



Statehood in Early Islam: A Comparative Analysis of Medina's Political Order and the Westphalian State

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Abstract: Despite the agreements and disagreements concerning whether the Messenger of God (PBUH) pursued a project of state-building, the reality is that he assumed control over the military, economic, and cultural-religious administration of Medina. By obligating Muslims to migrate (Hijrah) to Medina, determining its protected boundaries, and concluding the Charter (Constitution) of Medina, he effectively undertook the governance and administration of that city. The issue, and consequently the question that arises, is whether Medina al-Nabi can be compared with and evaluated against the four constitutive elements of the modern nation-state, a model that was institutionalized through the Peace of Westphalia in the West and subsequently became the criterion for the recognition and identification of states in the contemporary era.

Drawing upon a combined historical, analytical, and comparative methodology, this study concludes that Medina al-Nabi, despite its divergence from and even opposition to the religious assumptions embedded in the Westphalian settlement, and despite the pre-modern nature of its political foundations, nevertheless embodied within itself the essential components of the modern state, including population, territory, government, and sovereignty. Furthermore, it evolved from a tribal social order into a city-state, subsequently into a nation-state, and ultimately into an imperial political system.

Keywords: Medina al-Nabi, Peace of Westphalia, Modern State, Islamic State, Political Structure.

Introduction

Although the majority of scholars have accepted that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) established an Islamic state, some maintain that he neither insisted upon nor deliberately pursued such a project and that he undertook no explicit action in this regard. The reality, however, is that not only did Medina al-Nabi come into existence as an organized political entity, but the Messenger of God (PBUH) also communicated the divine revelation and translated it into practical reality. This demonstrates that, within the framework of divine commandments, he assumed the social, political, and military leadership of Medina. Such a development signifies the birth of a new political order with its own foundations, content, territorial domain, and followers – namely, the Islamic State. Consequently, it is necessary to explain this process of state formation within the framework of modern understandings of the state.

It is well known that the state, as the highest and most complex form of political organization, has always occupied a central position in the studies of political science and international law. In the classical literature of these disciplines, the emergence of the “modern state,” in its technical sense, is generally attributed to the Peace of Westphalia (1648), a historical turning point at which concepts such as territorial sovereignty, political independence, and national borders replaced transnational religious loyalties and universal empires. Therefore, the principal issue of this study is a comparative understanding of the political structure of Medina al-Nabi; an event that represented not only a major religious transformation but also the emergence of a new political subject known as the Ummah, whose foundations appear to be at variance with the principles underlying the Westphalian order and its transition from supranational loyalties.

Accordingly, the central research question of the present study is whether the political structure that emerged in Medina during the seventh century CE can be evaluated through the analytical framework of the components of the modern (Westphalian) state. In

other words, was the “State of Medina” merely a moral-religious covenant among believers, or did it also possess the four constitutive elements of statehood—territory, population, government, and sovereignty—in their technical and institutional sense?

In addressing this question, the research hypothesis is based on the assumption that the State of Medina, beyond being a traditional political model, possessed the structural characteristics of a state, including the concentration of authority, a unified political territory, and a collective identity that transcended tribal affiliations. Furthermore, the Constitution (Charter) of Medina, as the first codified constitutional document, provided the necessary legal framework for the transition from a “tribal state of nature” to a “civil, state-centered order.” Through a historical, analytical, and comparative methodology, and in light of theories of sovereignty and statehood, this study seeks to examine and test this proposition. Its ultimate objective is to offer a new interpretation of the state in early Islam, one in which revelatory legitimacy is integrated with the tangible functions of the state, namely order, security, and law.

1 .Literature Review

Considering the title and subject of the present study, the relevant literature may be classified into three categories: domestic (Iranian) studies, international studies, and studies conducted in the Arab world. A review of these works indicates that although numerous studies have been written on Medina al-Nabi and its relationship to the state, relatively few have systematically analyzed the political structure of Medina in relation to the components of the Westphalian state.

For example, Al-Jabri (1990), in his book *The Arab Political Mind* (Al-'Aql al-Siyasi al-'Arabi), attempts to explain the logic of politics in the Arab-Islamic world through the triad of “creed, tribe, and booty.” In this interpretation, the political order of early Islam is

viewed as being based more on a combination of religious loyalties and tribal affiliations than on the modern concept of the state.

