

Interpretive Analysis of the Term "*Sabīl*" in Verse 141 of Surah *al-Nisā'*: A Critique of Common Views and the Presentation of a Novel Theory

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Abstract

The present study examines the interpretation of the term "*Sabīl*" in verse 141 of Surah *al-Nisā'* (And Allah will never grant the disbelievers a way over the believers) and, through a descriptive-analytical approach grounded in principles of *Ijtihād*, evaluates the implication of this term within the linguistic structure and contextual setting of the verse. A review of previous scholarship shows that exegetes and jurists have interpreted "*Sabīl*" in various senses, including: authority in the Hereafter, doctrinal and legislative authority, psychological domination, or absolute domination in general. However, a critical analysis of these interpretations reveals that some of them are inconsistent with the apparent meaning of the verse and involve conflating divine ordainment with social and historical realities. Focusing on the relationship between the lexical meaning of "*Sabīl*" and the role of syntactic and contextual elements of the verse, especially the construction "*Lil Kāfirīna 'alā al-Mu'minīna*," (for the disbelievers over the believers) this study argues that the central implication of the verse is the negation of God's establishment of paths and mechanisms that produce domination, rather than the negation of all means and instruments that exist in the world. The findings indicate that this reinterpretation, while preserving consistency with the apparent meaning of the verse, provides a more precise analytical framework for understanding divine intent and reduces previous exegetical tensions.

Keywords: *Sabīl*, Verse 141 of Surah *al-Nisā'*, *Ijtihād*-based Exegesis, Domination, Linguistic Implication.

Accepted: 27/6/2026

Revised: 17/6/2026

Received: 7/1/2026

eISSN: 2538-2012

ISSN: 2008-9252

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How to Cite: Dehghani, H. (2026). Interpretive Analysis of the Term "*Sabīl*" in Verse 141 of Surah *al-Nisā'*: A Critique of Common Views and the Presentation of a Novel Theory, *Journal of Quranic Knowledge*, 17(64), 81-104. DOI: 10.22054/rjqk.2026.91004.3248

Introduction

Verse 141 of Surah *al-Nisā'*, with the statement: "And Allah will never grant the disbelievers a way over the believers," (*Wa lan Yaj'ala Allāhu lil Kāfirīna 'alā al-Mu'minīna Sabīlā*) is among the key verses in exegetical, juristic, and political discourses concerning the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. It is especially cited in discussions regarding the negation of the domination of disbelievers over believers. The term "*Sabīl*" in this verse plays a central role in determining the scope and nature of its implication, such that different understandings of this term have led to diverse, and at times conflicting, interpretations in theological, legal, and social domains.

This conceptual conflation, particularly the failure to distinguish between "God's establishment of *Sabīl*" and "The external occurrence of domination," has caused many interpretations either to conflict with historical realities or to resort to interpretations far removed from the apparent meaning of the verse. The necessity of this study lies in the fact that, without a precise theoretical framework, invoking the verse of "*Nafy al-Sabīl*" (negation of the way) in legal and theological inference may lead to incorrect or incomplete conclusions.

This situation highlights the need for a systematic analysis and comparative critique of existing viewpoints and, ultimately, for presenting a comprehensive and minimally conflicting interpretation of the verse's implication. The present study is designed with the aim of reexamining the implication of the verse and clarifying the meaning of "*Sabīl*" within its context. It seeks, through focusing on the linguistic structure of the verse and critiquing earlier interpretations, to offer an interpretation that is clear, faithful to the apparent meaning of the verse, and supported by intra-textual examples.

1. Research Question

The main issue of this study is to clarify the precise meaning of "*Sabīl*" in verse 141 of Surah *al-Nisā'* and to evaluate its role in explaining the negation of the domination of disbelievers over believers. The subsidiary research questions are as follows:

- What are the views of exegetes and jurists regarding the meaning of "*Sabīl*" in this verse?
- What interpretive or evidentiary challenges and shortcomings does each of these views face?
- Based on the linguistic structure and context of the verse, is it possible to offer a more coherent and less contradictory interpretation of the implication of "*Sabīl*"?

2. Literature Review

Research related to the Verse of the Negation of *Sabīl* (*al-Nisā'*: 141) and the principle derived from it encompasses a broad range of juristic, exegetical, theological, legal, and political studies. These studies may generally be classified into four categories: "Juristic and exegetical studies on the Verse of the Negation of *Sabīl*," political, legal, and international studies, studies focusing on civilizational and defensive dimensions and comparative and historical studies."

The most important works in each category are reviewed below.

