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# Muhammad Abduh's Rational Hermeneutics and Its Implications for **Islamic Legal Reform**

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# Abstract

Research Objective: Investigates Muhammad Abduh's rational hermeneutics as a foundation for Islamic legal reform, exploring how his integration of reason ('aql), ethics, and revelation (naql) reconfigures Qur'anic interpretation to revitalize ijtihad and promote justice-aligned legal principles. Research Methodology: The research employs a qualitative design grounded in hermeneutical analysis and Islamic legal theory. It analyses key verses from Tafsir al-Manar, Tafsir Juz 'Amma, and Risalat al-Tawhid using textual, contextual, and comparative approaches to assess jurisprudential significance. **Results**: Abduh's tafsir consistently elevates ethical reasoning, public welfare, and maqāṣid al-sharīʿah above rigid textualism. His interpretations of verses concerning religious freedom (2:256), family law (4:3), justice (5:8), and gender equity (33:35) reflect a reformist orientation rooted in moral deliberation. Findings and Implications: The findings reveal a transformative legal paradigm reframing Islamic law as an adaptable, ethically driven system. Abduh's approach supports institutional reform and offers credible alternatives to formalist legal reasoning in addressing pluralism, governance, and human rights. Conclusion: Abduh's rational hermeneutics demonstrates that Islamic legal thought can be renewed through a principled balance of textual fidelity and moral responsiveness, affirming ijtihad's enduring relevance in contemporary legal discourse. **Contribution**: The study enriches Islamic legal scholarship by offering an analytical model bridging classical jurisprudence and modern ethical challenges, positioning tafsir as a meaningful tool in legal reform. Limitations and Suggestions: The study's limitation lies in its textual focus without assessing practical implementation. Future research should examine the framework's applicability in digital ethics, environmental jurisprudence, and policy-making.

# Introduction

This paper revisits Muhammad Abduh's interpretation of the Qur'an, emphasizing its implications for Islamic legal reform.<sup>1</sup> During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Muslim

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1 Harry Mulfi, "Konsep Muhammad Abduh Tentang Islam Rasional Di Era Modern," Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Theosofi Dan Peradaban Islam, 2021, https://doi.org/10.51900/alhikmah.v3i1.11234; Zaini, "THE METHOD OF INTERPRETATION OF SYEH MUHAMMAD ABDUH AND SYEH RASYID RIDHA IN THE BOOK

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Vol. 14: Issue 1 June (2025)



societies grappled with the dual challenges of colonial dominance and internal stagnation, particularly in the realm of legal thought. Classical jurisprudence had become stagnant, restricted by a strict adherence to taqlid and increasingly out of touch with changing socio-political realities.<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) addressed this crisis not only through theological renewal but also by proposing a rational hermeneutic framework that redefined the foundations of Islamic law. His interpretive methodology, most notably articulated in Tafsir al-Manar, aimed to restore the role of ijtihad (independent reasoning) and to reformulate the ethical foundations of Islamic legal norms. This study examines how Abduh's rational hermeneutics revitalized Islamic legal discourse and continues to influence reformist approaches to sharī'ah in the contemporary era.<sup>3</sup>

While Abduh's influence on theology and education is well documented, his contributions to modern Islamic legal thought remain less explored. His application of reason ('aql) and contextual analysis challenged literal interpretations of the Qur'an, creating opportunities for the reinterpretation of legal injunctions in light of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah (the higher objectives of Islamic law).is emphasis on ethical reasoning, social utility, and justice over formalist legalism marked a critical shift in Islamic jurisprudence. However, scholarly treatments often overlook the juridical impact of Abduh's tafsir. Addressing this gap, the present research emphasizes the legal dimensions of his rational exegesis and its relevance for contemporary legal reform in Muslim societies.<sup>4</sup>

