

## THE SUNNATULLAH OF POWER ROTATION IN QS. ALI IMRAN 140: A BALAGHAH AND FOURTH TURNING ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

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The rise and fall of power is a recurring pattern in human history. In Islam, this phenomenon is understood through the concept of *sunnat Allah*, namely the divine laws that govern social and historical change. This study examines the concept of power rotation in Q.S. Al Imran [3]: 140 through a *balaghah* perspective and its dialogue with Fourth Turning Theory. Using a qualitative literature review, this study analyzes Qur'anic commentaries, *balaghah* literature, and works on historical cycles. The findings show that the phrase *wa-tilka al-ayyamu nudawiluha bayna an-nas* reflects a universal principle of power rotation as part of *sunnatullah*. The *balaghah* analysis highlights the continuity of historical change and the impermanence of worldly power. This study also identifies similarities with Fourth Turning Theory in viewing history as a recurring process, although *sunnatullah* is rooted in divine revelation, whereas Fourth Turning Theory is based on empirical observation. Therefore, *sunnatullah* provides a broader framework for understanding historical and civilizational change.

**Keywords:** sunnatullah; power rotation; fourth turning theory

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## INTRODUCTION

The rise and fall of political powers and civilizations have long been among the most enduring themes in historical and social thought. Across different periods of human history, dominant groups, dynasties, and nations have experienced cycles of emergence, consolidation, decline, and replacement. Such recurring patterns indicate that historical transformation is not merely a sequence of random events but often follows identifiable principles that shape the trajectory of societies. In Islamic intellectual tradition, these patterns are understood through the concept of sunnatullah, namely the divine laws governing human life, society, and civilization. According to ‘Ali Jum‘ah, understanding sunnatullah is essential because it represents a systematic framework through which the Qur’an explains the operation of historical and social realities (Saifillah et al., 2026). Consequently, the study of power rotation is not only relevant for understanding political change but also for comprehending broader processes of civilizational development and decline (Billah & Habsi, 2026).

A major problem in contemporary discussions of political and social transformation is the tendency to interpret changes in power solely through immediate political, economic, or institutional factors (Rashwan, 2024c, 2024b). While such explanations are valuable, they often neglect deeper philosophical and historical dimensions that may explain why dominant powers eventually decline despite their apparent strength (Afandi, 2025; Elitaliya et al., 2025). Similarly, discussions within religious scholarship frequently focus on theological lessons without systematically connecting Qur’anic principles to broader theories of historical change. As a result, there remains a conceptual divide between normative religious understandings of history and analytical frameworks developed within modern social sciences. This separation limits efforts to construct comprehensive explanations regarding the cyclical nature of power and civilization (Asyibli et al., 2025; Uddin et al., 2024).

Within the Qur’an, historical consciousness occupies a central position. Narratives concerning the peoples of Nuh, ‘Ad, Tsamūd, Fir‘aun, and Bani Israil are repeatedly presented not merely as stories of the past but as lessons illustrating the consequences of moral, political, and social choices. Among the Qur’anic verses addressing historical dynamics, Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān: 140 is particularly significant. Revealed in the aftermath of the Battle of Uhud, the verse states, “*wa tilkal-ayyāmu nudāwiluhā bayna an-nās*” (such days We alternate among people) (Khairianur et al., 2026; Taufiq & Mohaman, 2025). The verse conveys the principle that victory and defeat are not permanently attached to any particular group but rotate according to divine wisdom and historical circumstances (Hasibuan et al., 2025; Usman et al., 2024). This notion has continued to attract scholarly attention because it offers a concise yet profound explanation of social and political change (Zahed, 2021).

Previous studies have examined Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān: 140 primarily through exegetical, theological, and historical approaches. Classical commentators such as Ibn Kathir interpreted the verse as a reminder that military success and failure serve as tests of faith, sincerity, and perseverance among believers (Al-Atar, 2019; Stetkevych, 2019). Contemporary scholars, including M. Quraish Shihab, have further emphasized the relevance of the verse for understanding social resilience and collective responsibility. These studies have contributed significantly to explaining the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the verse (Fitria & Kamaliah,

2025; Khan Sardaraz, 2019; Qutbuddin, 2024). Nevertheless, most remain concentrated on its theological implications and historical context, leaving broader questions concerning cyclical patterns of power and civilizational transformation relatively underexplored (Habsi et al., 2026).