Similarly, Firahi (2011), in his book *Power, Knowledge, and Legitimacy in Medieval Islam*, examines the relationship between political power, religious knowledge, and the mechanisms of legitimacy throughout Islamic history. He argues that political authority in early Islam was not founded solely upon coercion or personal rule; rather, it was closely connected with bay'ah (allegiance), divine designation (nass), and networks of religious meaning-making. Likewise, Lakzaei (2013), in his book entitled *The Political Conduct of the Holy Prophet (PBUH)*, analyzes the State of Medina as a "state-ummah" (dawlat al-ummah) and emphasizes the role of the Prophet (PBUH) in establishing justice, consultation (shura), and political cohesion. From this perspective, the Medinan experience represents an example of the integration of religion and politics within a newly emerging society.

Furthermore, Mohsen Mohajernia (2010), in an article entitled *The Political System of Islam*, compares the components of the state during the Prophetic era with modern concepts of statehood. He demonstrates that although the State of Medina possessed the essential pillars of a state, its political order, unlike the modern state – which is based upon bureaucracy and purely conventional contracts – was formed around divine guardianship (wilayah), Islamic law (shari'ah), and ethical leadership.

Watt (1956), in his book *Muhammad at Medina*, describes Medinan society as a kind of "super-tribe" that the Prophet (PBUH) succeeded in organizing around a new religious-political order. According to Watt, the Prophet's migration (Hijrah) marked the beginning of the formation of a new political community that transcended purely tribal loyalties.

In another work, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (1961), Watt further emphasizes the political role of the Prophet (PBUH) as both a messenger of God and a statesman. He argues that the Prophet's leadership in Medina was not merely spiritual in nature; rather, it also

included social organization, conflict resolution, and political guidance.

Krasner (1999), in his book *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, argues that sovereignty – particularly Westphalian sovereignty – is one of the central concepts of the modern state, within which the principles of non-intervention and territorial authority occupy a fundamental position.

Similarly, Sachedina (2001), in *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, examines religious and political pluralism in Islam and emphasizes the possibility of coexistence among different groups within the framework of an Islamic order. He considers Medina to be an example of a political order based upon the recognition of differences and the acceptance of pluralism.

Moreover, Akram Diya al-Umari (1994), in his book *Civil Society During the Era of Prophethood (Al-Mujtama' al-Madani fi 'Ahd al-Nubuwwah)*, attempts to demonstrate that the Prophetic experience contains clear indicators of the establishment of a state, including the Ummah as a population, a defined territory, and an organized public order. Through a detailed examination of the Prophetic biography (Sirah) and documents such as the Constitution of Medina, he reinterprets the State of Medina as a political unit that transcended tribal structures and evolved into an organized political entity.

2 .Theoretical Framework: Sovereignty Theory and Structural Components of the Westphalian State

The present study, for the purpose of a comparative analysis of the political structure of Madīnah al-Nabī (the Prophet's City), grounds its theoretical framework on the foundational concepts of the "modern state," which originate in the Peace of Westphalia (1648). The Westphalian state, in political science literature, is an institution that transitioned from transnational religious loyalties toward centralized political authority. According to classical definitions, a "state" for its

empirical and legal realization requires four interwoven elements, which are elaborated below:

2.1 .Population

Population constitutes the human pillar of state formation. In the Westphalian model, the state exercises authority over a set of individuals who possess a shared (national) identity and who have come together within the framework of a social contract (Heywood, 2013: 57). In the Westphalian state, population is defined beyond blood and tribal affiliations, on the basis of civic rights and duties. In this model, a unified collective identity provides the foundation for legitimizing the authority of power (Krasner, 1999: 12). Today, it is held that the population of each nation-state must be permanent and should not experience severe fluctuations except through natural birth and death.

2.2 .Territory

A modern state cannot be conceived without a geographical domain with clearly defined and recognized borders. Territory is the physical space over which state sovereignty is exercised. In Westphalian theory, the “principle of territoriality” implies that state laws are only valid within national borders, and no external power has the right to intervene within this domain (Krasner, 1999: 20). Territory is not only a source of wealth but also the foundation of security and national identity (Heywood, 2013: 58). This element, like the previous one, requires stability and consolidation, and states that collapse or disintegrate due to annexation or partition are considered to lack this component.

2.3 .Government

Government is the executive and institutional arm of the state, responsible for legislation and enforcement of laws, maintaining order, and managing public affairs. According to Charles Tilly’s theory, state formation requires the centralization of instruments of power within a

central institution (Tilly, 1992: 74). In the modern model, government is responsible for establishing the “monopoly of the legitimate use of force” in order to prevent natural state conditions and chaos. This institution functions as an intermediary between the people and sovereignty in achieving collective goals (Heywood, 2013: 59). Government, in essence, is the executive component of the state that undergoes multiple changes within its structure and framework; governments are transient and temporary.

