogyakarta,” *Ijtihad : Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam Dan Kemanusiaan* 24, no. 1 (July 23, 2024): 71-95, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijtihad.v24i1.71-95>.

weakness. When groups of roughly equal power find themselves in conflict, they come to realize that mutual oppression would only result in shared destruction. As a result, they establish rules and norms to safeguard each other's interests—not out of a sense of moral obligation but as a strategic compromise to prevent greater chaos. In this sense, justice becomes a product of negotiated power equilibrium rather than a universal ethical value. Al-Farabi suggests that what is commonly labeled as "justice is often the institutionalization of earlier power negotiations driven by fear. Over time, these arrangements harden into social conventions, giving the illusion of moral legitimacy. However, Al-Farabi is careful to point out that such conventions still carry the imprint of their origins in power dynamics. This conception underscores his broader critique of societies that fail to transcend the logic of domination, contrasting sharply with his vision of the virtuous city, where justice is based on rational harmony and the pursuit of human perfection rather than pragmatic fear.¹⁹

This position echoes the views of the Sophists, particularly Gorgias, who argued that justice is the outcome of conflict and coercion within society. For the Sophists, justice was not a transcendent moral ideal but rather a tool employed by dominant groups to legitimize their power—an expression of dialectical politics rooted in domination. Al-Farabi seems to acknowledge a similar realist perspective when he remarks that "what is most beneficial to the oppressor is justice, because it is the justice of nature, and is a virtue."²⁰ However, this statement should not be taken to mean that Al-Farabi endorses a purely utilitarian or relativistic concept of justice. Instead, he is analytically describing how justice is often constructed in unjust societies. While some scholars have interpreted this as evidence of Al-Farabi's utilitarian leanings, a more nuanced reading reveals that he is exposing the moral danger of equating justice with power and utility. Through this critical lens, Al-Farabi invites us to reconsider justice not merely as a lofty ideal but as a socio-political construct shaped by human fears and ambitions. Far from being cynical, this perspective provides a crucial insight into how the discourse of justice can be manipulated

¹⁹ Puji Kurniawan, "Masyarakat Dan Negara Menurut Al-Farabi," *Jurnal ElQanuniy: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Kesyaharian Dan Pranata Sosial* 4, no. 1 (2018): 101–15, <https://doi.org/10.24952/el-qonuniy.v4i1.1830>.

²⁰ Alfarabi, *Ara Ahl Al-Madinah Al-Fadhilah* (Beirut: Dar al-Masyriq, 2003), 158.

in real-world politics. For the renewal of Islamic law, Al-Farabi's approach serves as a warning against unquestioningly accepting existing legal structures as inherently just and calls for a deeper alignment between law, reason, and ethical governance.

Therefore, it becomes clear why Al-Farabi advocates for the concept of a virtuous city (*al-madina al-fadila*), as only within such a city can perfect harmony and unity be realized—where happiness and truth are united. In this city, the attainment of ultimate perfection, highest joy, and genuine goodness becomes possible, as happiness is sought for its own sake and not due to external influences.²¹ This happiness is considered the ultimate goal because it facilitates the realization of human perfection. Al-Farabi argues that through the study of political science—grounded in the knowledge of metaphysical principles and communication with the active intellect—the city of man can approximate the divine order or the "Kingdom of God."²² He asserts, "Just as there exists a first principle in the cosmos, followed by other principles in a structured order, so too in the city or nation must there be a first principle followed by others in a hierarchical system." As the cosmos reflects the rational principles underlying existence, the ideal city mirrors these principles in its organization, structure, and leadership.²³

According to Al-Farabi, any deviation from the model of the virtuous city is a deviation from reason and order, inevitably leading to disorder and conflict. A key sign of this deviation is the fragmentation of opinion among citizens, which undermines the principle of love that should bind them together.²⁴ For Al-Farabi, love within the city stems "first and foremost from a shared commitment to virtue, which is manifested in agreement in both thought and action." Justice, therefore, has the purpose of achieving happiness, but this can only be attained through love—a unity of purpose that begins with the unity of thought and culminates in the harmony of reason. Al-Farabi further asserts that cities ruled by ignorance do not require justice, as "those led by ignorance cannot truly be called kings,

²¹ Alfarabi, *Fusuul Al Muntazi'ah* (Beirut: Dar al-Masyriq, 1993), 46.