Muhammad Abduh was not the first to introduce rationalism into Islamic jurisprudence, as rationalist traditions—such as those of the Mu'tazilites—had existed centuries earlier. However, Abduh played a crucial role in reviving and promoting the use of reason ('aql) within modern Islamic thought, particularly in the context of legal and educational reform. He argued that reason should be central to religious life and legal interpretation, advocating for a harmonious balance between rational inquiry and spiritual needs to achieve well-being in both this world and the hereafter. Muhammad Abduh played a crucial role in revitalizing rationalism within contemporary Islamic thought, particularly by highlighting the importance of reason ('aql) in religious life, legal interpretation, and education. Although rationalist traditions, such as those of the Mu'tazilites, existed before him, Abduh distinguished himself by promoting a harmonious

TAFSIR AL MANAR," Al-Bayan: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadist, 2019, https://doi.org/10.35132/ALBAYAN.V2I1.44; Raffy Akbar Nst et al., "Pemikiran Muhammad Abduh," Mimbar Kampus: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Agama Islam, 2024, https://doi.org/10.47467/mk.v23i2.3814; Tasnim Abdul Rahman and A Amir, "The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in Indonesia," 2021, https://doi.org/10.21580/ihya.23.1.7076; A Amir, "The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in The Nusantara: From Qur'anic Exegesis to Islamic Reform Movement," Afkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies, 2022, https://doi.org/10.18196/afkaruna.v18i2.10282.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Wang Yongbao, "THE IMPACT OF COLONIALISM AND NATIONALISM ON THE MARGINALIZATION OF ISLAMIC LAW IN THE MUSLIM WORLD," Malaysian Journal of Syariah and Law 12, no. 2 (August 21, 2024): 375–87, https://doi.org/10.33102/mjsl.vol12no2.653; Ibraheem Tayseer Ahmad, "The Islamic State in Contemporary Thought: A Critical Analysis of Wael Hallaq's Perspective," Journal of Posthumanism 5, no. 5 (April 29, 2025), https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i5.1307; Rabiat Akande, "Secularizing Islam: The Colonial Encounter and the Making of a British Islamic Criminal Law in Northern Nigeria, 1903–58," Law and History Review 38, no. 2 (May 22, 2020): 459–93, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0738248019000166.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Haroon Bashir, "Islam and the Emancipatory Ethic: Islamic Law, Liberation Theology and Prison Abolition," Religions 14, no. 9 (August 22, 2023): 1083, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091083.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Bashir; Mark Sedgwick, "Muhammad 'Abduh: Modern Islam and the Culture of Ambiguity By Oliver Scharbrodt," Journal of Islamic Studies 35, no. 1 (January 1, 2024): 126–29, https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etad044.

https://journal.uin-alauddin.ac.id/index.php/al daulah/index

Vol. 14: Issue 1 June (2025)



balance between rational inquiry and spiritual needs to attain well-being in both this world and the hereafter.

Through an analysis of key legal-themed verses and Abduh's interpretive strategies, this research illustrates that his tafsir was not solely exegetical but also jurisprudentially transformative. Abduh's methodology allows for a reexamination of laws pertaining to religious freedom, gender justice, and public welfare. This study employs an interdisciplinary approach that integrates hermeneutics, legal theory, and the sociology of law to evaluate how Abduh's perspective enriches contemporary Islamic legal discourse. In doing so, it presents a comprehensive model for legal reform that is rooted in ethical rationalism and responsive to the challenges faced by the modern Muslim world.

# Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in hermeneutical analysis and Islamic legal theory to examine Muhammad Abduh's rational hermeneutics and its contribution to Islamic legal reform. The research adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework integrating hermeneutics (inspired by Fazlur Rahman's double-movement theory and Mohammed Arkoun's critical hermeneutics), Islamic legal theory ( $u \dot{s} \bar{u} l$  a l-f i q h), and sociology of law. This approach provides a critical lens to assess Abduh's efforts to reconcile reason and revelation in legal reasoning while examining how religious texts interact with historical contexts and institutional forces.

The primary sources comprise Muhammad Abduh's exegetical and theological writings, notably *Tafsir al-Manar* (co-authored with Rashid Rida), *Tafsir Juz 'Amma*, and *Risalat al-Tawhid*. Secondary sources include academic analyses by contemporary scholars examining Abduh's legal, theological, and hermeneutic thought. The units of analysis are specific Qur'anic verses interpreted by Abduh with legal implications, including verses addressing justice (4:58; 5:8), governance (42:38), religious freedom (2:256), family law (4:3; 2:229), and gender equity (33:35). These verses were selected purposively based on their prominence in both classical jurisprudence and Abduh's interpretative work.