1) First Category: Juristic and Exegetical Studies on the Verse of the Negation of *Sabīl*

A substantial portion of the literature on the principle of the Negation of *Sabīl* was formed in classical juristic and exegetical works. Texts such as "*Jawāhir al-Kalām*," (Najafī, 1983 AD/1404 AH) "*al-Makāsib*," (Shaykh Ansārī, 1994 AD/1415 AH) and "*al-Mīzān*" (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1973 AD/1393 AH) are among the most important sources that played a foundational role in explaining the meaning of the verse and its legal implications. Among contemporary exegetes, Makarem Shirazi (1995 AD/1374 SH), in "*Tafsir Nemooneh*," emphasized the general applicability of the verse and regarded it as a basis for denying the domination of disbelievers over believers, deriving numerous legal implications from it. Likewise, Seyfi Mazandarani (1994 AD/1415 AH), in his juristic discussions, employed the principle of the Negation of *Sabīl* alongside the hadith: "Islam prevails and is not prevailed over."

In contemporary scholarship, Haji Ali (2007 AD/1386 SH), focusing on the legal dimensions of the verse, interpreted "*Sabīl*" as referring to legislative authority and examined some of its legal consequences. Shirkhani (2017 AD/1397 SH) evaluated the verse's implication as more limited and interpreted it within a specific framework. Bakhshi Shahrokhbadi, Ahmadi, and Askari (2024 AD/1403 SH), through a comparative study of the views of Islamic schools of thought, demonstrated the diversity of interpretations regarding the concept of "*Sabīl*." Likewise, Kohantarabi and Fartousi (2022 AD/1401 SH) examined the theoretical and practical challenges of the principle of the Negation of *Sabīl* and reported the main points of disagreement in interpreting the verse. Additionally, Mohammadi (2022 AD/1401 SH), in a juristic study, investigated the relationship between the principle of the Negation of *Sabīl* and the prohibition of legal domination of non-Muslims over Muslims.

2) Second Category: Political, Legal, and International Studies

Another body of research has focused on the capacities of the principle of the Negation of *Sabīl* in the sphere of foreign policy and international relations. Sohrabi (2019 AD/1399 SH) introduced the Verse of the Negation of *Sabīl* as one of the foundations of foreign relations in Islamic thought. Diyari Bidgoli and Davari (2021 AD/1400 SH) also examined the influence of this principle on the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and defended an expansive interpretation of the verse. In the field of political jurisprudence and public law, Faghani, Momeni, and Mosleh (2026 AD/1405 SH) studied the relationship between benefiting from the capacities of non-Muslims and the principle of the Negation of *Sabīl*. In contrast, Sadeghian (2025 AD/1404 SH), emphasizing the general applicability of the verse's meaning, examined the scope of this principle in the context of economic relations and foreign investment.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate the significant role of the principle of the Negation of *Sabīl* in analyzing emerging political, economic, and international issues.

3) Third Category: Studies with a Civilizational and Defensive Approach

In recent years, greater attention has been given to the civilizational and strategic dimensions of the Verse of the Negation of *Sabīl*. Omid Naqlbari (2024 AD/1403 SH) examined the civilizational capacities of the verse in cultural, political, security, economic, and technological domains and regarded it as one of the foundations for preserving the identity

and independence of Islamic society. Rokni Lamouki (2025 AD/1404 SH) also explained the defensive and strategic implications of the principle of the Negation of *Sabīl* across various fields.

Tavakkoli (2024 AD/1403 SH) examined the place of this principle within the framework of the "Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution" statement and considered it one of the components for safeguarding the independence and dignity of the Islamic community.

4) Fourth Category: Historical and Social Studies

Some studies have also addressed the principle of the Negation of *Sabīl* from historical or social perspectives. Shojaeian (2019 AD/1399 SH) examined the historical development of understanding this principle in Shi'i political jurisprudence and showed that the range of its applications gradually expanded alongside the development of political jurisprudence. Heydari (2023 AD/1402 SH), through examining the relationship between the principle of dignity and the principle of the Negation of *Sabīl*, analyzed the factors influencing either dignity or subjugation in Islamic societies and emphasized the role of faith, righteous action, struggle, and scientific advancement in realizing the negation of domination.

5) Summary of the Literature and the Position of the Present Study

A review of previous studies shows that the Verse of the Negation of *Sabīl* has attracted scholarly attention from various juristic, exegetical, political, civilizational, and historical perspectives, and that different aspects of it have been examined. Nevertheless, several foundational issues still require independent and systematic investigation. First, the relationship between "God's establishment of *Sabīl*" and "The external realization of domination" has rarely been analyzed independently. Second, the precise criterion for identifying a "Domination-producing *Sabīl*" and distinguishing it from other causes and available means still requires further clarification.

Third, the role of the linguistic structure of the verse, especially the construction "For the disbelievers over the believers," in generating the implication of domination has received limited systematic analysis. Fourth, the relationship between the apparent meaning of the verse and the historical and social realities of domination still requires clarification within a coherent interpretive framework.