Another body of literature focuses on the concept of sunnatullah as a framework for understanding historical processes (Rashwan, 2021). Scholars such as Fazlur Rahman argue that the Qur'an presents history as a field governed by consistent divine principles rather than arbitrary interventions (Ali, 2021; Musavipour & Montazeri, 2024). Meanwhile, historical thinkers such as Ibn Khaldun and Arnold J. Toynbee developed theories explaining the rise and decline of civilizations through recurring social dynamics (Mohases & Balvardi, 2025). Although these perspectives highlight the patterned nature of historical change, relatively few studies have integrated Qur'anic discussions of sunnatullah with contemporary theories of cyclical historical transformation (Asrina, 2026; Haniah et al., 2026; Yasmar et al., 2025). Consequently, the relationship between Qur'anic conceptions of power rotation and modern cycle theories remains insufficiently examined (Gould, 2016; Naseri et al., 2025).

In modern social theory, one influential framework for understanding recurring historical change is Fourth Turning Theory developed by William Strauss and Neil Howe (Huda et al., 2025; Rashwan, 2024a). The theory proposes that societies move through recurring cycles consisting of High, Awakening, Unraveling, and Crisis phases within approximately eighty- to one-hundred-year periods (Aulia et al., 2025; Khazaei et al., 2026; Pertiwi et al., 2026). According to this perspective, major crises function as turning points that dismantle existing structures and facilitate the emergence of new social orders (Abbasi, 2024; Akhavan Moghaddam, 2024). While Fourth Turning Theory has been widely discussed in analyses of Western political and social developments, little attention has been given to its possible dialogue with Islamic conceptions of historical change. More specifically, no substantial study has explored how the rhetorical construction of Q.S. Āli 'Imrān: 140 may illuminate or challenge the assumptions underlying cyclical theories of history.

Based on this gap, the present study offers a novel contribution by examining Q.S. Āli 'Imrān: 140 through a *balāghah* perspective and placing its concept of power rotation in dialogue with Fourth Turning Theory. This article addresses three research questions: (1) how does the *balāghah* of *wa tilkal-ayyāmu nudāwiluhā bayna an-nās* construct the concept of power rotation; (2) what principles of sunnatullah can be derived from classical and contemporary interpretations of the verse; and (3) to what extent do these principles converge with or differ from Fourth Turning Theory. Using a qualitative literature review approach, this study aims to enrich Qur'anic scholarship by demonstrating how the rhetorical structure of the verse articulates a sophisticated understanding of historical transformation while simultaneously contributing to broader interdisciplinary discussions on power, civilization, and social change.

Based on this background, this study starts from the assumption that the concept of power rotation in Surah Āli 'Imrān: 140 is not entirely identical to the modern theory of historical cycles. The Qur'an places power changes as part of the sunnatullah (the law of God) that still takes into account the moral, spiritual, and responsibility dimensions of humankind. Therefore, the dialogue with Fourth Turning Theory is not intended to equate the two

perspectives, but rather to demonstrate the common ground and epistemological limits of each approach.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a literature review design to examine the concept of *sunnatullah* in the rotation of power in Q.S. Āli Imrān [3]: 140 and its dialogue with Fourth Turning Theory. This study relied on secondary data obtained from scholarly sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, research reports, classical and contemporary Qur’anic commentaries (*tafsīr*), and works on Arabic rhetoric (*balāghah*). The selection of literature was guided by three criteria: relevance to the research topic, publication recency, and academic credibility. Priority was given to sources discussing *sunnatullah*, power rotation in the Qur’an, Q.S. Āli Imrān[3]: 140, *balāghah* studies, historical cycles, and Fourth Turning Theory.

To obtain relevant literature, systematic searches were conducted through academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and other scholarly repositories using keywords related to the research focus. The collected literature was then screened through title, abstract, and full-text reviews to ensure its suitability with the objectives of the study. The units of analysis in this study include the *balāghah* structure of Q.S. Āli Imrān[3]: 140, classical and contemporary interpretations (*tafsīr*) of the verse, the concept of historical cycles in Fourth Turning Theory, and the points of convergence and divergence between the Qur’anic framework and Fourth Turning Theory.