2.4 .Sovereignty

Sovereignty is the highest and most decisive element of the Westphalian state. This concept has two dimensions: internal sovereignty (supreme and exclusive authority over all individuals and groups within the territory) and external sovereignty (political independence and recognition by other states) (Krasner, 1999: 4). Sovereignty implies the existence of a final decision-making authority above which no power exists. Within this framework, states are considered equal, and the principle of non-intervention forms the basis of international relations (Heywood, 2013: 60). Unlike government, sovereignty—contrary to governance and in continuity with the state—is characterized by stability and permanence; according to Jean Bodin, it is inalienable, indivisible, and non-partitionable.

By integrating these four elements, the Westphalian state is defined as a stable political organization that transforms dispersed power into institutionalized authority through the “social contract.” In subsequent sections, this paper analyzes Madīnah al-Nabī as a political unit in which the Prophet (PBUH), through the “Medinan Covenant,” transformed a pluralistic population into a unified “ummah” (population), defined the boundaries of “haram” (territory), established a political leadership institution (government), and consolidated political independence vis-à-vis the polytheists and surrounding tribes (sovereignty). In this study, the Westphalian model is not employed as a historically transferable reality to the first century

of the Hijri era, but rather as an “ideal-type analytical construct” for assessing stateness within the political order of Medina. Therefore, the aim of the article is not to demonstrate the identity of Medina with the modern state, but to reveal its institutional and functional capacities within a pre-modern political order.

3 .The Peace of Westphalia

The Peace of Westphalia (1648), in the literature of international relations and political science, is more than merely an agreement ending the Thirty Years’ Religious War in Europe; it is recognized as a turning point in the transition from a medieval “universalist” order to a “state-centric” order. Accordingly, Krasner argues that Westphalian sovereignty signifies the elimination of any external authority (the Pope or the Emperor) within the territorial domain of a ruler (Krasner, 1999, p. 20). Such a conception of sovereignty introduces elements for the modern state that can also be applied to understanding Madīnah al-Nabī.

The Westphalian state is built upon three core pillars that can be employed in comparative research (such as reconstructing the Medinan state):

3.1 .Territoriality

In the Westphalian system, political authority is defined by geographical boundaries rather than personal or tribal loyalties. As Krasner notes, “the Westphalian order is based on the principle that states possess exclusive authority within their territorial domain” (Krasner, 1999, p. 21).

3.2 .Internal Independence and Non-Intervention

One of the most significant achievements of Westphalia was the consolidation of the principle of “*cuius regio, eius religio*”. This principle denotes the ruler’s exclusive jurisdiction over internal affairs, including religion and legislation, and any external intervention was considered a violation of sovereignty (Philpott, 2001, p. 75). As Croxton emphasizes, Westphalia “weakened previous hierarchical structures

so that territorial rulers acquired primary jurisdiction in governing their domains" (Croxtton, 2013, p. 351).

3.3 .Legal Equality of States

By rejecting the absolute authority of the Pope and the Emperor, the Westphalian system recognized all sovereign political units, regardless of size or military power, as legally equal. This transition represented the transformation of the medieval vertical order into a horizontal system of independent states (Gross, 1948, p. 22).

Although some historians argue that the Peace of Westphalia did not instantly transform the world and that many features of sovereignty evolved later (Teschke, 2003, p. 217), in political science the "Westphalian model" is used as an "ideal type" for analyzing and evaluating stateness. In other words, Westphalia functions as a framework by which the "degree of stateness" of any political structure can be assessed; that is, the extent to which it possesses monopoly over the use of force, territorial control, and independence in decision-making. Therefore, when we refer to the "Westphalian state" in analyzing the state of Medina, the intention is to evaluate precisely these three characteristics in the political structure of Madīnah al-Nabī: whether Medina possessed territorial control (defined borders), exclusive sovereign authority (transition from tribal allegiance to obedience to a unified authority), and independence from external intervention (Meccan polytheists or external tribes), or not.