²² Alfarabi, *Arasaa'ill* (tt: tt, 1962), 16.

²³ Alfarabi, *Fusuul Al Muntazi'ah*. 71.

²⁴ Alfarabi, *Kkitab Al-Milah* (Beirut: Dar al-Masyriq, 2001),74.

and they have no need for philosophy in any matter—whether theoretical or practical.”²⁵ He critiques jurists who treat religious principles as innate and uncritical foundations, stating that they often fail to grasp these principles theoretically and merely accept them as dogma derived from the founder of religion.

Al-Farabi approaches the concept of justice through a distinctive lens, emphasizing its integral connection with civic administration. This political interpretation of justice is enriched with metaphysical dimensions, which he elaborates in his seminal work *Ara' Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila* (The Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City).²⁶ In this work, he dedicates a significant portion to discussing how justice evolves in society. He illustrates how a once harmonious society can deteriorate into conflict and strife, making the reflection on justice not just philosophical but existentially urgent. In his words, “Nature is justice; thus, justice must be upheld, and it must prevail over mere conventions.” This illustrates Al-Farabi's insistence that true justice is grounded in natural and rational order, not merely in social agreement or tradition.

Upon further examination, Al-Farabi's views extend beyond the initial discussion. He introduces the concept of the “city of conquest”—a society based on oppression and war—as a counterpart to the virtuous city. The city of conquest symbolizes a societal deviation from the path of true justice and moral perfection, marking a failure to achieve happiness and the higher virtues. Al-Farabi argues that natural justice, in this context, degrades human society, preventing them from reaching the fullness of virtue and happiness.²⁷ Al-Farabi firmly asserts that natural justice does not characterize a virtuous city. Instead, true justice is the foundational principle that unites and sustains a good society. Without justice, relationships between citizens devolve into oppression and conquest. In the virtuous city, justice fosters cooperation and love among its citizens, ultimately guiding them toward happiness and perfection.²⁸

²⁵ Alfarabi. 76.

²⁶ Alfarabi, *Ara Ahl Al-Madinah Al-Fadhilah* (Beirut: Dar al-Masyriq, 2003), 157.

²⁷ Alfarabi. 166.

²⁸ Abdul Salam, *Al-Falsafah As-Siyasiyyah 'Inda Al-Farabi*. 83.

Al-Farabi presents a nuanced view of justice, particularly in his *Ara' Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila*. He defines justice as an essential component of the virtuous social structure, stating, "Justice lies first and foremost in the equitable distribution of the property of the city's inhabitants among all its people." Beyond this, material goods and social status must be allocated according to the role of each resident within the city. This raises a pivotal question: does Al-Farabi's concept of justice prioritize equality, fairness, or distribution? While he speaks of "goodness" in terms of resource management and social dignity, his framework suggests that justice operates within a rigid social hierarchy.²⁹

For Al-Farabi, justice is not merely a matter of formal equality. Instead, it emphasizes division based on the social hierarchy and the rational capacity of each individual. In other words, each person receives their due according to their predetermined role in society. Al-Farabi stresses that justice cannot be separated from this hierarchical structure, and true justice can only be realized within an orderly city governed by rational principles.³⁰

Furthermore, Al-Farabi acknowledges that this hierarchy is not arbitrary. It derives from the "active giving" of the first cause, which justifies the existence of exceptional leaders. These leaders possess a profound understanding of justice and ensure that the city operates in accordance with the established order. Justice, in Al-Farabi's view, is always aligned with this hierarchy. Any deviation from this structure, whether in the form of underperformance or overreach, is considered an injustice. Injustice, for Al-Farabi, represents a disruption of the social order, often resulting from fear, weakness, or external interference that disturbs the city's natural balance.