The data analysis was conducted through literature reduction, thematic categorization, conceptual synthesis, and theoretical interpretation. Relevant information was first identified and extracted from the selected literature, then categorized into major themes, such as the Qur’anic concept of *sunnatullah*, the *balāghah* dimensions of Q.S. Āli Imrān[3]: 140, theories of historical and civilizational change, and Fourth Turning Theory. These themes were subsequently synthesized to identify patterns, convergences, and divergences among existing perspectives. Finally, a dialogical interpretation was developed to establish a critical conceptual dialogue between Qur’anic teachings and contemporary social theory regarding the cyclical dynamics of power and history. This study is a purely conceptual, literature-based analysis and does not involve empirical testing; therefore, it is positioned as a theoretical and interpretative study rather than empirical or field-based research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Historical Context of the Revelation of Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān: 140

The analysis of classical and contemporary *tafsīr* literature indicates that Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān: 140 was revealed in the aftermath of the Battle of Uhud, a critical event in early Islamic history. The verse states: “If a wound has touched you, a similar wound has touched the other people. Such days We alternate among people (*wa tilkal-ayyāmu nudāwiluhā bayna al-nās*), so that Allah may make evident those who believe and take martyrs from among you”

(Q. 3:140). The primary context of revelation concerns the military setback experienced by the Muslim community after previously achieving victory at Badr. Classical exegetes consistently associate this verse with the need to explain the significance of temporary defeat within the broader framework of divine wisdom. The reviewed sources reveal that the Muslim community experienced considerable psychological distress following the losses at Uhud. The death of prominent companions, the injury of the Prophet Muhammad, and the apparent reversal of military fortune generated uncertainty among believers. According to the exegetical narratives preserved by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, some members of the community questioned the reasons for defeat despite their commitment to the new faith. The verse emerged as a response to these concerns by situating the event within a broader pattern of historical alternation rather than treating it as an isolated occurrence.

The findings further indicate that the Qur’anic response did not deny the reality of defeat but instead contextualized it within a recurring historical process. Al-Qurṭubī records that the phrase *nudāwiluhā bayna an-nās* refers to the alternation of victory and defeat among competing groups. The verse thus shifts attention from a single military encounter to a broader principle governing human history. Contemporary commentators similarly emphasize that the revelation transformed the perception of defeat from a sign of abandonment into an element of a larger historical pattern. A common finding across the examined tafsīr literature is the presentation of Uhud as an educational event. The defeat functioned as a moment of differentiation between sincere and superficial commitment, a theme explicitly stated in the continuation of the verse. Consequently, the historical context reveals that Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān: 140 was revealed not merely to explain a military setback but also to articulate a broader principle concerning the fluctuation of power and circumstances among human societies.

### **Balāghah Structure of the Phrase *wa tilkal-ayyamu nudāwiluhā bayna an-Nas***

The linguistic analysis of the verse identifies the phrase *wa tilkal-ayyamu nudāwiluhā bayna an-nās* as the central rhetorical element in Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān: 140. The demonstrative pronoun *tilka* refers to specific historical events already experienced by the audience, while *al-ayyām* (days) functions as a metonymic expression representing periods of victory, defeat, prosperity, and adversity. Classical scholars of balāghah note that the use of “days” transcends literal chronological meaning and symbolizes broader historical circumstances. The verb *nudāwiluhā* derives from the root *d-w-l*, which conveys the meaning of alternation, circulation, exchange, or transfer. Lexical analysis reveals that the term is associated with movement from one party to another. In this context, the verb portrays historical conditions as dynamic rather than static. Several exegetes identify an implicit *isti‘ārah* (metaphorical expression) in which victory, authority, or fortune is represented as an object transferred among groups according to particular conditions. The phrase also demonstrates rhetorical conciseness (*ījāz*) by expressing a comprehensive historical principle in a limited number of words. Rather than specifying individual events, nations, or periods, the Qur’an employs a universal linguistic structure applicable across different contexts. The expression *bayna an-nās* (“among people”) further broadens the scope of the statement, indicating that the phenomenon extends beyond the immediate context of the Muslim community.