4 .Political Elucidation of the Prophetic Mission (Bi'tha)

The Prophetic mission (bi'tha) of the Messenger of God (PBUH) is amenable to interpretation from multiple dimensions of transformation in the ideological, cultural, social, economic, and political systems, all of which share fundamental commonalities. However, the political elucidation is grounded in the principle of "transition from a tribal order to an ummah-centered society." Prior to the bi'tha, the political structure of Arabia was an "archipelago of independent tribes" that derived their legitimacy from blood and

lineage. The bi‘tha, through the introduction of the concept of “Tawḥīd (monotheism),” in effect targeted the foundations of tribal legitimacy. The Prophet of Islam, by calling toward an authority beyond blood (religion), elevated political loyalties from the tribal level to the level of a “community of faith” (Watt, 1956, p. 120).

This political event constituted a form of “civil disobedience” against the aristocracy of Quraysh, since the power structure of Mecca was based upon the balance of interests among wealthy tribes, and the Prophet (PBUH), by negating idols, indirectly challenged the economic-political foundations of the Ka‘ba sanctuary (the central axis of Quraysh power) (Ibn Hisham, 1955, vol. 1, p. 264).

In the tribal political system, the leader (sayyid) was selected through the consensus of elders and according to customary traditions (‘urf). The bi‘tha introduced a new paradigm of legitimacy: “revelational legitimacy.” In this model, sovereignty does not derive from tribal consent, but rather from “divine text (naṣṣ)” and connection with the transcendent order. This transformation sowed the seeds of state formation, since the state requires an authority capable of issuing law beyond tribal custom (Fayrāhī, 2010, p. 89). As Fayrāhī states, the Prophet, through the bi‘tha, redefined the “concepts of power, knowledge, and legitimacy,” transferring authority from the tribal blood-network to the semantic network of religion (ibid., p. 92). Another political dimension of the bi‘tha is the creation of the concept of the “ummah.” In historical documents, “ummah” initially referred to a group bound by covenant. However, the bi‘tha transformed this concept into a comprehensive political identity that transcends geographical and blood-based boundaries. Sargent, in his analysis of early covenants, emphasizes that through the bi‘tha, the Prophet laid the foundations of a “new legal community” in which political rights and duties were defined not on the basis of lineage, but on membership in this divine covenant (Serjeant, 1978, p. 472). This constituted a necessary precondition for state formation in Medina; that is, before the Medinan state (in the Westphalian sense) emerged, the “people of

Medina" were transformed through the Prophetic call into an embryonic nation (ummah).

5 .Elements of the Modern State in Madīnah al-Nabī

In the analysis of Medina's political structure, two foundational events play a central role: first, the Hijra (migration) of the Prophet (PBUH) from Mecca to Yathrib, and second, the drafting of the Constitution (Covenant) of Medina. The Hijra was not merely a spatial relocation; rather, it represented a transition from a condition of constrained religious preaching to the formation of an independent political community. The Constitution of Medina subsequently structured this community within a legal-political order.

According to Watt, the Hijra marked the beginning of a formation in which the Prophet became not only a religious leader but also an arbiter and political administrator (Watt, 1956, p. 227). Likewise, Serjeant demonstrates that the Constitution of Medina comprised a set of legal clauses regulating relations among the Muhājirūn, the Anṣār, and the Jews, as well as organizing the defense of the new political domain (Serjeant, 1978, pp. 3–6). Accordingly, if Medina is assessed through classical criteria of stateness, the four foundational elements of the state can be identified there in an initial yet discernible form.

5.1 .Territory: Hijra and the Transformation of Yathrib into a Political Domain

The first component of any state is territorial domain. Prior to the Hijra, the Islamic mission in Mecca lacked an independent territory, and Muslims – despite possessing a shared faith identity – lived within the structure of Quraysh domination. According to multiple reliable historical reports, after suffering persecution from the polytheists of Mecca and opposition to his message, the Messenger of God (PBUH) traveled to the northern regions of Mecca, including the city of Ṭā'if, in search of a receptive ground for planting the seeds of Islam. However,

not only did the inhabitants of these regions reject the call to Islam, but the Prophet also came close to losing his life.

In the eleventh year of the Prophetic mission, six pilgrims from Yathrib accepted the Prophet's invitation and pledged to convey the message to the rest of Yathrib's inhabitants. The following year, the First Pledge of al-'Aqaba was concluded with six additional individuals, and in the thirteenth year of the Prophetic mission, the Second Pledge of al-'Aqaba was established with the allegiance of 73 pilgrims from Yathrib to the Messenger of God (PBUH), and Yathrib was selected as the initial homeland and territorial base for the establishment of the Islamic state (Mirzazadeh, 2025, pp. 120–121). The Hijra to Yathrib operationalized this selection.