Although justice holds a significant place in Al-Farabi's political philosophy, he does not elevate it as the ultimate goal of a virtuous city. Instead, Al-Farabi positions justice as an instrument to achieve happiness (*sa'ada*), which he defines as the highest good and the true purpose of human existence. In his conception, justice operates within a broader

²⁹ Alfarabi, *Fusuul Al Muntazi'ah*. 71.

³⁰ Al-Farabi, *As-Siyasah Al-Madaniyah*. 71.

teleological framework that is directed toward communal happiness and moral perfection. Love (*maḥabba*), in this sense, serves a central function by uniting citizens and guiding them toward that shared goal.³¹ Thus, justice is subordinated to higher ideals—happiness and virtue—and, at times, becomes instrumental to maintaining order during transitional phases.

This raises a critical question: Does Al-Farabi's prioritization of happiness and love diminish the role of justice? Some interpretations suggest that justice, for Al-Farabi, is confined to preserving a rigid social hierarchy in which any deviation is seen as unjust. Love, in turn, reinforces this hierarchy by promoting social cohesion and acceptance of one's predetermined role. Moreover, in the early stages of city formation—particularly the city of conquest (*al-madina al-qahr*)—Al-Farabi seems to accept that justice must contend with, or even be overridden by, prevailing structures of power. Yet, this tension is temporary, as the final aim remains the establishment of a fully virtuous society governed by wisdom and harmony. Therefore, justice must continually evolve until it aligns with the ideals of love and happiness.³²

Among contemporary Arab thinkers, Al-Farabi retains a distinguished position—not only due to historical interest in Islamic philosophy but also because of his lasting impact on moral and political thought.³³ Nevertheless, relatively few modern scholars have critically analyzed his concept of justice. In fact, justice in Al-Farabi's framework goes beyond the fair application of laws; it encompasses the equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities. He warns that societies lacking justice are vulnerable to instability and enduring conflict. Consequently, leadership plays a vital role in articulating and realizing justice at every level of society.³⁴

³¹ Nassif Nassar, *Logika Otoritas: Pengantar Filsafat Materi*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Amwaj Publishing House, 2001), 11.

³² Hesti Pancawati, "Pemikiran Al-Farabi Tentang Politik Dan Negara," *Aqlania* 9, no. 1 (2018): 73, <https://doi.org/10.32678/aqlania.v9i01.2063>.

³³ Nassif Nassar, *Logika Otoritas: Pengantar Filsafat Materi*. 244.

³⁴ Himatul ulya, "Peran Filsafat Hukum Dalam Pembentukan Hukum Di Indonesia," *MANDUB: Jurnal Politik, Sosial, Hukum Dan Humaniora* 2, no. 2 (2024): 321–331.

Furthermore, Al-Farabi extends the notion of justice beyond human relationships to include human nature and human-divine relations.³⁵ As moral beings, humans are responsible for maintaining ecological balance and upholding fairness in their interactions with nature. In this sense, justice becomes a foundational principle not only in sociopolitical contexts but also in cosmological and ethical dimensions. This holistic understanding of justice provides both philosophical depth and practical relevance for building a just, harmonious, and sustainable society.

In integrating Islamic philosophy with law, Al-Farabi maintains that Islamic teachings can be interpreted through the lens of rationality. Revelation (*wahy*) represents a form of higher knowledge, granting access to truths unattainable by reason alone. Philosophy, in his view, serves as a rational method to understand and articulate these revealed truths. Accordingly, the Prophet—endowed with both rational insight and spiritual vision—is the ideal leader who bridges divine guidance and philosophical wisdom in establishing just laws. For Al-Farabi, revelation is not in conflict with reason; rather, it complements and elevates it. Revelatory texts, often expressed in symbolic and metaphorical language, require rational interpretation to unveil their deeper meanings.³⁶ This dialectical relationship between revelation and philosophy underpins his vision of an ideal state (*al-madina al-fadila*) governed by justice, virtue, and the pursuit of ultimate happiness.³⁷