The present study has been designed to fill these gaps and seeks to provide a comprehensive, minimally conflicting, and textually faithful interpretation of the verse by: "Making a precise distinction between "God's establishment of *Sabīl*" and "The external realization of domination," proposing an operational definition of "Domination-producing *Sabīl*" based on the criterion of "The unequal establishment of rules," analyzing the syntactic structure of the verse and deriving the implication of domination from the construction "Lil Kāfirīna 'alā al-Mu'minīna," and addressing the question of historical instances of domination through redefining the relationship among human agency, shared capacities, and divine ordainment.

3. Research Methodology

The research method employed in this study is descriptive–analytical with an Ijtihād-based approach, and it is organized into five stages:

1) Stage one: Lexical analysis

At this stage, the root, derivatives, and semantic fields of the term "*Sabīl*" are examined in the Qur'an and authoritative lexical sources. This analysis draws upon works such as "*al-ʿAyn*" by "*Farāhīdī*," "*al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*" by "*Fayyūmī*," "*al-Muḥīt fī al-Lughah*" by "*Ṣāhib ibn ʿAbbād*," "*Muʿjam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*" by "*Ibn Fāris*," "*Lisān al-ʿArab*" by "*Ibn Manẓūr*," and "*al-Mufradāt fī Ḥarīb al-Qurʾān*" by "*Rāghib Isfahānī*." In addition, to clarify the implications of the term more precisely, the semantic relationship of *Sabīl* with related concepts, especially "*Ṣirāṭ*" and "*Ṭarīq*" is comparatively analyzed.

2) Stage two: Contextual analysis

At this stage, the syntactic and semantic structure of the verse is analyzed, with particular attention given to the function of the prepositions "*Li-*" (for/to) and "*ʿalā*," (over/upon) as well as the implication of the expression "*Lan Yajʿala*" (will never make/establish) in conveying emphatic negation and continuity of negation in the context of divine ordainment.

3) Stage three: Collection and classification of interpretive views

At this stage, interpretations presented in Shi'i and Sunni exegetical sources are extracted, classified, and organized into five principal approaches.

4) Stage four: Comparative critique of the views

At this stage, each interpretation is evaluated and critiqued based on criteria such as: "Consistency with the apparent meaning of the verse, avoidance of interpretations contrary to the apparent meaning or excessively remote interpretations, and the ability to explain historical evidence concerning the domination of disbelievers over believers."

5) Stage five: Presentation of the preferred theory

Finally, an interpretation is proposed that preserves the greatest degree of conformity with the apparent meaning of the verse while resolving the challenges and ambiguities present in previous interpretations.

The difference between the present method and conventional thematic exegesis is that this study begins with an interpretive problem emerging directly from the text of the verse, and its primary focus is on lexical, syntactic, and contextual analysis of the verse. By contrast, many thematic studies collect and examine a group of verses under a predetermined topic. Accordingly, before referring to theological or juristic discussions, the present study seeks to derive the implications of the verse on the basis of linguistic, contextual, and exegetical evidence and then evaluate the resulting findings in light of broader discussions. This feature distinguishes the present research method both from purely transmission-based approaches and from the conventional model of thematic exegesis.

4. Concepts

This section examines the foundational concepts related to verse 141 of Surah *al-Nisā'*, with a focus on the lexical analysis of *Sabīl* and its comparison with related terms such as "*Ṣirāṭ*" and "*Ṭarīq*." It will also clarify the conceptual distinction between the two domains of creation and legislation as a necessary presupposition for understanding the implication of the verse.

These discussions provide a conceptual framework for a more precise analysis of the verse's implication in the following sections.

4.1. Lexical Analysis of the Term "*Sabīl*" and Its Comparison with "*Ṣirāṭ*" and "*Ṭarīq*"

The term "*Sabīl*" is derived from the root (s-b-l), which originally conveys the meaning of extension and flow. In its earliest usages, it referred to sending or releasing something from above to below, as well as to stretching out and extending. For this reason, a road is also called "*Sabīl*," because a road possesses continuity and the capacity for extension (Ibn Fāris, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 3, 129).

In terms of grammatical usage, this word appears in both masculine and feminine forms, and its plural is "*Subul*." (Farāhīdī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 7, 263; Fayyūmī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 2, 265; Ṣāhib ibn ʿAbbād, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 8, 330)

Some later lexicographers added the qualifications of "Clarity and Visibility," (Ibn Manẓūr, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 11, 319) while others emphasized "Ease" (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 395) as characteristics of "*Sabīl*." However, these qualifications do not appear to be part of the original meaning of "*Sabīl*" and seem to have been added in later usage. Such qualifications are absent in earlier lexical works such as "*al-ʿAyn*" by "Farāhīdī," (1988 AD/1409 AH: 7, 263) "*al-Muḥīt fī al-Lughah*," (Ṣāhib ibn ʿAbbād, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 8, 330) and "*Muʿjam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*." (Ibn Fāris, 1993 AD/1404 AH: 3, 129)

The author of "*al-Furūq*" also noted this point, stating that "*Ṭarīq*" does not imply ease, whereas "*Ṣirāṭ*" specifically denotes a smooth and easy road (al-ʿAskarī, 1979 AD/1400 AH: 295).