The findings suggest that the balāghah structure of the verse communicates two

interconnected meanings. First, historical conditions are inherently changeable. Second, such changes occur within an ordered framework rather than through random processes. The linguistic construction therefore establishes the foundation for understanding power alternation as a recurring feature of human history. This rhetorical formulation provides the textual basis for subsequent exegetical discussions concerning victory, defeat, and social transformation.

### **The Principle of *Sunnatullah* in the Alternation of Power**

The examination of tafsīr literature indicates that Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān: 140 embodies a broader Qur’anic concept commonly described as *sunnatullāh*, namely the established patterns through which Allah governs historical and social processes. Although the term itself does not explicitly appear in the verse, commentators consistently interpret the alternation of victory and defeat as part of a divinely instituted order operating within human history. A recurring finding across classical and contemporary interpretations is that this principle does not function as rigid determinism. Instead, the alternation of power is linked to human behavior and collective action. The continuation of the verse refers to the identification of believers and the emergence of martyrs, suggesting that historical outcomes serve specific purposes within the divine order. Consequently, social and political developments are portrayed as meaningful events connected to moral and spiritual dimensions. The data further reveal that the Qur’anic framework integrates divine sovereignty and human agency. Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr emphasize that defeat at Uhud was associated with strategic disobedience by a group of archers who abandoned their positions. Thus, the historical outcome was not detached from human action. At the same time, the event remained part of a broader divine design intended to produce particular lessons and consequences. Contemporary exegetes similarly identify a relationship between moral conduct and historical outcomes. The findings indicate that power alternation in the Qur’anic perspective operates through a pattern in which human decisions influence historical trajectories while remaining subject to overarching divine governance. This combination of agency and providence constitutes a defining characteristic of the Qur’anic conception of historical change.

### **Exegetical Perspectives on Victory and Defeat**

The comparative analysis of major exegetical works reveals substantial agreement regarding the fundamental meaning of victory and defeat in Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān: 140. Al-Ṭabarī interprets the verse as evidence that military success and failure alternate among communities according to divine wisdom. Victory is therefore not a permanent possession, nor is defeat a permanent condition. Historical outcomes fluctuate in accordance with broader purposes beyond immediate human perception. Ibn Kathīr similarly emphasizes the temporary nature of both triumph and loss. His interpretation highlights the educational dimension of defeat, particularly in relation to obedience and communal discipline. The findings indicate that Ibn Kathīr views the events of Uhud as demonstrating the consequences of human actions within a divinely regulated historical framework. Victory and defeat are thus interconnected with ethical conduct rather than purely military capability. Al-Qurṭubī expands the discussion by

emphasizing the universal scope of the principle. According to his interpretation, the alternation described in the verse applies to nations and communities across history. He highlights the instability of worldly power and argues that political dominance continually shifts among groups. This perspective situates the verse within a broader historical and sociological context. Contemporary commentators such as Sayyid Qutb and M. Quraish Shihab introduce additional dimensions while maintaining the central exegetical consensus. Qutb interprets victory and defeat as components of a larger process of civilizational formation and moral testing. Quraish Shihab stresses the educational and psychological significance of the verse, emphasizing its role in shaping a realistic understanding of historical dynamics. While classical exegetes tend to focus on theological and military implications, contemporary scholars broaden the discussion toward social and civilizational processes. Nevertheless, all examined commentators agree that victory and defeat constitute recurring and meaningful elements of human history rather than final indicators of divine favor or rejection.