The ideal state is led by a philosopher-king—someone who embodies wisdom, ethical virtue, and metaphysical understanding. This leader ensures that the political order reflects moral principles and enables citizens to reach their highest potential, both intellectually and spiritually. Social harmony is achieved when every individual performs

³⁵ M. Ali Rusdi et al., “The King’s Decree: Integration of Customary Law and Islamic Law in the Clove Lease Agreement,” *Ijtihad : Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam Dan Kemanusiaan* 24, no. 1 (July 23, 2024): 97–118, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijtihad.v24i1.97-118>.

³⁶ Aina Noor Habibah, “Konsep Negara Ideal Dalam Pemikiran Al-Farabi Telaah Kitab Ara’ Ahl Madinah Al-Fadilah,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Spiritualis: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Dan Tasawuf* 5, no. 2 (2020): 134–152, <https://doi.org/10.53429/spiritualis.v5i2.65>.

³⁷ R Reja, M Hasan, and N Hakimah, “Analisis Yuridis Terhadap Isbat Nikah Yang Akad Nikahnya Oleh Wali Hakim (Studi Penetapan Pengadilan Agama Nanga Pinoh,” *Al-Usroh*, 2022, <http://e-journal.iainptk.ac.id/index.php/alusroh/article/view/706>.

their role according to their capacities within a clearly defined hierarchy designed to foster justice and the common good.³⁸ In the context of Islamic legal reform, Al-Farabi's conception of justice offers an essential philosophical foundation. His thought supports the reinterpretation of Islamic law in a way that is more egalitarian, inclusive, and attuned to contemporary issues such as human rights. Legal interpretations, therefore, must move beyond rigid traditionalism and be oriented toward societal welfare and justice for all, including marginalized and vulnerable groups.³⁹

Moreover, Al-Farabi's insights justify the flexibility of law in response to changing sociopolitical realities. He insists that justice cannot be reduced to fixed legal codes; instead, it must be interpreted dynamically, with sensitivity to context. This approach empowers Islamic law to remain relevant and adaptive without compromising its ethical foundations.⁴⁰ The integration of philosophical rationality into Islamic law also helps bridge tensions between Islamic jurisprudence and global human rights discourse. By treating philosophy as a partner to revelation, Al-Farabi demonstrates that Islamic legal systems can simultaneously uphold religious values and universal ethical norms. His thought offers a model for reform in which law is moral, rational, and committed to the common good.

In sum, Al-Farabi's theory of justice and virtue remains profoundly relevant in the 21st century. First, it expands the meaning of justice beyond formal legalism to embrace moral and social equity. Second, it advocates the use of reason and wisdom in legal interpretation, opening the door for meaningful reform. Third, it presents a philosophical framework where Islamic law can evolve to meet global challenges without losing its spiritual core.

³⁸ Yumi Antika and Jagad Aditya Dewantara, "Keterkaitan Pemikiran Al-Farabi Mengenai Negara Yang Ideal Dengan Konsep Kehidupan Bernegara Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Kewarganegaraan* 5, no. 2 (2021): 448-456, <https://doi.org/10.31316/jk.v5i2.2292>.

³⁹ Achmad Musyahid Idrus et al., "The Tradition of Mappasikarawa in the Bugis-Makassar Community Marriage: A Study of Islamic Law Philosophy," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 2 (May 9, 2023): 848, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i2.17125>.

⁴⁰ Aziza Aryati, "Rekonsiliasi Antara Filsafat Dan Agama: Telaah Pemikiran Filsafat Al-Farabi," *Syi'ar* 12, no. 2 (2018): 1-11.