Sajjadi and Mohebbi (2011 AD/1391 SH: 5-12), through examining 173 occurrences of "*Sabīl*" in the Qurʾan and drawing upon early lexical sources (including *Ibn Fāris*, *Rāghib Iṣfahānī*, *Ibn Manẓūr*, and *Qummī*), categorized its usages into twelve semantic groups: "Absolute path, route of escape, conveying/provisioning (means and supplies), way and method, cause (reason), religion, creed, and doctrine, proof and evidence, guidance and finding the way, worship of God, path of guidance, oppression and transgression, and the way of God in the sense of obedience to God. An important point is that the use of "*Sabīl*" across these multiple senses is not a case of lexical homonymy. Rather, in all these usages, "*Sabīl*" retains its original lexical meaning (an extended and flowing path), and the difference lies in the referents rather than the underlying meaning itself. In other words, these twelve categories represent usages and instances of "*Sabīl*," not distinct and unrelated meanings. This perspective, based on the theory of "Semantic Unity" in Qurʾanic vocabulary, is also emphasized by Muṣṭafawī (2009 AD/1430 AH: 5, 45).

To understand more precisely the implication of "*Sabīl*" in the verse under discussion, comparison with the two related terms "*Ṣirāṭ*" and "*Ṭarīq*" appears necessary, because although all three share the basic meaning of "Path," each carries distinct semantic and functional nuances.

First, the term "*Ṣirāṭ*" refers to a straight, smooth, and easy road. In Arabic usage, it conveys a sense of clarity, directness, and freedom from twists and turns. Consequently, this term is used in contexts emphasizing clear guidance and an un-deviating course. Literary examples also indicate that "*Ṣirāṭ*" concerns the ease and smoothness of the path rather than simply any path. By contrast, "*Ṭarīq*" has a broader meaning and denotes a route or passage without implying whether it is easy, difficult, straight, or deviating. Therefore, "*Ṭarīq*" may refer both to physical routes and to abstract or spiritual paths, and it does not inherently carry a positive or negative evaluative meaning.

The term "*Sabīl*," however, despite sharing with "*Tarīq*" the basic implication of "Path," possesses an important distinguishing feature: its broad applicability in non-material and spiritual domains.

For this reason, in Qur'anic and religious usage, "*Sabīl*" refers less to a physical route and more to the pathways, mechanisms, and channels through which a particular objective or condition is realized. Thus, expressions such as "*Sabīl Allāh*" (the way of God) have become more widespread and deeply rooted in usage than expressions such as "*Tarīq Allāh*." ('Askarī, 1979 AD/1400 AH: 295)

This lexical characteristic demonstrates that "*Sabīl*" has the capacity to signify structures and pathways extending beyond tangible roads, an issue that plays a decisive role in interpreting verse 141 of Surah *al-Nisā'* and in analyzing its relationship with concepts such as domination, divine ordainment, and the created and legislative order.

4.2. The Distinction Between Ontological Ordainment and Legislative Ordainment and Its Role in Interpreting the Verse of the Negation of *Sabīl*

One of the foundational issues in interpreting verse 141 of Surah *al-Nisā'* is distinguishing between the two categories of ontological ordainment and legislative ordainment. A considerable portion of the disagreement among exegetes regarding the implication of the verse stems from determining the type of ordainment being negated in the expression: "And Allah will never grant the disbelievers a way over the believers."

Therefore, before entering into an analysis of interpretive positions, it is necessary to clarify these two types of ordainment and their relationship to the meaning of the verse.

4.2.1. Ontological Ordainment

In the terminology of *Uṣūlīs*, ontological ordainment refers to the actual creation of things and their objective realization in external reality, such that the object of ordainment acquires real and external existence. In this type of ordainment, the discussion is not about convention or legal construction, but rather about the bestowal of existence and actual creation in the external world, such as the creation of beings and the realization of objective phenomena within the order of existence (Muṣaffar, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 2, 48; Khu'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 1, 34; Fazel Lankarani, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 5, 317; Sabzevari, n.d.: 2, 12).

4.2.2. Legislative Ordainment

By contrast, legislative ordainment refers to the establishment and enactment of rulings, rights, and obligations by the Divine Lawgiver. In this form of ordainment, the object of ordainment does not acquire external existence; rather, a legal convention and normative obligation are established with respect to the actions of morally responsible individuals. Examples include assigning obligatory status to prayer or prohibiting usury.

Thus, legislative ordainment concerns the domain of lawmaking and regulating human conduct according to religious obligations and prohibitions (Fāḍil Tūnī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 106; Muṣaffar, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 2, 48; Nā'inī, 1973 AD/1352 SH: 2, 4; Subḥānī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 3, 21).