Thus, with the arrival of the Prophet (PBUH) in Yathrib, for the first time a clearly defined spatial domain emerged in which an Islamic order could be established. Donner explicitly states that the Hijra was not merely an escape from persecution, but rather the "beginning of the formation of a politically organized community" (Donner, 2010, p. 69). The Constitution of Medina elevated this transformation from a social to a legal level.

In several clauses of this document, Yathrib is presented as a domain that must be defended and within which relations are regulated under a shared order. Serjeant's analysis of the text of the Covenant shows that it defines Yathrib as a shared political and security sanctuary, such that defense of the city and related responsibilities are distributed among the signatory groups (Serjeant, 1978, pp. 8–10). This indicates that Medina was no longer merely a residential settlement of tribes, but was gradually becoming a shared political territory.

Watt also emphasizes that, following the Hijra, the Prophet (PBUH) succeeded in constructing a political unit in which previous tribal bonds were redefined within a new order (Watt, 1956, pp. 228–229). From this perspective, although Medina did not possess modern Westphalian borders or cartographic demarcations, it clearly had a recognizable territory, a defensive perimeter, and a center of political

authority. Therefore, the territorial element in Medina was realized not in the form of modern national borders, but in the form of a lived and politically recognized domain.

5.2 .Population: Transformation of Dispersed Tribes and Groups into a Political Ummah

As noted above, population constitutes the second element of the state, namely the people placed under a defined political order. Prior to the Hijra, Muslims in Mecca were a faith-based group, but they had not yet become an organized political population. In order to realize the population component of the newly established state, the Prophet of Islam (PBUH), based on verse 97 of Surah al-Anfāl, made migration to Medina a condition of true faith, a condition that remained in force until the conquest of Mecca (Mirzazadeh, 2025, p. 124), thereby increasing and stabilizing the population of the Medinan polity.

The Hijra and settlement in Medina made it possible for the Muhājirūn and Anṣār, alongside other inhabitants of the city, to be redefined as a new political unit. One of the most important evidences of this transformation is the concept of the “ummah” in the Constitution of Medina. In the text of this covenant, the Quraysh emigrants and the Anṣār are collectively described as a “single ummah,” meaning a community that, despite tribal differences, is elevated into a unified socio-political unit.

Serjeant emphasizes that in this document, “ummah” is not merely an abstract religious concept but a practical mechanism for organizing population and distributing responsibilities (Serjeant, 1978, pp. 5–7). Lecker, in his studies of Medinan society, shows that the Prophet's new order placed various groups of Yathrib—including the Aws, Khazraj, the emigrants, and Jewish tribes—within a shared arrangement, thereby producing a form of political demographic recomposition (Lecker, 2004, pp. 25–29).

This recomposition is significant because it demonstrates that the population of Medina was not composed solely of Muslims, but

included diverse groups with varying degrees of political membership within the structure. Sachedina, emphasizing the Medinan experience, regards it as an example of a political order in which religious and social pluralism was recognized within a legal framework (Sachedina, 2001, pp. 23–25).

Thus, the population element in Medina, through the Hijra and the Covenant, was elevated from dispersed tribal communities to an organized political ummah.

5.3 .Government: Establishment of Decision-Making, Arbitration, and Public Administration Authority

The third element of the state is government; that is, the institution or center responsible for decision-making, dispute resolution, organization of public affairs, and enforcement of order. In Medina, this element is most clearly manifested in the role of the Prophet (PBUH) after the Hijra. Prior to the Hijra, the Prophet (PBUH) in Mecca functioned primarily as a religious preacher; however, in Medina, he additionally became a political leader and administrator of public order.

Watt explicitly states in this regard that the Prophet in Medina was not only a religious authority but also the head of the community, military commander, and adjudicator of disputes (Watt, 1961, pp. 96–98). This transformation demonstrates that with the Hijra, an embryonic governmental structure emerged with the Prophet (PBUH) at its apex. This government, although not in the form of a modern bureaucracy, nevertheless performed the essential functions of governance: decision-making, adjudication, mobilization of forces, regulation of group relations, and enforcement of commitments.

The Constitution of Medina also legally institutionalized this position. In clauses 23 and 36 of this covenant, dispute resolution and referral of conflicts to God and His Messenger are stipulated. Serjeant regards these clauses as evidence of the existence of a final authority of arbitration and decision-making in Medinan society (Serjeant, 1978, pp. 9–11). This point is of fundamental importance, because without a

final authority for resolving disputes, political order cannot transcend the level of fragmented agreements.