The Relevance of Al-Farabi's Thought to the Challenges of Human Rights in the Contemporary Muslim World

In the 21st century, Islamic law faces significant challenges due to rapid social and cultural changes. Technological revolutions, urbanization, and modernization have profoundly transformed the structure of Muslim societies.⁴¹ These changes have introduced new worldviews, values, and lifestyles that often differ from the traditional contexts in which Islamic law was applied initially. For instance, issues such as women's rights, religious pluralism, and individual freedoms demand new interpretative approaches to Islamic law to ensure its alignment with contemporary realities. Moreover, the rising global awareness of human rights across various countries necessitates harmonization between Islamic principles and more inclusive and just international standards.⁴²

Globalization adds another layer of complexity to these challenges, as Muslims are compelled to interact with diverse legal systems, both nationally and internationally. Islamic law must now compete with and adapt to secular legal systems that dominate many countries. This interaction brings about new challenges in human rights.⁴³ In the era of globalization, Islamic law is also confronted with the question of how to remain relevant and contribute meaningfully within an increasingly homogenized international legal framework without losing its essential values. Furthermore, international treaties on minority rights, trade, the environment, and human rights compel Muslim communities to adopt Islamic jurisprudence in accordance with global commitments.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Wahyu Abdul Jafar et al., "The Childfree Phenomenon Based on Islamic Law and Its Respond on Muslim Society," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 8, no. 2 (November 9, 2023): 389, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v8i2.7865>.

⁴² Galiya Kurmangaliyeva and Aslan Azerbayev, "Al-Farabi's Virtuous City and Its Contemporary Significance (Social State in Al-Farabi's Philosophy)," *The Anthropologist* 26, no. 1-2 (October 17, 2016): 88-96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09720073.2016.11892133>.

⁴³ Ali Murtadho Emzaed, Ibnu Elmi AS Pelu, and Shakhzod Tokhirov, "Islamic Law Legislation in Indonesia: Anomalies of the Relationship between Political Configuration and Zakat Legal Product during the Reform Era," *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 17, no. 1 (May 29, 2023): 97-112, <https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v17i1.7815>.

⁴⁴ Carla Ferstman et al., "Contemporary Human Rights Challenges: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Its Continuing Relevance," *Contemporary Human Rights Challenges: The Universal*

One of the principal tools for reforming Islamic law is *ijtihad*, the intellectual effort to interpret and apply Islamic law in accordance with changing circumstances. *Ijtihad* plays a vital role in addressing contemporary challenges such as human rights, reproductive technologies, and the digital economy. Muslim scholars and intellectuals use *ijtihad* to explore more dynamic and contextual interpretations of Islamic texts (Qur'an and Hadith) while taking into account social conditions and modern realities. This re-interpretive process allows Islamic law to remain relevant and responsive to the needs of the time while upholding the core principles of *shari'a*. It also involves a re-evaluation of traditional interpretations that may no longer be suitable in today's socio-cultural context.⁴⁵

The role of Muslim thinkers in the reform of Islamic law is crucial to ensure its progressive and adaptive development. Contemporary Muslim intellectuals—including scholars, activists, and academics—act as agents of change who blend tradition with innovation. They not only focus on textual interpretation but also seek to establish a legal framework that is inclusive, just, and contextually grounded. Thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, Tariq Ramadan, and Amina Wadud advocate for a more critical approach to Islamic law, emphasizing the universal moral and ethical values of Islam, such as justice, equality, and compassion. They argue that Islamic law should respond to the challenges of the present era without losing its spiritual and moral essence. Through their intellectual contributions, contemporary Muslim thinkers help expand the horizon of Islamic legal thought so it becomes more relevant and responsive to both global and local developments.⁴⁶

Human rights are a set of entitlements and freedoms recognized as fundamental for every individual, regardless of origin, race, religion, or social status. Globally, human rights have been affirmed through various international instruments, such as the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights and Its Continuing Relevance, no. September 2018 (2018): 1-238, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351107136>.

⁴⁵ Masmuni Mahatma, "Islamic Preaching and Its Significance in Realizing the Virtuous City (Al-Madinah Al-Fadhilah) in the Perspective of Al-Farabi," *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies* 17, no. 1 (2023): 203-222, <https://doi.org/10.15575/idajhs.v17i1.26150>.