4.2.3. The Role of This Distinction in Interpreting the Verse of the Negation of "*Sabīl*"

The importance of this distinction in interpreting the Verse of the Negation of "*Sabīl*" lies in the fact that the verb "*Ja'ala*" (to make) is attributed in the verse to God, and its object is "*Sabīl*."

Accordingly, one of the fundamental questions in understanding the verse is whether the negation of divine ordainment refers to the negation of ontological ordainment or to the negation of legislative ordainment. In light of this question, two general approaches can be identified among exegetes: Some have regarded the verse as pertaining to the domain of creation and ontology, interpreting it as negating the actual realization of a certain kind of domination in external reality. Others have understood the verse as expressing a legal or normative principle, interpreting its implication as denying the enactment of rulings and mechanisms that legitimize the domination of disbelievers over believers.

Therefore, this distinction is not merely terminological; rather, at the level of interpretive analysis, it serves a methodological function. That is, determining the type of ordainment shapes the interpreter's underlying assumptions in approaching the apparent meaning of the verse and in reconciling that meaning with historical realities.

Accordingly, it may be said that the distinction between ontological ordainment and legislative ordainment in this context reflects two different explanations of the relationship between the order of existence and the order of legal convention.

If the ordainment in the verse is attributed to the ontological domain, then its implication points to a level of divine laws and patterns operating in external reality. If, however, it is interpreted within the legislative domain, then the verse functions to negate any legal authorization or normative enactment that legitimizes domination.

In either case, the central point of analysis is that "*Ja'ala*" in this verse does not refer to the external occurrence of domination itself; rather, it concerns the manner in which such domination is attributed to divine will and the system of divine ordainment. This point constitutes the main axis of disagreement in interpreting the verse and is the source of the diversity of exegetical views.

5. Five Exegetical and Juristic Views on the Meaning of "*Sabīl*" in the Verse: "And Allah Will Never Grant" (*Wa lan Yaj'ala Allāh*)

The views of jurists and exegetes concerning the term "*Sabīl*" in the verse: "And Allah will never grant the disbelievers a way over the believers" can, in most cases, be classified into five positions, each of which is presented with analytical discussion and logical critique.

5.1. First View: Restricting "*Sabīl*" to the Hereafter

This interpretation limits "*Sabīl*" to the domain of the Hereafter and, accordingly, understands the verse as expressing a divine promise that on the Day of Judgment no proof or authority will exist for disbelievers over believers. According to this interpretation, believers' status in the Hereafter will be distinguished from that of disbelievers and hypocrites: neither will hypocrites enter the Paradise of believers, nor will believers share Hell with them. Otherwise, disbelievers could present an argument and say: "You who opposed us in this world and fought our allies (the hypocrites), what difference is there now between you and them?" (Ṭabarī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 5, 213; Shubbar, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 128; Ṭabarsī, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 3, 196)

The main argument for this interpretation is based on the context of the verse and its connection with the Day of Resurrection. In the preceding part of the verse, it is stated: "So Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection." Some exegetes considered this phrase an indication that "*Sabīl*" should be understood in an eschatological sense (Tūsī, n.d.: 3, 364; Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 11, 248).

Additionally, Shaykh Ansari argued that the verse resists specification which limits the interpretation of absolute negation of domination in worldly life; therefore, complete realization of the negation of domination can only occur in the Hereafter (Shaykh Ansari, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 3, 584; Nā'inī, 1992 AD/1413 AH, 2, 344).

5.2. Second View: Interpreting "*Sabīl*" as Proof and Argument

According to this interpretation, the term "*Sabīl*" in the verse: "And Allah will never grant the disbelievers a way over the believers" is understood to mean proof or argument, rather than domination or outward victory. Under this reading, the verse negates the possibility that disbelievers could establish decisive proof or valid argumentation against believers; it does not deny political, social, or ontological domination (Ḥasan Khan, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 2, 169; Baydāwī, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 2, 104).

To support this interpretation, two narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt are cited:

"In the first narration, Imam Ali (AS) is reported to have said: "[God has not placed] a proof for a disbeliever against a believer" indicating that God has granted no proof or conclusive argument to a disbeliever against a believer (Ibn Ash'ath, n.d.: 178).

The second narration, from Imam *Riḍā* (AS), explicitly states that even committing severe acts, such as killing prophets, does not establish any proof or justification for disbelievers against believers (Ibn Bābawayh, 1958 AD/1378 AH, 2, 204).

5.3. Third View: Negation of Doctrinal and Moral Domination While Affirming Ontological Domination

According to this view, some exegetes and jurists maintain that "*Sabīl*" in the verse: "And Allah will never grant the disbelievers a way over the believers" is limited to moral or doctrinal domination, and that the purpose of the verse is to preserve the spiritual dignity of believers.