Fayrāhī also demonstrates in his analysis of power in Islam that the Prophet (PBUH) in Medina was able to establish a form of legitimate centralization of power based on revelation, allegiance (bay‘a), and social acceptance, thereby distinguishing it from purely tribal leadership (Fayrāhī, 2010, pp. 91–94). Accordingly, government in Medina should be understood as a central institution for societal administration that, despite its structural simplicity, possessed clear governmental functions.

The centralized government under the Messenger of God (PBUH), after his passing, was transferred to his successors—despite doctrinal and political disagreements between Sunnis and Shi‘a—under the title of the Caliphate, which demonstrates its transient and temporal nature.

5.4. Sovereignty: Monopoly of Political Authority and Independence of the Medinan Order

The fourth element of the state is sovereignty; that is, the existence of supreme authority within a political domain and its independence from rival or intervening authorities. In Medina, this element can be identified from two perspectives: first, the shift of political loyalty from tribe to the order of the ummah; and second, the independence of Medina from Quraysh domination and intervention.

The Hijra represents a turning point in this regard, because prior to it, Muslims were under the authority of Meccan power structures. With the Hijra, they entered a domain in which the Prophet (PBUH) was able to exercise independent political authority. Donner describes this condition as the “formation of a community of believers with independent leadership,” separated from the dominant structure of Mecca (Donner, 2010, pp. 70–72). This independence constituted the initial foundation of Medinan political sovereignty.

At the internal level as well, the Constitution of Medina demonstrates that final decision-making in disputes and major issues was referred to a single authority. In Serjeant's formulation, the Medinan Covenant preserved internal relations among groups while simultaneously connecting them to a centralized political authority at a higher level (Serjeant, 1978, p. 10). This is precisely what, in political theory, can be termed internal sovereignty: the existence of a final authority within a political order.

Accordingly, it can be argued that Medina possessed an early form of sovereignty: on the one hand, final authority within the community was concentrated in a single politico-religious leadership, and on the other, the community defined itself as an independent political unit vis-à-vis Mecca and hostile tribes. This monotheistic and divine sovereignty constituted the framework within which governments – i.e., the caliphates – operated and circulated.

However, it must be emphasized that this sovereignty was not identical to its modern Westphalian conception; it was neither defined by rigid territorial borders nor by modern international law. Nevertheless, as an initial configuration of independent political authority, it is clearly observable in the Medinan experience.

Based on the Hijra and the Constitution of Medina, it can be demonstrated that the political structure of Madīnah al-Nabī possessed the four foundational elements of the state:

Territory: Yathrib as the domain of the new order and a shared political-defensive sanctuary;

Population: transformation of emigrants, helpers, and other groups into a political ummah with legal bonds;

Government: formation of a central authority for decision-making, arbitration, and public administration in the person of the Prophet (PBUH);

Sovereignty: concentration of political authority within Medina and relative independence from Quraysh domination and other external powers.

Therefore, Medina cannot be reduced merely to a religious community or a tribal alliance; rather, it should be regarded as an institutionalized political order in which the fundamental elements of the state, albeit in a historical and pre-modern form, are clearly identifiable. The analytical innovation of this perspective lies in the fact that the Medinan polity is understood not through purely contemporary criteria, but within the comparative horizon of state theory.

6 .Research Findings: Reconstruction of the Four State Components in the Prophetic Era

The findings of this research indicate that the political experience of Medina after the Hijra extends beyond a simple religious solidarity and possesses the structural logic of "stateness." Based on the Westphalian theoretical framework, the state consists of four pillars: population, territory, government, and sovereignty. In what follows, the reconstruction of these four pillars within the political structure of Madīnah al-Nabī (PBUH) is analyzed with reference to the "Constitution of Medina" and the practical conduct (sīra) of the Prophet.

6.1 .Political Population: From Tribal Asabiyyah to the Social Contract of the Ummah

The first finding demonstrates that the Prophet (PBUH) transformed the human foundation of the state from a basis of "blood and ethnicity" to one grounded in "rights and contract." In the pre-Islamic era (Jāhiliyya), population was defined through tribal asabiyyah (solidarity); however, the Prophet, by introducing the concept of the "ummah" in the second clause of the Constitution of Medina, created a novel collective identity.

In this clause, the Quraysh emigrants, the Anṣār of Yathrib, and those who joined them are described as "ummah wāḥida min dūn al-nās" (a single community distinct from other people) (Serjeant, 1978: 4). This definition corresponds precisely to the modern state component of "population," which is based on a unified political

identity and a social contract (Heywood, 2013: 57). The very nature of this covenant implies the capacity for geographical and demographic expansion of such a political system.