The analytical procedure consists of four sequential stages: textual extraction of relevant Qur'anic verses from Abduh's works, contextual analysis situating his interpretations within 19th-century Egyptian socio-political conditions, comparative legal reading contrasting Abduh's interpretations with traditional juristic commentaries (al-Tabari, al-Qurtubi), and thematic coding synthesizing his hermeneutic principles, including rationalism, justice, public welfare, and  $maq\bar{a}sid$  orientation. This systematic approach enables a comprehensive examination of methodological divergences and reformist shifts in Abduh's legal thinking.

Research credibility is ensured through the triangulation of multiple sources and established scholarly protocols in Qur'anic and legal studies. The study acknowledges its limitations as a textual analysis that does not empirically investigate institutional implementation or societal reception of Abduh's ideas. All sources are properly attributed with respectful treatment of religious traditions.

#### **Results and Discussions**

# Reforming Legal Interpretation: From Formalism to Ethical Functionalism

Muhammad Abduh's Rational Hermeneutics and Its Implications for Islamic Legal Reform is an interpretive model as a reformist legal framework. His tafsir embodies a radical departure from legal formalism, reconceiving Qur'anic interpretation as a dynamic process centered on ethical intentionality, justice ('adl), and public welfare (maṣlaḥah). In contrast to rigid juristic literalism, Abduh's hermeneutics prioritizes ijtihad (independent legal reasoning) to ensure

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Vol. 14: Issue | June (2025)

Islamic law remains responsive to evolving human needs.5

Abduh's approach to rational hermeneutics significantly transforms the method of interpreting Islamic law from a rigid framework to one that is based on ethical and functional aspects. In his explanations of Surah al-Nisa' and al-Baqarah, he prioritizes justice, equity, and the welfare of the public over strict compliance with established jurisprudential precedents. For example, his reexamination of polygamy supports limiting it based on ethical capability and social justice, foreshadowing modern maqāṣid-oriented reasoning. Likewise, his interpretation of lā ikrāha fī al-dīn (no compulsion in religion) recasts legal pluralism and the freedom of belief as core principles of the Qur'an, departing from historical coercive interpretations.<sup>6</sup>

The analysis further affirms that Abduh's exegesis advocates for a reappraisal of penal codes, gender regulations, and religious obligations in light of changing socio-political contexts. This viewpoint resonates with contemporary reformist initiatives in Egypt, Indonesia, and other regions that utilize his methodology to validate modern legal adaptations, all while remaining anchored in the teachings of the Qur'an.<sup>7</sup>

# Qur'anic Legal Verses and Their Reformist Reinterpretation

The results suggest that Abduh's rational hermeneutics considerably transform Islamic legal interpretation from a rigid approach to a more ethical and functional perspective. His tafsir demonstrates a consistent method of deriving legal principles through ethical reasoning, awareness of context, and an emphasis on justice ('adl) and the common good (maṣlaḥah). Below are particular examples of Qur'anic verses that Abduh viewed as fundamental to his approach to legal reform:

1. **Surah Al-Baqarah (2:256):** "Lā ikrāha fī al-dīn" (There is no compulsion in religion). Abduh interprets this verse as a definitive legal principle guaranteeing religious freedom and autonomy of conscience. Rejecting coercive interpretations common in pre-modern jurisprudence, he argues that faith must be grounded in conviction, not force, and legal systems must uphold this dignity. This exegesis laid the groundwork for reformist arguments in favor of religious pluralism and non-coercive law.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Bashir, "Islam and the Emancipatory Ethic: Islamic Law, Liberation Theology and Prison Abolition"; Siddiqi, "Moral Epistemology and the Revision of Divine Law in Islam."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Moh. Nor Ichwan, David Ming, and Mokh Sya'roni, "Bridging Tradition and Modernity: Integrating Classical Interpretation and Modern Hermeneutics through Ijtihad in Qur'an Studies," Pharos Journal of Theology, no. 106.2 (March 2025), https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.2021; Siddiqi, "Moral Epistemology and the Revision of Divine Law in Islam."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Siti Iyam Muslimah, "Adâbî Ijtimâ'î Dalam Penafsiran Ayat Gender Perspektif Muhammad Abduh," Journal of Comprehensive Science (JCS), 2024, https://doi.org/10.59188/jcs.v3i11.2721; Moh. Nor Ichwan et al., "Muhammad Abduh and Sufism: Building Spiritual Consciousness in the Context of Social Change," Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam, 2024, https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2024.14.1.163-187; I Adam, "Islamic Modernism and Tafsir in Nineteenth Century Egypt: A Critical Analysis of Muhammad Abduh's Exegesis," Journal of Quranic Sciences and Research, 2023, https://doi.org/10.30880/jqsr.2023.04.01.006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Adam, "Islamic Modernism and Tafsir in Nineteenth Century Egypt: A Critical Analysis of Muhammad Abduh's Exegesis"; Pierluigi Chiassoni, "Protecting Freedom of Conscience in a Constitutional State," 2021, 15–42, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003131083-3; Nicolae Sedletchi, "The Right to Freedom of Conscience - Dimensions Conceptual-Legal," Vector European, 2023, https://doi.org/10.52507/2345-1106.2022-2.06; J Maclure and Charles Taylor, "Secularism and Freedom of Conscience," 2011, https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674062955.

https://journal.uin-alauddin.ac.id/index.php/al daulah/index

Vol. 14: Issue 1 June (2025)



- 2. **Surah Al-Nisā' (4:3)** states: "If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with orphans, marry women of your choice, two, three, or four. But if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly, then marry only one..." Abduh interprets this verse not as a legal endorsement of polygamy but rather as a conditional allowance, with justice as its fundamental requirement. He critiques the historical misuse of this verse and advocates for legal restrictions on polygamy, emphasizing ethical capacity and social impact. His interpretation anticipates later arguments for monogamy as the ethical standard by *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah.*9
- 3. **Surah Al-Mā'idah (5:8)** states, "Do not allow the enmity of a people to hinder you from being just. Uphold justice; that is closer to righteousness." Abduh underscores this verse as a universal legal principle that governs both public and private interactions. In his legal framework, justice ('adl) is viewed not merely as a procedural matter but as a substantive one, serving as the moral foundation for Islamic legislation and governance.<sup>10</sup>
- 4. **Surah Al-Baqarah (2:229)** states, "Do not take them back to harm them or to transgress. And whoever does that has wronged himself." Abduh cites this verse to challenge abusive practices within family law, particularly regarding divorce and custody. He emphasizes that Islamic law should safeguard the vulnerable, especially women, from legal exploitation. Any interpretation that permits harm is both legally and ethically invalid.<sup>11</sup>
- 5. **Surah Al-Shūrā (42:38)** states, "...those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation (shūrā)..." For Abduh, this verse serves as a foundation for legitimizing consultative governance as a Qur'anic legal principle. He critiques autocratic rule and advocates for democratic participation and constitutional reform within Muslim governance. Abduh proposes that Islamic political and legal systems should be firmly grounded in shūrā, justice, and accountability.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> U Abdurrahman, "Penafsiran Muhammad 'Abduh Terhadap Alquran Surat Al-Nisâ' Ayat 3 Dan 129 Tentang Poligami" 14 (2017): 25–46, https://doi.org/10.24042/adalah.v14i1.1139; M Ichsan, "POLIGAMI DALAM PERSPEKTIF HUKUM ISLAM (Kajian Tafsir Muqaranah)," JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah), 2018, https://doi.org/10.31958/JURIS.V17I2.1196; Masiyan Syam and Faisal Haitomi, "Poligami Dalam Surah An-Nisa' (4): 3 (Aplikasi Pendekatan Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed)." 9 (2020): 66–84, https://doi.org/10.29300/jpkth.v9i1.2752; Laily Rahma Wati et al., "Poligami Dalam Al Quran Perspektif Penafsiran," Reflection: Islamic Education Journal, 2024, https://doi.org/10.61132/reflection.v2i1.398; Khairul Hamim, "Comparison Between Double Movement Theory and Nazariyyat Al-Hudud Theory on Polygamy Laws," El-Mashlahah, 2022, https://doi.org/10.23971/el-mashlahah.v12i2.4903; Man Baker, "Polygyny in Islam: A Call for Retrospection," British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 50 (2021): 397–409, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2021.1975258.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> A Munim, "Post-Divorce Custody of Children According to Positive and Islamic Laws" 2 (2020): 20–27, https://doi.org/10.30659/LDJ.2.1.%P; Umar Multazam, "The Concept of Child Custody (Hadhanah) After Divorce in the Perspective of Islamic Law," Indonesian Journal of Islamic Law, 2024, https://doi.org/10.35719/ijil.v7i1.1956; Siti Nurjanah, "Divorce and Its Impact on Custody of Minors Using Islamic Law Perspectives," Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam, 2022, https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v7i1.4156; N Nasrudin et al., "Comparative Analysis of Islamic Family Law and Normative Law: Examining the Causes of Divorce in Purwokerto, Indonesia," Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam, 2024, https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i2.16825.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Khudzaifah Dimyati et al., "Developing Islamic Legal Philosophy-Based Assurance of Justice," WISDOM, 2022, https://doi.org/10.24234/wisdom.v24i4.808; Agus Riwanto and S Suryaningsih,