### **Characteristics of Power Alternation in the Qur'anic Perspective**

The collected data reveal several recurring characteristics of power alternation within the Qur'anic perspective. The first characteristic is its moral dimension. Historical outcomes are consistently linked to ethical conduct, obedience, responsibility, and collective behavior. The examined tafsīr literature repeatedly associates military and political outcomes with the moral condition of communities. A second characteristic is its spiritual dimension. The verse explicitly states that historical alternation serves to identify believers and produce martyrs. Exegetes therefore understand changes in power not merely as political events but also as processes through which spiritual qualities become visible. Historical experiences function as mechanisms of testing, differentiation, and character formation. The third characteristic is its social dimension. The phrase *bayna an-nās* indicates that alternation occurs among human societies and groups. The findings suggest that power transitions are not restricted to a particular nation or era. Instead, they constitute a social phenomenon observable across different historical contexts. This universality allows the verse to be applied beyond the specific circumstances of Uhud. The fourth characteristic is its historical dimension. The examined sources consistently portray power alternation as a recurring pattern rather than an exceptional event. Historical change emerges as a continuous process involving the rise and decline of groups, institutions, and civilizations. Taken together, these findings indicate that the Qur'anic concept of power alternation is multidimensional, encompassing moral, spiritual, social, and historical aspects simultaneously.

### **Preliminary Comparison with the Fourth Turning Theory**

The comparative analysis identifies several conceptual parallels between the Qur'anic notion of power alternation and the Fourth Turning Theory proposed by Strauss and Howe. Both frameworks recognize that historical conditions undergo recurring transformations rather than progressing in a strictly linear manner. Each perspective also acknowledges the existence of patterns that influence collective social experiences across generations and historical periods. Despite these similarities, significant differences emerge from the data. The

Qur'anic framework grounds historical change in sunnatullāh, understood as a divinely established order governing human affairs. In contrast, Fourth Turning Theory explains societal transformation primarily through generational dynamics and recurring social cycles. The foundational assumptions of the two perspectives therefore differ substantially. Another distinction concerns causality. The Qur'anic perspective emphasizes moral responsibility, human action, and spiritual accountability as factors influencing historical outcomes. Fourth Turning Theory places greater emphasis on generational archetypes and cyclical social behavior. Consequently, the Qur'anic model incorporates ethical variables that are largely absent from the sociological structure of Fourth Turning Theory. The findings further indicate differences in the nature of historical recurrence. The Qur'anic conception does not prescribe fixed chronological cycles. Although patterns recur, their manifestation remains contingent upon human conduct and divine wisdom. Fourth Turning Theory, by contrast, proposes a more structured cyclical tendency linked to generational succession. These preliminary findings establish a foundation for a more detailed comparative discussion in the subsequent section.

**Table 1.** Comparison of Principles of Power Alternation

Aspect	Qur'anic Perspective	Fourth Turning Theory
Basis of change	Sunnatullah	Social cycle
Main factor	Morality and human action	Generational dynamics
Nature of change	Non-deterministic	Cyclical tendency
Purpose	Education and divine testing	Social transformation

### Synthesis of Findings and Transition to Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Q.S. Āli 'Imrān: 140 presents a comprehensive framework for understanding historical change through the concept of power alternation. The historical context of revelation shows that the verse emerged in response to the Muslim community's experience of defeat at Uhud. Linguistic analysis reveals that the phrase *wa tilkal-ayyāmu nudāwiluhā bayna an-nāse* expresses a universal principle concerning the circulation of historical circumstances among human societies.

The examination of tafsīr literature further indicates that power alternation is consistently interpreted as part of a broader pattern of sunnatullāh. Classical and contemporary commentators agree that victory and defeat are neither permanent nor arbitrary. Rather, they function within an ordered framework connecting historical events to moral, spiritual, and social factors. This interpretation is reinforced by the recurring emphasis on human responsibility, ethical conduct, and communal behavior. The analysis also identifies four major characteristics of power alternation in the Qur'anic perspective: moral accountability, spiritual testing, social universality, and historical recurrence.

These dimensions collectively distinguish the Qur'anic framework from purely deterministic or materialistic explanations of historical change. At the same time, the preliminary comparison with Fourth Turning Theory reveals several areas of convergence,

particularly regarding the recognition of recurring historical patterns. However, the comparison also uncovers important conceptual differences related to causality, agency, and the source of historical order. These findings suggest that while both frameworks seek to explain the dynamics of societal transformation, they operate from distinct epistemological and theoretical foundations. The following Discussion section examines these similarities and differences in greater depth, exploring their implications for contemporary understandings of history, power, and civilizational change.