Accordingly, as Montgomery Watt states, the Prophet succeeded in creating a “super-tribal entity” in which political loyalty replaced blood-based allegiance (Watt, 1956: 227). From this perspective, the “ummah” in Medina was not merely a theological concept but a “political population” endowed with reciprocal rights and obligations, accommodating pluralism (including Jews and various tribes) within a broader unified structure (Sachedina, 2001: 23). It should also be noted that the initial population of this city-state not only reached, following the conquest of Mecca in the eighth year of the Hijra, a scale comparable to the population of the modern nation-state, but also, through territorial expansion during the rule of the second and third caliphs, reached the demographic scope of an empire.

6.2. Territorial Domain: Defining Political Sanctuary and Boundaries of Authority

The second finding emphasizes that the Medinan state, unlike nomadic structures, was founded upon “territorial stability.” With the Prophet’s Hijra, Yathrib was transformed from a dispersed settlement into a “political territory”. In the Constitution of Medina, Yathrib is referred to as a “ḥaram” (sanctified domain), a region in which internal warfare and bloodshed were prohibited and security for all inhabitants was guaranteed (Lecker, 2004: 32).

This “sanctification of space” corresponds to the concept of “national borders” in Westphalian legal theory, which defines the physical space within which sovereignty is exercised (Krasner, 1999: 20). In effect, the Prophet (PBUH), by defining the security boundaries of Medina and assigning collective responsibility for its defense (clauses 42–45 of the Covenant), established a territory in which central authority was legally binding.

According to Fred Donner, the Hijra marks the beginning of the formation of a community that, for the first time, possessed an

“independent political geography” (Donner, 2010: 69). The territorial domain of Madīnah al-Nabī, like its population component, subsequently expanded through political growth to encompass various tribes, cities, and regions characterized by ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity.

6.3 .Government and Institutional Power: Centralization of Coercive Instruments and Public Administration

Findings related to the third pillar demonstrate that in Medina, a “single political authority” replaced the fragmented power of tribal chiefs. If government in the Westphalian model requires a “monopoly of the legitimate use of force” (Tilly, 1992: 74), then the Prophet (PBUH) in Medina appeared not only as a prophet but also as a “head of state”, performing key governmental functions such as adjudication, military command, and the collection of taxes (zakāt and jizya) (Watt, 1961: 96). Clause 23 of the Constitution of Medina, which explicitly states that in the event of disputes, final reference is made to “God and Muhammad (PBUH),” formally recognized the Prophet’s governmental authority over all tribes and inhabitants of Medina.

This clause effectively entailed the removal of adjudicative authority from tribal leaders and its transfer to a “central authority” (Serjeant, 1978: 9). Dawood Farahi argues that such centralization elevated the Medinan polity from a “simple society” to a “political organization,” in which law (revelation and covenant) prevailed over individual will (Fayrāhī, 2010: 92). However, unlike the Westphalian Treaty, this governance system was grounded in religious belief and aimed at establishing a trans-tribal, “ummah-centered” polity. Thus, unlike Westphalia, which was based on the secularization of authority, the governance of the Prophet was founded upon Islamic teachings and religious norms.

6.4 .Sovereignty: Political Independence and Rejection of External Intervention

The highest element of the Westphalian state is “sovereignty”, defined as supreme authority internally and independence externally (Krasner, 1999: 4). The findings of this research indicate that the Medinan state, from its very establishment, consolidated its sovereignty at two levels:

Internal sovereignty: The abolition of the right of private revenge and its replacement with a state-based legal system (clauses on homicide and retaliation in the Covenant). This reflects the “monopoly of authority” of the center over all subjects.

External sovereignty: The Medinan state, through the signing of military treaties and the dispatch of diplomatic envoys to major empires, presented itself as an “independent political unit” in the international arena, not subject to the guardianship of any external power (Mecca or surrounding tribes) (Donner, 2010: 72).

This political independence constitutes the core essence of Westphalian sovereignty, which in Medina was manifested in the form of the “political authority (wilāya) of the Prophet” and the “dignity of the ummah.” Based on the conducted analyses, it can be concluded that the political structure of Madīnah al-Nabī (PBUH) was not a transient alliance, but rather a “fundamental reconstruction of the concept of the state.” The Noble Prophet (PBUH), with political insight, institutionalized the four state components (population, territory, government, and sovereignty) within an Islamic framework. The “Constitution of Medina,” as the first legal-political document of Islam, marked the transition from a “tribal natural condition” to a “civil, state-oriented order.” The correspondence of this experience with Westphalian components indicates that the Medinan state, despite its temporal distance from modernity, possessed the structural and functional logic of a complete and authoritative state.