From this perspective, even in circumstances where believers live under the rule of non-Muslim groups, their religion is not violated and their religious identity remains respected. Thus, a form of divine dignity and honor remains preserved for believers even within unfavorable political conditions (Sulṭān Ali Shah, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 2, 60; Sa'di, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 225).

5.4. Fourth View: Interpreting "*Sabīl*" as Legislative, Legal, and Juridical Domination

In juristic and exegetical sources, the term "*Sabīl*" in the verse: "And Allah will never grant the disbelievers a way over the believers" has most commonly been interpreted as negating domination within legislative, legal, and juridical frameworks.

This interpretation has been emphasized in numerous works, including those of *Ibn Shahrāshūb* (1949 AD/1369 AH: 2, 212), *Ibn Zuhrah* (1996 AD/1417 AH: 210), *Mu'min Qummī* (2000 AD/1421 AH: 246), *Allamah Hillī* (1993 AD/1414 AH: 5, 277), *Mughnīyyah*

(2003-2004 AD/1424-1425 AH: 2, 466 and 127), and *Nahāwandī* (2007 AD/1386 SH: 2, 304).

According to this interpretation, "*Sabīl*" signifies the negation of the legal, juridical, and legislative authority of disbelievers over believers within Islamic society, rather than negating ontological or natural forms of domination.

5.5. Fifth View: Negation of Absolute Domination

One of the interpretations proposed for the term "*Sabīl*" in the verse:

"And Allah will never grant the disbelievers a way over the believers" is that "*Sabīl*" signifies the negation of all forms of domination without exception, whether ontological, legislative, political, or social.

The argument for this interpretation is based on the indefinite form of "*Sabīl*" and its use within a context of absolute negation (through the particle "*Lan*").

However, confrontation with historical examples and empirical realities shows that believers and Muslims throughout history have repeatedly been subjected to the domination and victory of disbelievers, from the killing of prophets by figures such as Pharaohs, to the martyrdom of the infallible Imams, and even to the condition of contemporary Muslims under non-Muslim governments (Qurtūbī, 1944 AD/1364 AH: 5, 420).

Therefore, interpreting the verse as negating every kind of absolute and perpetual domination appears inconsistent with observable historical reality. To resolve this tension, exegetes who adopted this interpretation proposed four explanations:

1) Perfect Faith of Believers

The intended meaning of "Believers" refers only to individuals possessing pure and complete faith. According to this reading, such believers are never subjected to domination by disbelievers (Rashīd Riḍā, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 5, 466; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1973 AD/1393 AH: 5, 116).

2) Limited and Temporary Domination

The intended meaning of "Domination" is not complete and enduring control; temporary, limited, and non-destructive forms of domination remain acceptable (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1973 AD/1393 AH: 5, 116; Qāsimī, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 3, 376).

3) Subject Restriction to a Particular Group

Some exegetes restricted the meaning of "Disbelievers" in the verse to a particular group, such as the Jews, and considered the negation of domination to apply only to them (Ṭabarsī, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 3, 196).

4) Negation of Ultimate Domination

According to this interpretation, the verse does not negate all domination absolutely; rather, it negates the final and permanent domination of disbelievers over believers (Ibn Kathīr, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 2, 386). However, a close analysis of the context of the verse and examination of the implication of "Allah will never establish..." indicate that none of these explanations fully aligns with the verse's apparently absolute and comprehensive negation of domination.

In this context, the term "*Sabīl*" functions as a general negation of every domination-producing pathway available to disbelievers over believers, without being restricted to particular circumstances, specific groups, or temporary and incomplete forms of domination.

Therefore, although the proposed explanations may remain open to analytical discussion, they are not acceptable from the standpoint of consistency with the apparent meaning and context of the verse. This suggests that restricted or temporary interpretations of the verse are incompatible with its broader implication.

6. The Preferred Theory: Absolute Negation of a "Divinely Instituted Domination-Producing Way "

According to the preferred interpretation, the meaning of the noble verse:

"And Allah will never make for the disbelievers over the believers a way" is the absolute negation of any domination-producing "*Sabīl*" whose establishment is attributable to God.

More precisely, the verse denies that God, within either the order of creation or legislation, has established any path, mechanism, or rule whose outcome would be the domination, control, or unjust superiority of disbelievers over believers.

Accordingly, the negation in the verse concerns the divine act of "Making," rather than the mere external occurrence of domination in historical reality.

This interpretation is defensible both linguistically and conceptually and demonstrates greater coherence than competing interpretations in terms of reason, divine justice, and rational social practice.

6.1. Semantic Analysis of the Verse Based on a Three-Level Account of the Concept of *Sabīl*

1) First Level: The General Meaning of *Sabīl* and Its Restriction to a Domination-Producing Way

The word "*Sabīl*" originally carries a broad and unrestricted meaning and may denote any kind of path, route, possibility, or mechanism, whether ontological or legislative.