⁴⁶ Zakiyah Daradjat, *Ilmu Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: Bina Aksara, 2527), 35.

Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948.⁴⁷ These principles emphasize individual freedom, the right to live in dignity, and protection from all forms of oppression or discrimination. Though universally recognized, the implementation and interpretation of human rights vary across countries and cultures. In the 21st century, the concept of human rights continues to evolve in response to new challenges such as digitalization, climate change, and global economic inequality, all of which affect individuals' access to fundamental rights.⁴⁸

The relationship between Islamic law and human rights has been the subject of intense discussion, particularly concerning issues like religious freedom, women's rights, and corporal punishment. Some argue that there is tension between internationally recognized human rights principles and specific traditional interpretations of Islamic law, especially when it comes to balancing individual rights with religious or communal authority.⁴⁹ However, many contemporary Muslim scholars seek to bridge this gap by asserting that core human rights values—such as justice, equality, and freedom—are fundamentally in harmony with Islamic principles. They propose that human rights can be accommodated within Islamic legal frameworks through the method of *ijtihad* and contextually relevant reinterpretation. For instance, modern Islamic discourse has re-examined issues like gender equity, freedom of religion, and social justice, showing that Islam supports these rights, albeit sometimes through a distinct interpretive lens.⁵⁰

Despite widespread recognition of human rights, violations remain prevalent, including in many Muslim-majority countries. Such violations often stem from political,

⁴⁷ Siti Rohmah, Moh Anas Kholish, and Andi Muhammad Galib, "Human Rights and Islamic Law Discourse: The Epistemological Construction of Abul A'la Al-Maududi, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naim, and Mashood A. Baderin," *Justicia Islamica* 19, no. 1 (July 1, 2022): 153–170, <https://doi.org/10.21154/justicia.v19i1.3282>.

⁴⁸ Linda Fidawaty, "Aborsi Dalam Perspektif Hak Asasi Manusia Dan Hukum Islam (Analisis Terhadap Peraturan Pemerintah No. 61 Tahun 2014 Tentang Kesehatan Reproduksi)," *Al'Adalah* 14, no. 1 (2018): 107, <https://doi.org/10.24042/adalah.v14i1.2930>.

⁴⁹ Haddad Ulum Harahap et al., "Legal Status of a Wife Leaving Her Husband and Vice Versa in Contextual Fiqh Studies: A Pre-Divorce Analysis," *Jurnal Ilmiah Mizani: Wacana Hukum, Ekonomi Dan Keagamaan* 12, no. 1 (April 16, 2025): 50, <https://doi.org/10.29300/mzn.v12i1.7158>.

⁵⁰ Anar Tanabayeva et al., "Al-Farabi's Humanistic Principles and 'Virtuous City,'" 2015, 124–129, <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2015.01.14>.

legal,⁵¹ and social problems, including authoritarian regimes, gender-based discrimination, restrictions on freedom of expression, and the unjust treatment of minority groups. Some Muslim countries have been criticized for enforcing *shari'a* in ways that are considered incompatible with international human rights standards, particularly in the areas of corporal punishment (such as stoning and flogging) and restrictions on religious and personal freedoms. Political conflicts and wars in countries like Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan have also led to severe human rights violations, including mass killings, forced displacement, and lack of access to basic services like healthcare and education.

Public attitudes toward human rights in the Muslim world vary greatly depending on socio-political and cultural contexts. In some settings, human rights are still viewed as a Western construct that does not fully align with Islamic values. This perception is often influenced by the legacy of colonialism, which associated human rights discourse with Western dominance over Muslim societies. Some conservative groups reject elements of human rights, particularly those concerning freedom of expression, women's rights, and freedom of religion, arguing that they conflict with Islamic teachings.⁵² Nonetheless, there is a growing segment of Muslim society—particularly among youth, activists, and civil society groups—that embraces human rights as essential to sustainable and just social development. These debates reflect the complexity of reconciling tradition, religion, and universal human rights in an era of globalization.