### **Sunnatullah and the Critique of Historical Determinism**

The findings of this study suggest that the phrase *wa tilkal-ayyāmu nudā wiluhā bayna an-nās* (Q. Āli ‘Imrān: 140) articulates a conception of historical movement that recognizes recurring patterns without endorsing historical determinism. The verse acknowledges that victory and defeat circulate among human communities, yet it does not present this circulation as an automatic or unavoidable cycle. Rather, the Qur’anic formulation situates historical change within the framework of sunnatullāh, a divinely established order that governs social reality while preserving human responsibility. This distinction is crucial because it separates the Qur’anic understanding of history from theories that interpret historical development as the inevitable consequence of impersonal forces. In classical and contemporary tafsīr traditions, the alternation of power is consistently linked to moral and spiritual conditions rather than merely external circumstances. The events of Uhud illustrate this principle. The defeat experienced by the Muslim community is not explained solely by military weakness or historical necessity but is associated with specific human actions, including strategic disobedience and internal fragmentation. This interpretation implies that historical outcomes emerge through the interaction between divine laws and human choices. Consequently, the Qur’anic view rejects a purely fatalistic reading of history while simultaneously rejecting the notion that history is entirely autonomous from divine governance. This perspective differs significantly from historical determinism as represented in the thought of Karl Marx. Marxist historical materialism views social transformation as the outcome of structural economic contradictions that propel societies through successive stages of development. Within this framework, human consciousness is largely shaped by material conditions, and historical change follows a relatively predictable trajectory. The Qur’anic perspective, by contrast, does not reduce historical causality to economic or material factors. While social and material conditions undoubtedly influence historical developments, the Qur’an introduces moral agency, faith, justice, and collective ethical behavior as equally significant variables. History is therefore neither mechanically predetermined nor exclusively governed by material forces.

A similar distinction can be observed when comparing the Qur’anic conception of history with Oswald Spengler’s cyclical theory of civilizations. Spengler argues that civilizations resemble living organisms that pass through predetermined stages of birth, growth, maturity, and decline. Such a model implies that civilizational collapse is ultimately unavoidable regardless of human intervention. The findings of this study suggest that Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān: 140 presents a different framework. Although the verse recognizes recurring patterns of rise and decline, these patterns are not governed by a fixed biological cycle. Historical outcomes remain contingent upon human responses to moral, social, and spiritual challenges.

Thus, decline is not necessarily an irreversible destiny but may be altered through transformation in collective behavior. Arnold Toynbee's "Challenge and Response" theory provides a more nuanced point of comparison. Toynbee emphasizes the capacity of societies to respond creatively to crises, thereby avoiding deterministic explanations of history. In this respect, his framework shares certain affinities with the Qur'anic emphasis on human agency. Nevertheless, a fundamental difference remains. For Toynbee, the source of civilizational renewal lies primarily in human creativity and adaptive capacity.

In the Qur'anic worldview, successful responses to historical challenges are inseparable from moral integrity and alignment with divine principles. Human agency operates within a transcendent moral order rather than independently of it. From this perspective, the Qur'anic concept of *sunnatullāh* may be understood as a middle position between determinism and voluntarism. It acknowledges the existence of consistent historical laws while preserving the significance of human choice. Victory and defeat are neither random events nor inevitable products of cyclical forces. They are outcomes shaped by the interaction of divine governance, moral conduct, social cohesion, and human action. Therefore, *sunnatullāh* offers a model of historical understanding that integrates social regularity with ethical accountability, providing a distinctive alternative to both deterministic and purely secular interpretations of historical change.

### **Convergences and Divergences with Fourth Turning Theory**

The comparison between Q.S. Āli 'Imrān: 140 and Strauss and Howe's Fourth Turning Theory reveals both significant convergences and substantial divergences. At a general level, both frameworks challenge linear models of history by proposing that social life is characterized by recurring patterns. The Qur'anic notion of alternating "days" among people and the Fourth Turning concept of recurring generational cycles each suggest that periods of stability, crisis, decline, and renewal are recurring features of collective existence. This shared recognition of patterned historical movement provides an important basis for comparative dialogue.