Vol. 14: Issue 1 June (2025)



- 6. **Surah Al-Nisā' (4:58):** "God commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice..." Abduh highlights this verse as the jurisprudential basis for the rule of law, fair adjudication, and public trust. He criticizes premodern legal structures that failed to guarantee equal justice and proposes institutional reforms based on this Qur'anic injunction.<sup>13</sup>
- 7. **Surah Al-Aḥzāb (33:35):** "Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women... the fasting men and the fasting women... the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so—for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward." Abduh references this verse to argue for gender equity in legal and moral responsibility. He posits that spiritual and ethical equality must be reflected in legal rights and obligations, providing a Qur'anic rationale for rethinking patriarchal interpretations in Islamic law.<sup>14</sup>
- 8. **Surah Al-Ḥujurāt (49:13):** "O mankind, we created you from a male and a female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another..." This verse serves as the foundation for Abduh's critique of legal ethnocentrism and sectarianism. He advocates for legal principles that foster social cohesion, uphold equal dignity, and encourage intercommunal respect, while rejecting discriminatory rulings based on ethnicity or status.<sup>15</sup>

These examples together demonstrate that Abduh's approach to legal interpretation is marked by a dedication to ethical principles, practical context, and adaptability in law. He does not intend to eliminate the Islamic legal tradition; instead, he strives to rejuvenate it by applying the universal moral principles present in the Qur'an. His interpretation functions as a channel for

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https://journal.uin-alauddin.ac.id/index.php/al daulah/index

Vol. 14: Issue 1 June (2025)



legal renewal, highlighting the significance of human dignity, justice, and social welfare.

# Integration of Reason and Revelation in Legal Interpretation

Abduh articulated a jurisprudential paradigm that integrates reason ('aql) with revelation (naql), arguing that divine guidance invites rational engagement rather than passive acceptance. Legal rulings, in his view, are not static prescriptions but rational outcomes guided by moral objectives. His interpretation transforms legal methodology into an active ethical endeavor, asserting that the Qur'an's legal content must resonate with contextual human realities to preserve its normative vitality.<sup>16</sup>

By redefining the Qur'an as a text that encompasses both moral guidance and rational thought, he rejuvenated ijtihad as a valid source of legal authority, confronting the prevailing medieval consensus on legal matters. His contributions laid the foundational ideas for contemporary maqāṣid-based legal reasoning, positioning ethics—not merely textual interpretation—at the center of the lawmaking process. Abduh advocated for a synergistic relationship between reason and revelation to facilitate interpretation and legislation, thereby highlighting the significance of ethics and rationality in the quest for reform in Islamic law.<sup>17</sup>

Abduh's tafsir enables jurists to approach law not as a static set of rules but as a dynamic process of ethical deliberation. His interpretations challenge patriarchal and coercive readings of the text, support legal pluralism, and elevate human dignity as a core legal principle. While critiques remain regarding his limited engagement with fiqh methodology or gender-specific jurisprudence, Abduh's hermeneutics remain a critical resource for legal reformers seeking to align Islamic law with justice, equity, and contemporary realities.