The thought of Al-Farabi, one of the greatest philosophers in the Islamic tradition, offers significant contributions to modern discussions on social justice and human rights. Although Al-Farabi lived in the 10th century, his ideas on justice, virtue, and the ideal state remain highly relevant to contemporary efforts aimed at building societies that are both just and respectful of individual rights. His philosophical approach provides a foundation

⁵¹ Dewi Fransiska Mamonto et al., "Islamic Civil Law in Indonesia: Developments, Challenges, and Future Prospects," *NUSANTARA: Journal Of Law Studies* 3, no. 02 (December 25, 2024): 50–58, <https://juna.nusantarajournal.com/index.php/juna/article/view/103>.

⁵² Muhammad Aziz et al., "Providing Incentive Guarantees and Privileges for Health Services in the Implementation of Legal Protection for Health Workers During the Covid-19 Pandemic," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah* 14, no. 1 (June 29, 2022): 111–124, <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v14i1.15280>.

for exploring how Islamic principles of social justice can intersect with the modern discourse on human rights and how his political philosophy can contribute to human dignity and justice in a globalized world.⁵³

Al-Farabi strongly emphasized the importance of social justice within the ideal structure of society. In his seminal work *Al-Madina al-Fadilah* (The Virtuous City), he articulates the concept of a state founded on virtuous principles, with justice as its central pillar. For Al-Farabi, justice is a prerequisite for achieving the collective well-being of society. A just state, in his view, ensures the fulfillment of each individual's rights according to their position and contribution to society. Thus, social justice involves not only the fair distribution of resources but also the recognition and protection of fundamental human rights, including the right to life, liberty, and well-being.⁵⁴

Table. 2. The Relationship of Al-Farabi's Thought with the Modern Concept of Human Rights

Aspects	Al-farabi's Thoughts	Modern Human Rights Concept	Relevance in the Contemporary Muslim World
Social Justice	Al-Farabi emphasized justice as the primary basis of the ideal state, with the fulfillment of the rights of the individual according to his position in society.	Justice is a fundamental principle of human rights that guarantees fair treatment without discrimination.	Al-Farabi provides the basis for a philosophy of justice that is in line with the principles of social justice in modern human rights, which are particularly relevant to efforts to create a just society in Muslim countries.
Virtue in Government	The idea of a country built on virtue, where wise	Transparent and fair government is part of the state's	This concept of ideal government based on virtue provides a

⁵³ Emita Gunawan, "Relevansi Konsep Negara Dalam Pemikiran Al-Farabi Di Masa Indonesia Sekarang," *Jurnal Pendidikan PKN (Pancasila Dan Kewarganegaraan)* 2, no. 2 (2021): 88, <https://doi.org/10.26418/jppkn.v2i2.47791>.

⁵⁴ Fauzi Rahmat Pamula and Sayehu, "Rights and Obligations of Husband and Wife (Theological Normative and Sociological Approach)," *Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 1, no. 02 (February 12, 2024): 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.63731/jhk.v1i02.13>.

	leaders must lead with the principles of justice and wisdom.	responsibility to respect individual rights.	foundation for understanding the importance of transparent and fair government in ensuring that the fundamental rights of individuals are respected.
The Role of the State in Guaranteeing Rights	The state must act to ensure the welfare of the people by providing fair rights according to individual needs.	The state is responsible for the fulfillment of human rights, including economic, social, cultural, and civil rights.	Al-Farabi provides a philosophical argument on how the state should maintain social welfare, which is in line with the responsibility of the modern Muslim state to guarantee the rights of its citizens.
Equality in Society	An ideal society creates balance, where all members have equal rights in contribution and treatment.	The principles of equality and non-discrimination are the foundation of modern human rights.	Al-Farabi's thoughts are particularly relevant to the struggle for the rights of women and minorities in many Muslim countries, which seek to achieve equality in various aspects of life.
Individual Freedom	Individual freedom is guaranteed within the framework of a just state, where the rights of individuals are respected to achieve happiness.	Freedom of religion, opinion, and the right to live free from oppression.	Al-Farabi teaches the importance of individual freedom in achieving happiness, which is in line with the principle of liberty recognized by international human rights and relevant in the context of freedom of religion and expression in the Muslim world today.
Education and Enlightenment	The state must prioritize education to create a society that is intelligent and able to	Education is a fundamental right that contributes to the development of individuals and society.	Increased education and enlightenment in Muslim societies are essential to building awareness of human rights, which is in line