However, what is negated in the verse: "And Allah will never make for the disbelievers over the believers a way (*Sabīl*)" is not "*Sabīl*" in its unrestricted sense. Rather, the verse concerns a specific type of "*Sabīl*," referred to here as a domination-producing "*Sabīl*."

Within this framework, two categories of "*Sabīl*" must be distinguished:

A) Non-Dominating "*Sabīl*"

This refers to a path, route, or direction that does not imply superiority, control, or domination of one party over another.

An example is the use of *sabīl* in the verse: "And do not say of those who are killed in the way of Allah that they are dead." (al-Baqarah: 154)

Here, "*Sabīl*" means the divine path or cause and carries no implication of domination or superiority.

B) Domination-Producing "*Sabīl*"

A domination-producing "*Sabīl*" refers to a path, rule, or mechanism that, by virtue of divine establishment (*Ja' l*), grants one side an exclusive advantage or superiority, and this privilege becomes the source of its domination over another.

Accordingly, the criterion for identifying a domination-producing "*Sabīl*" is not merely the existence of domination in external reality. Rather, the source of that domination must originate from the structure of the divine establishment itself.

That is, one party's superiority must arise from an advantage embedded within the very rule or mechanism instituted.

For example, if the Lawgiver had legislated a rule granting a disbeliever a special legal privilege or authority over a believer in disputes, one unavailable to the believer, that rule would constitute a domination-producing "*Sabīl*," because the source of domination would lie within the legislation itself.

On this basis, elements such as reason, free will, human capacities, natural abilities, social opportunities, and material resources are not in themselves instances of a domination-producing "*Sabīl*," because they are originally granted to human beings in a shared and non-discriminatory manner.

Therefore, if disbelievers at certain times gain superiority over groups of believers through more effective use of these shared capacities, such superiority may constitute external domination, but since its source is not an exclusive privilege granted by God, it does not amount to a divinely instituted "*Sabīl*."

Accordingly, the verse negates neither every form of divinely instituted domination-producing "*Sabīl*," not all paths, causes, opportunities, nor even all occurrences of domination in external reality.

2) Second Level: The Implication of the Expression "*Lil Kāfirīna 'alā al-Mu'minīn*" for the Concept of Domination

One of the important interpretive indicators in the verse is the precise combination of the two prepositions "*Li-*" (for/to) and "*'alā*" (over/upon) in the phrase: "For the disbelievers over the believers."

This linguistic construction clearly conveys the notions of superiority, ascendancy, and domination. Therefore, the concept of domination is not derived from the word "*Sabīl*" alone; rather, it is inferred from the overall sentence structure and the relational positioning of the two parties.

If the verse had stated: "Allah will never make for the disbelievers a way" such a clear implication of denying domination would not arise.

Accordingly, the verse does not deny the existence of paths, means, or opportunities as such; rather, it denies the existence of a path or mechanism whose outcome is the actual and external domination of the disbeliever over the believer.

Furthermore, in ordinary linguistic usage, the concept of domination inherently includes a form of superiority, ascendancy, and one party's predominance over another. Therefore, the expression: "For the disbelievers over the believers" does not merely indicate interaction or influence; rather, it points to a form of one-sided superiority and predominance, which constitutes the essence of domination.

3) Third Level: The Criterion for Attributing "*Sabīl*" to Divine Making

An important point is that the noble verse directs its negation toward "Making," not toward domination in an absolute sense.

Accordingly, in understanding the verse, a distinction must be drawn between the occurrence of domination and the attribution of domination to divine establishment.

In ordinary language as well, one attributes the superiority or dominance of one party to the lawgiver or designer of a system only when the source of that superiority lies in the rules and structure of the system itself.

However, if the rules apply equally to everyone and the difference arises merely from how individuals make use of shared opportunities, common understanding does not attribute that superiority to the designer of the system.

On this basis, attributing "*Sabīl*" to divine establishment requires that the source of domination originate in the act of establishment itself, not in differing ways of utilizing what has been established.

Since the verse directs negation toward divine establishment, understanding its meaning depends on clarifying the criterion by which domination is attributed to God.

Within this framework, the mere occurrence of domination in external reality is insufficient for attributing it to divine establishment. Rather, the criterion is an examination of the structure of making at either the legislative or ontological level.

Accordingly whenever the source of superiority and predominance is embedded in the structure of the establishment itself, the resulting domination may conventionally be attributed to divine establishment but whenever rules and opportunities are distributed equally between both parties, differences in outcomes are conventionally attributed to differing uses of those opportunities, not to the establishment of a "*Sabīl*."

Therefore, the distinguishing criterion in this theory is:

- Domination arising from unequal establishment: Attributable to God as the maker of "*Sabīl*."
- Domination arising from unequal utilization of shared opportunities: Not attributable to divine establishment of "*Sabīl*."

