

The Difference Between a Politician and a Political Scientist

(Translated)

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By: Ustadh Islam Abu Khalil – Uzbekistan

While the concepts of a “politician” and a “political scientist” are closely related, their functions and roles differ.

A political scientist is a specialist who studies politics scientifically and analyzes political events. They study states, political systems, and international relations, analyzing the causes and consequences of events to offer conclusions and recommendations. However, they may not necessarily engage in practical political work. If such a scholar seeks to translate their ideas into practical reality, they become a political thinker.

A politician, on the other hand, is someone who engages in politics practically, seeking to manage societal affairs, make decisions, and either maintain or alter the existing order based on the ideas they espouse. Presidents, ministers, members of parliament, and leaders of political movements all fall into this category.

Yet, a true politician is not defined solely by their office; they could be a farmer, a merchant, or a professional in any other field, while still exerting influence on society and its political trajectory. Conversely, some officeholders occupy official positions without possessing independent political will, limiting their role to merely implementing the decisions of others.

A Misconception in Society

Unfortunately, misconceptions about politics have become widespread in our societies. One of the most common is the notion that “one should not get involved in politics because it is a corrupt and dirty business.”

This mindset has deterred many people from taking an interest in their society’s affairs. Consequently, governing systems have become insulated from the oversight and accountability of the state, and the public has grown indifferent to flawed policies. This apathy has contributed to the persistence of injustice and mismanagement, while weakening the sense of responsibility toward the nation’s issues.

What Is Politics?

Politics is the guardianship of domestic and foreign affairs. Linguistically, the verb *saasa* (سَاسَ) is to practice political governance implying undertaking planning, administration, and guardianship, as well as assuming responsibility for the affairs of others. For instance, the phrase *saasa al-khayl* (سَاسَ الْخَيْلِ guardianship of horses) refers to the act of guardianship of, training, and leading them.

The word *siyaasah* (سِيَاَسَة politics) derives from this linguistic root, signifying the guardianship, administration, and organization of matters.

The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, «كَانَتْ بَنُو إِسْرَائِيلَ تَسُوسُهُمُ الْأَنْبِيَاءُ، كُلَّمَا هَلَكَ نَبِيٌّ خَلَفَهُ نَبِيٌّ، وَإِنَّهُ لَا نَبِيَّ بَعْدِي، وَتَكُونُ خُلَفَاءُ فَتَكُنُ» **“The Prophets (as) governed Bani Israeel; whenever a prophet passed away, another succeeded him. Yet, there is no prophet after me. There will, however, be Khulafaa’ (Caliphs) who will be numerous.”** (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

Thus, it is evident that the term *siyaasah*, in its linguistic origin, denotes guardianship and administration; it subsequently came to be used as a specific term for managing the affairs of the state and society. In the aforementioned Hadith, the Messenger of Allah (saw) used the verb *tasusuhum* (تَسُوسُهُمْ governing them), thereby illustrating the linguistic meaning of politics. The Hadith also demonstrates that politics is not a corrupt or lowly activity; rather, it is a noble task undertaken by the Prophets (as).

Siyaasah in the Noble Quran

Although the specific word *siyaasah* (politics) does not appear in the Noble Quran, its meanings are conveyed through various terms and concepts, such as *Al-Hukm* (ruling

governance), Al-Amr (the affair of authority), Al-Istikhlaf (succession in authority), At-Tamkeen (empowerment in authority), and Al-Shura (consultation by those in authority).

Allah (swt) says, ﴿وَأَنِ احْكُم بَيْنَهُم بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ﴾ **“And rule in governance between them by what Allah has revealed.”** [TMQ Surah Al-Maaidah 49]. This verse indicates that the source of governance is that which Allah (swt) has revealed. Allah (swt) said, ﴿يَا دَاوُودُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ﴾ **“O Daud (as), indeed We have made you a vicegerent upon the earth, so judge between the people in truth and do not follow your own desire, as it will lead you astray from the way of Allah.”** [TMQ Surah Saad: 26]. This verse demonstrates that justice is the foundation upon which governance must rest.

The Noble Quran also contains other terms denoting the concept of ruling governance and the guardianship of the affairs for the people, including,

Istikhlaf (استخلاف succession in authority), which refers to appointing a human being as a successor on earth. Allah (swt) said, ﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ﴾ **“Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession in authority upon the earth.”** [TMQ Surah An-Nur: 55].

Another term is *tamkeen* (تمكين empowerment in authority), signifying the granting of authority and capability. Allah (swt) said, ﴿الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَوْا عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ﴾ **“And they are those who, if We empower them in authority in the land, establish Salah and give Zakat and enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil; and to Allah belongs the outcome of all affairs of governance.”** [TMQ Surah Hajj: 41]. This verse outlines the functions of governance in Islam: establishing Salah, giving Zakat, enjoining good, and forbidding evil. Consequently, ‘ulema regard it as one of the most significant Quranic verses clarifying the purpose of ruling authority in Islam; for the function of governance is not merely maintaining order or managing the economy, but rather establishing justice and governing society in accordance with the commands of Allah (swt).

Among the Quranic terms is also Al-Amr (affair of authority); Allah (swt) said, ﴿وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَىٰ﴾ **“and whose affair of authority is determined by consultation among themselves.”** [TMQ Surah Ash-Shura: 38]. Therefore, the claim that “the Quran did not mention or discuss the Caliphate” is incorrect, as the aforementioned verses clearly elucidate the concepts of Hukm (ruling governance), Istikhlaf (succession in authority), and the guardianship of people’s affairs.

Consequently, *siyaasah* is not merely about following the news, reading newspapers, or commenting on events—though a politician may indeed need to do these things. Instead, its true essence lies in guardianship of the domestic and foreign affairs of the Ummah based on Islam and striving to implement these principles in real life.

Political Awareness in Islam

For a Muslim, political awareness entails viewing the world and current events through the lens of the Islamic Aqeedah (creed); that is, evaluating every occurrence against the standard of لا إله إلا الله (لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله) **“There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.”**

If a person seeks to make their ideology the basis for understanding and transforming reality, or struggles to ensure their ideas prevail in life and are implemented in society, then they are a politician. This is because politics is inextricably linked to action and the struggle to establish ideas and principles in reality; it is not merely about knowing or analyzing events.

In short, a political scientist studies and analyzes politics, whereas a politician is one who acts according to a specific idea and program to manage societal affairs or rectification of the system of governance.

As for the Muslim’s political awareness, it is embodied in viewing reality through the Islamic Aqeedah (creed) and feeling a sense of responsibility toward establishing truth and justice.

Thus, politics in Islam is not the exclusive domain of an elite few; rather, it is a responsibility concerning the guardianship of the affairs of the Ummah and the safeguarding of its interests in accordance with the Shariah rulings of Allah (swt) and the Sunnah of His Messenger (saw).