understand its rights and obligations.	with Al-Farabi's vision of a society driven by virtue and education.
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Source: Author's Interpretation

From the table above, it can be seen that the basic principles of Al-Farabi's thought do not contradict each other and even have the potential to harmonize with modern human rights values such as the right to education, justice, and freedom of opinion. This shows that classical Islamic philosophy can be contextualized in contemporary human rights discourse, especially in the Muslim world. Al-Farabi's conception of justice resonates with modern human rights principles that advocate for equal treatment of all individuals without discrimination. He envisioned an ideal society in which all members contribute based on their abilities and roles while the state guarantees that everyone is treated fairly and given the opportunity to achieve happiness. This aligns closely with fundamental human rights ideals such as equality, non-discrimination, and human dignity. Furthermore, Al-Farabi argued that justice must encompass all aspects of life—economic, political, and social. This holistic vision mirrors modern human rights frameworks, which recognize civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights as interconnected and essential to human flourishing.

CONCLUSION

Al-Farabi's political philosophy presents both valuable insights and critical limitations for contemporary Islamic legal reform. His emphasis on justice (*'adl*), rational deliberation, and ethical leadership offers a normative foundation that can enrich Islamic jurisprudence, particularly when contextualized through established methodological frameworks such as *maqasid al-shari'ah* and *ijtihad*. These principles provide theoretical support for reform efforts addressing modern legal concerns—such as gender equity, minority rights, and the ethics of governance—especially when aligned with the objectives of Islamic law and the lived realities of Muslim-majority societies. However, applying Al-Farabi's framework requires careful navigation of its historical and epistemological

constraints. His vision of the *al-madina al-fadila*, ruled by a philosopher-king, may conflict with present-day democratic values and participatory governance. Moreover, Al-Farabi did not engage with contemporary issues such as digital rights, intersectional justice, or individual autonomy in ways that reflect modern conceptualizations. Therefore, a critical and selective adaptation is essential—one that draws on his rational-ethical orientation while acknowledging the socio-political transformations of the 21st century.

This study contends that Al-Farabi's philosophy should not be viewed as a prescriptive legal model but as a supplementary ethical compass that inspires reform. Reformers must operationalize their insights through Islamic legal tools that ensure coherence with the dynamic nature of *fiqh* and responsiveness to universal human rights concerns. For example, revisiting legal positions on women's agency, freedom of belief, or corporal punishment can benefit from a Farabian lens—provided such reinterpretations remain anchored in sound jurisprudential reasoning and contextual relevance. Ultimately, the original contribution of this research lies in proposing an integrative approach between Al-Farabi's political philosophy and the *maqasid*-based methodology of Islamic legal reasoning. This synthesis enables a more inclusive, justice-oriented, and philosophically grounded path for legal reform in Muslim societies—one that remains faithful to Islamic tradition while constructively engaging with the demands of pluralism, human dignity, and social transformation. Future research should expand this framework by examining practical case studies where such integration can yield normative and policy-level impacts.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Syukri contributed to the conceptualization of the study, data collection, and initial drafting of the manuscript. Adenan was responsible for methodology design, data analysis, and critical revision of the content. Syahminan contributed to the literature review, interpretation of findings, and final editing of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest influencing the research, analysis, or conclusions. The study was conducted independently, free from external pressure or interests, to ensure objectivity and scientific integrity.

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