# Rejection of Taglid and Revival of Ijtihad

At the heart of Abduh's reformist thought is the rejection of taqlid, which he considers detrimental to intellectual advancement. He advocates for ijtihad, emphasizing the jurist's duty to critically engage with both scripture and the realities of society. According to Abduh, law should evolve in response to societal changes through ethical deliberation rather than strict adherence to precedent. This approach not only revitalizes Islamic legal theory but also resonates with contemporary reformist movements.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Mohammed A F Badawi and Zulfikri, "The Relevance of Muhammad Abduh's Thought in Indonesian Tafsir: Analysis of Tafsir Al-Azhar," *Millah*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol21.iss1.art5; Susilo Susilo, "Reinterpretation of the Meaning of Angels in Tafsir Al-Manar (Critical Analysis Studies)," *Aqwal: Journal of Qur'an and Hadis Studies*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.28918/aqwal.v4i1.915; Aditiya Gilang Febiyanto and Andhika Najib Azka, "The Enlightened Path: Muḥammad 'Abduh's Fusion of Reason and Revelation," *Mauriduna: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2025, https://doi.org/10.37274/mauriduna.v6i1.1409.

<sup>17</sup> D Mukhetdinov, "The Reception of Egyptian Modernism in Indonesia: Harun Nasution on Theology of Muhammad Abduh," *Islam in the Modern World*, 2020, https://doi.org/10.22311/2074-1529-2020-16-3-49-64; Rizki Firmansyah and Sufian Bosu, "JEJAK PENAFSIRAN RASIONAL PADA KITAB TAFSIR JUZ 'AMMA KARYA MUHAMMAD ABDUH," *MIMESIS*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.12928/mms.v4i1.7079; Risman Bustamam and Devy Aisyah, "Model Penafsiran Kisah Oleh Muhammad Abduh Dalam Al-Manar: Studi Kisah Adam Pada Surah Al-Baqarah" 2 (2020): 199–218, https://doi.org/10.15548/mashdar.v2i2.1695; Aditiya Gilang Febiyanto and Andhika Najib Azka, "The Enlightened Path: Muḥammad 'Abduh's Fusion of Reason and Revelation," *Mauriduna: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2025, https://doi.org/10.37274/mauriduna.v6i1.1409.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Mohammad Izdiyan Muttaqin et al., "Muhammad Abduh's Thought and Its Practical Implications on Government Work Programs For 2024-2029," *Journal of Social Research*, 2025, https://doi.org/10.55324/josr.v4i2.2424; Muhammad Hafizh et al., "Muhammad Abduh's Typical Modern

Vol. 14: Issue 1 June (2025)



Muhammad Abduh's reformist philosophy focuses on opposing taqlid, which refers to the uncritical following of past authorities, as he viewed it as an obstacle to both intellectual and societal advancement. Rather, Abduh advocated for ijtihad, the practice of independent reasoning, encouraging scholars to thoughtfully engage with both Islamic texts and contemporary realities. He contended that Islamic law should adapt through ethical reasoning and rational interpretation, rather than strict adherence to historical precedents, thus allowing it to respond to social changes. This perspective revitalized Islamic legal theory and resonated with broader modern reformist initiatives, as Abduh and his peers aimed to adapt Islamic teachings to the challenges posed by modernity through rational and contextual approaches. By promoting ijtihad, Abduh fostered a dynamic and reflective relationship with tradition, striving to align faith with current needs and ethical principles, thereby making a significant contribution to the development of modern Islamic thought. Page 19 and 19 and