A second area of convergence concerns the role of crisis in social transformation. Fourth Turning Theory identifies crises as pivotal moments that reshape institutions, values, and social structures. Likewise, the Qur'anic account of Uhud demonstrates that moments of collective adversity can serve transformative purposes. Defeat becomes a catalyst for self-reflection, social reorganization, and moral refinement. In both frameworks, crises are not merely destructive events but formative experiences that contribute to the development of communities and civilizations.

Despite these similarities, the two perspectives differ fundamentally at the ontological level. The Qur'anic worldview understands historical reality as operating within the framework of divine sovereignty. Historical events ultimately unfold within the scope of God's will and wisdom, even though human beings remain responsible for their actions. Fourth Turning Theory, in contrast, explains historical change through the interaction of generational archetypes and social dynamics. Its ontology is rooted in sociological observation rather than transcendence. Consequently, while both frameworks describe recurring patterns, they attribute those patterns to fundamentally different sources. The epistemological distinction is

equally significant. The Qur'anic conception derives its authority from revelation, which provides access to dimensions of reality that transcend empirical observation. Exegetical analysis therefore begins with the assumption that divine guidance offers valid insight into the nature of history. Fourth Turning Theory, on the other hand, emerges from inductive analysis of historical data. Strauss and Howe construct their model by identifying recurring generational patterns in American and Western history. As a result, the two approaches operate according to different standards of knowledge: one grounded in revelation and the other grounded in historical sociology.

Differences also appear at the axiological level. The Qur'anic perspective interprets historical change as a process oriented toward moral education, spiritual testing, and ethical accountability. The alternation of power serves pedagogical purposes that shape human character and communal responsibility. Fourth Turning Theory does not assign such transcendental purposes to history. Its primary concern is explaining how societies undergo structural transformation over time. While the theory may provide valuable insights into collective behavior, it does not address the moral or spiritual dimensions that are central to the Qur'anic framework. The distinction becomes particularly evident when examining causality. In Q.S. Āli 'Imrān: 140, historical outcomes are connected to variables such as faith, obedience, justice, and communal conduct. Human actions influence historical trajectories because moral choices carry social consequences. Fourth Turning Theory, by contrast, emphasizes generational succession as the principal driver of change. The transition from one generational archetype to another generates predictable shifts in social attitudes and institutional arrangements.

Thus, whereas the Qur'anic model prioritizes ethical causality, the Fourth Turning model prioritizes demographic and sociological causality. These differences indicate that structural similarities should not be mistaken for paradigm equivalence. Both frameworks acknowledge recurring historical patterns, yet they explain those patterns through distinct ontological, epistemological, axiological, and causal assumptions. Therefore, Fourth Turning Theory can serve as a useful comparative lens for exploring historical recurrence, but it cannot fully account for the transcendent dimensions embedded within the Qur'anic conception of history. The relationship between the two is best understood not as theoretical convergence but as an opportunity for interdisciplinary dialogue between revelation-based and social-scientific approaches to historical change.

### **Implications for Tafsir Studies and Civilizational Research**

The findings of this study contribute to contemporary tafsīr scholarship by demonstrating that Q.S. Āli 'Imrān: 140 extends beyond its immediate historical context. Although the verse was revealed in relation to the Battle of Uhud, the exegetical evidence indicates that its message is not confined to that event. Instead, the verse articulates a broader principle concerning the fluctuation of power, fortune, and historical circumstances among human communities.

This observation supports approaches to tafsīr that seek to uncover universal meanings embedded within specific historical occasions of revelation. From the perspective of Qur'anic interpretation, the study reinforces the value of thematic (tafsīr mawḍū'ī) approaches. Rather

than limiting analysis to textual explanation, thematic interpretation enables scholars to examine how Qur'anic concepts interact with broader intellectual traditions and contemporary issues. The comparison with Fourth Turning Theory demonstrates that Qur'anic concepts of history can be meaningfully engaged in dialogue with modern theories of social change. Such engagement expands the scope of tafsīr from textual exegesis toward broader interdisciplinary inquiry.