Components	The State of the Prophet (PBUH)	The Westphalian State	Points of Difference
Population	The political society of Medina was organized on the basis of the "ummah" and a political-religious covenant; political membership was not based on ethnic origin but on acceptance of a shared order, mutual commitment, and participation in collective defense and governance.	Population is defined in the form of "nation/citizens" within fixed borders, and individuals' political ties to the state are primarily established through legal citizenship, national identity, and public law order.	In Medina, political membership is primarily covenantal-normative (with religious elements); in Westphalia, it is primarily legal-national and based on citizenship.
Territory	The territory of Medina was the domain for the establishment and exercise of political order, but it was not yet structured as rigid, precise, and legally defined borders of the modern state; rather, it represented a sphere of influence, security, and shared administration.	Territory is a fundamental pillar of the state defined by clear, recognized, and exclusive borders. Territorial integrity and non-intervention are foundational principles of this political order.	In Medina, territory is functional, social, and security-oriented with expansion capacity; in Westphalia, it is legally bounded and the basis of interstate order.
Government	Government in Medina was based on the prophetic leadership of the Messenger (PBUH), a leadership that simultaneously combined religious, political, judicial, and military functions, distinct from the institutional-	Government is organized through formal, bureaucratic, and legal institutions; political authority is stabilized within institutional structures and extends beyond the individual ruler.	Medina is centered on a personal, religiously grounded leadership; Westphalia is centered on an impersonal bureaucratic state institution.

	bureaucratic model of the modern state.		
Sovereignty	Sovereignty in Medina referred to supreme and independent authority in governing the political community; however, its legitimacy derived from revelation, prophecy, and divine authority, thus differing fundamentally from modern national sovereignty.	Sovereignty refers to the supreme, exclusive, and independent authority of the state within its territory, linked to state equality, non-intervention, and legal independence in international relations.	In Medina, sovereignty is theologically grounded; in Westphalia, it is a juridico-political, state-centered construct within international order.

Table 1. Comparative Study of the Prophetic State in Medina and the Westphalian State

Conclusion

This study, aiming to reinterpret the political structure of Madīnah al-Nabī in light of the four Westphalian state components (population, territory, government, and sovereignty), demonstrates that the political experience of the Prophet of Islam in Medina was not merely a religious congregation or continuation of tribal traditions. Rather, it represented a deliberate and systematic process of state formation.

The findings confirm that although the modern nation-state is a product of seventeenth-century developments, the fundamental functions of the state in early Islam exhibit significant overlap with Westphalian criteria.

In terms of political population, the study shows how the “Constitution of Medina” replaced tribal asabiyyah with the concept of “ummah,” constituting the first social contract in Islamic history. This transformation from blood-based affiliation to belief-based political identity enabled the inclusion of diverse groups (Anṣār, Muhājirūn, and Jews) within a unified political entity.

Regarding territorial domain, it was shown that the designation of the “Sanctuary of Medina” and the delineation of geographic boundaries for governance and shared security effectively established the concept of “border” and jurisdictional territory, which—according to Lecker and Donner—formed the foundation of territorial sovereignty in the Prophetic state.

In explaining the governmental element, the results indicate that the Prophet, by establishing a centralized decision-making authority and abolishing private vengeance, achieved a monopoly of legitimate coercion (in the sense of Tilly and Weber, 1946). The delegation of ultimate judicial and executive authority to the Prophet in clauses 42 and 47 of the Covenant transformed the structure of power from a fragmented tribal system into a centralized political order (Fayrāhī, 2010).

Finally, in the discussion of sovereignty, the Medinan state succeeded in consolidating internal authority and, externally, through treaties and diplomatic correspondence, asserted its political independence as an “equal actor” in the Arabian Peninsula.

Overall, this study concludes that the “Medinan state” was a pre-modern model yet structurally state-like in its essential features. The Constitution of Medina was not merely a peace agreement, but a foundational constitutional document that managed social pluralism within a unified political order.

This experience demonstrates that, at its inception, Islam—by transcending tribal relations—developed a model of order that in many respects aligns with modern definitions of the state. This correspondence opens new horizons for comparative studies in Islamic political thought and international relations, and further reveals the necessity of re-evaluating Western historiographies that regard the state as a purely European phenomenon.

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