# Critical Reflections and Scholarly Debates

Despite its considerable influence, Abduh's rationalism has been critiqued for possibly weakening traditional legal authority. Critics focus on the dangers of legal subjectivism and its connection to secular legal systems. However, these criticisms underscore the importance of his perspective as a crucial challenge for legal reform, rather than serving as a conclusive jurisprudential framework.<sup>21</sup> Abduh's rational approach has motivated reformist movements and initiatives aimed at reinstating the importance of Islamic law. Critics contend that his hesitation to clearly outline a consistent moral rationalism hinders the formation of a strong alternative to conventional legalism, leaving reformist theories susceptible to claims of subjectivism or secular impact. Nonetheless, Abduh's epistemological perspective continues to be a foundational influence in the ongoing discussions regarding the interplay between tradition and reform in Islamic law, underscoring the importance of a reasoned engagement with both scripture and the evolving needs of society.<sup>22</sup>

Education: His Thoughts and Reforms in the Islamic World," *Nizham Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2025, https://doi.org/10.32332/nizham.v13i01.9697; E Efendi et al., "MUHAMMAD ABDUH: REFORMASI DAN PURIFIKASI INTELEKTUALITAS DUNIA PENDIDIKAN ISLAM TAHUN 1866-1905M," *AL Fikrah: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.51476/alfikrah.v3i2.501.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Muhamad Haris et al., "Muhammad Abduh's Thought and Its Practical Implications on Government Work Programs For 2024-2029," *Journal of Social Research* 4, no. 2 (January 25, 2025): 175–95, https://doi.org/10.55324/josr.v4i2.2424.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Hafiz Zakariya, "MUHAMMAD 'ABDUH'S REFORMISM: THE MODES OF ITS DISSEMINATION IN PRE-INDEPENDENT MALAYSIA," *International Research Journal of Shariah, Muamalat and Islam* 2, no. 4 (June 10, 2020): 43–54, https://doi.org/10.35631/IRJSMI.24005; Elly Warnisyah Hrp et al., "Pemikiran Muhammad Abduh," *Mimbar Kampus: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Agama Islam* 23, no. 2 (July 10, 2024): 1176–85, https://doi.org/10.47467/mk.v23i2.3814.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ilham Kuncahyo et al., "Efforts to Reform Islamic Law: An Analytical of Muhammad Abduh's Thought," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Social Science and Education (IJSSE*), April 2, 2024, 21–30, https://doi.org/10.53639/ijsse.v2i1.17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Aasia Yusuf, "Islam and Modernity: Remembering the Contribution of Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905)," *ICR Journal* 3, no. 2 (January 15, 2012): 355–69, https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v3i2.560; Aditiya Gilang Febiyanto and Andhika Najib Azka, "The Enlightened Path: Muḥammad 'Abduh's Fusion of Reason and Revelation," *Mauriduna: Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 13, 2025): 625–43, https://doi.org/10.37274/mauriduna.v6i1.1409.

https://journal.uin-alauddin.ac.id/index.php/al daulah/index

Vol. 14: Issue 1 June (2025)



# Conclusion

This study has reaffirmed that Muhammad Abduh's rational and sociologically informed exegetical method presents a transformative paradigm in Qur'anic interpretation, one that continues to resonate within contemporary Islamic legal and intellectual discourse. Through critical examination of Tafsir al-Manar, Tafsir Juz 'Amma, and Risalat al-Tawhid, the research has demonstrated Abduh's enduring commitment to harmonizing revelation with reason and to grounding Islamic law in ethical reasoning, scientific consciousness, and educational advancement. Positioned between the poles of traditionalist dogmatism and secular detachment, Abduh articulated a reformist hermeneutic rooted in ijtihad, moral autonomy, and epistemic integrity. While shaped by its 19th-century context and not without limitations—particularly regarding spiritual mysticism and gender inclusivity—his intellectual legacy remains a pivotal resource for rethinking Islamic legal theory and practice. The study's primary contribution lies in reframing tafsir as an ethically oriented, contextually responsive, and intellectually dynamic enterprise. Future inquiry is encouraged to extend Abduh's hermeneutical model to emerging fields such as ecological jurisprudence, digital ethics, and transnational Islamic legal reform.

# **CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement**

**Ahmad N**abil: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing -original Draft. Supervision, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, **Tasnim Abdul Rahman**: Supervision, Writing - review

# **Declaration of Competing Interest**

The authors declare that they have no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could influence the work reported in this paper.

# **Data Availability**

Data will be made available on request.

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Vol. 14: Issue 1 June (2025)



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