The study also contributes to ongoing efforts to connect tafsīr with the philosophy of history. Modern Islamic scholarship has increasingly sought to identify Qur'anic perspectives on historical development, civilizational change, and social transformation. The concept of *wa tilkal-ayyāmu nudā wiluhā bayna an-nās* provides a significant foundation for such discussions because it directly addresses the dynamics of historical movement. By situating the verse within debates concerning historical determinism, cyclical theories, and social transformation, the present study illustrates how tafsīr can participate in wider theoretical conversations traditionally dominated by secular frameworks.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the possibility of constructive dialogue between revelation and the social sciences. The comparison undertaken in this research does not seek to subordinate the Qur'an to modern theory or to validate revelation through sociological models. Rather, it demonstrates that comparative engagement can clarify both similarities and differences between intellectual traditions. Such an approach enriches Qur'anic studies by allowing Islamic concepts to enter broader academic discussions while preserving their distinctive epistemological foundations.

The implications extend beyond tafsīr studies to the field of civilizational research. Much of the existing literature on historical cycles and civilizational change is shaped by Western theoretical paradigms, including those of Spengler, Toynbee, and Strauss and Howe. The Qur'anic perspective offers an alternative framework that places ethical and spiritual factors at the center of historical analysis. This emphasis challenges approaches that explain social change exclusively through economic, demographic, or institutional variables.

The findings suggest that moral and spiritual dimensions should be considered integral components of civilizational development rather than secondary factors. Moreover, the Qur'anic model provides a conceptual framework for understanding the rise and decline of power that avoids both fatalism and historical inevitability. By linking historical outcomes to moral responsibility, it offers a dynamic account of civilizational change in which communities retain the capacity to alter their trajectories. Such a perspective is particularly relevant in contemporary discussions concerning governance, social resilience, and institutional sustainability. It highlights the importance of ethical culture and collective values as factors influencing long-term societal development. Ultimately, the present study argues that the Qur'anic conception of power alternation should not be understood merely as a description of past events. Instead, it functions as an interpretive paradigm for understanding historical transformation across diverse contexts.

The principle articulated in Q.S. Āli 'Imrān: 140 provides a framework through which contemporary societies may analyze patterns of rise, decline, crisis, and renewal without reducing history to deterministic cycles. As such, the verse contributes not only to the study of Qur'anic exegesis but also to broader scholarly debates concerning history, civilization, and

the nature of social change.

## CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān: 140, particularly the phrase *wa tilkal-ayyāmu nudā wiluhā bayna an-nās*, articulates a profound Qur’anic conception of the alternation of power through its distinctive balāghah structure. The rhetorical use of *tilka*, *al-ayyām*, and *nudā wiluhā* conveys that victory, defeat, authority, and decline are not fixed or permanent conditions but dynamic realities that circulate among human communities according to sunnatullah. The verse presents historical change as a meaningful and ordered process rather than a random occurrence, emphasizing that the rise and fall of individuals, societies, and civilizations are interconnected with moral, spiritual, and social dimensions. Consequently, the Qur’anic perspective understands power alternation as both a historical reality and a mechanism through which human character, faith, and collective responsibility are tested and revealed.

Academically, this study contributes to the development of Qur’anic studies by demonstrating how a balāghah-based reading can uncover broader historical and civilizational meanings embedded within a specific Qur’anic expression. The findings enrich tafsīr studies by extending the interpretation of Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān: 140 beyond its immediate context of the Battle of Uhud toward a universal principle of historical transformation. Furthermore, the study contributes to the growing dialogue between Islamic scholarship and contemporary social theory through a comparative engagement with Fourth Turning Theory. While identifying several structural similarities regarding recurring patterns of crisis and renewal, the study highlights fundamental differences in their epistemological, ontological, and axiological foundations, thereby offering a distinctive Qur’anic perspective on the dynamics of social change and historical development.

Despite these contributions, the study remains limited by its focus on a single Qur’anic verse and a single comparative theoretical framework. The analysis primarily examines the concept of power alternation through Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān: 140 and its relation to Fourth Turning Theory, leaving broader comparative possibilities unexplored. Future research may expand this discussion by investigating other Qur’anic verses related to sunnatullah, civilizational rise and decline, leadership transformation, and social change. Comparative studies involving additional theories of historical cycles, such as those proposed by Spengler, Toynbee, or Ibn Khaldun, may further enrich interdisciplinary discussions on history, religion, and civilization, while deepening scholarly understanding of the Qur’anic vision of historical dynamics.

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