More precisely, in the first case, domination results from a difference in the structure of making; in the second case, the structure remains equal, and the difference emerges only in the manner of realization and use.

Therefore, any domination that does not arise from an exclusive divinely granted advantage is not considered a divinely instituted domination-producing "*Sabīl*," even if it appears externally as domination.

Accordingly, the verse does not seek to deny every form of external domination in an absolute sense. Rather, it denies attributing domination to unequal divine establishment, that is, it denies any structure in which divine establishment itself has discriminatorily created domination of one side over another.

6.2. The Position of "*Ja'ī*" in the Verse and Resolving the Tension with Historical Realities

The fundamental point in understanding the verse is that the object of negation is divine making, not the external occurrence of domination. The verse does not state that disbelievers

will never exercise authority over believers in the external world; rather, it explicitly states that God has not established such a path within the systems of creation or legislation.

Accordingly, historical and social forms of domination that have occurred cannot be attributed to divine establishment. Rather, such conditions are often the result of believers' failure to utilize the capacities, opportunities, and legitimate means that God has placed at their disposal. Just as in rational human systems, such as educational systems or social competition, differences in outcomes do not necessarily arise from discrimination in the governing rules, but may instead result from differences in how shared opportunities are employed.

Summary of the Preferred Theory

Based on the foregoing analysis, the preferred interpretation holds that the verse: "And Allah will never make for the disbelievers over the believers a way" refers to the absolute negation of any divinely instituted domination-producing "*Sabīl*," rather than the negation of every instance of external domination.

This theory rests on three foundational principles:

1. In this verse, "*Sabīl*" is restricted to a domination-producing way (rather than every possible path);
2. The expression "For the disbelievers over the believers" conveys superiority and domination;
3. The negation concerns divine making, not the external occurrence of domination.

The strength of this interpretation, compared with competing views, lies in the fact that it avoids the problem of contradiction with historical realities (namely, the historical domination of disbelievers over believers); remains consistent with the principle of divine justice and the denial of discriminatory divine establishment; and remains more faithful to the apparent wording of the verse than interpretations that understand "*Sabīl*" merely as a general path or as shared causal means.

Accordingly, the ultimate meaning of the verse is that God, within His systems of creation and legislation, has established no rule, mechanism, or exclusive privilege that would result in the unjust domination of disbelievers over believers.

7. Critical Evaluation of Juristic and Exegetical Views in Light of the Preferred Theory

This section evaluates and critiques previous juristic and exegetical interpretations of the term "*Sabīl*" in the verse: "And Allah will never make for the disbelievers over the believers a way" with particular emphasis on assessing these views according to the preferred theory, which interprets "*Sabīl*" as the absolute negation of any domination-producing path within both the ontological and legislative orders.

7.1. Critique of the First View: Restricting "*Sabīl*" to the Hereafter

According to this interpretation, the verse refers exclusively to the denial of domination by disbelievers in the Hereafter.

However, the apparent wording of the verse indicates that the negation of "*Sabīl*" is expressed in absolute terms and encompasses all times and contexts. In other words, the indefinite form of "*Sabīl*" together with the absolute negation conveyed by "*Lan Yaj'ala*" suggests comprehensive scope.

Accordingly, restricting the meaning of "*Sabīl*" to the Hereafter is inconsistent with the apparent meaning of the verse.

Some exegetes have attempted to justify this interpretation through contextual reasoning, arguing that verse 141 of Surah *al-Nisā'* concerns eschatological matters because the preceding section states: "Then Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection."

Based on this analysis, the word "*Sabīl*" in the phrase: "For the disbelievers over the believers a way" has been interpreted as meaning the inability of disbelievers to gain access to or prevail over believers on the Day of Resurrection.

However, this contextual argument does not appear entirely persuasive. There is no clear thematic connection between the clause: "Then Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection" and the subsequent clause: "And Allah will never make for the disbelievers over the believers a way."

The preceding verses discuss "Those who wait and watch concerning you," a group that belongs neither fully among the believers nor among the disbelievers but adopts an opportunistic posture while awaiting the outcome of the conflict between the two sides.

Therefore, when God states: "Then Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection," the apparent meaning is that divine judgment is directed toward this intermediary group.

By contrast, the final clause of the verse, namely "*Wa lan Yaj'ala Allāho lil Kāfirīna 'alal Mu'minīna Sabīlā*" addresses a different relationship and concerns the relation between disbelievers and believers. Therefore, the subject matter and the parties under discussion in this clause differ from those in the preceding section. In such a context, the mere mention of "The Day of Resurrection" in the previous sentence cannot serve as definitive evidence for restricting or limiting the meaning of the final clause exclusively to the Hereafter, because a change in subject matter prevents the automatic extension of that qualification to the following statement.

Accordingly, the clause "*Wa lan Yaj'ala Allāho lil Kāfirīna 'alal Mu'minīna Sabīlā*" possesses independent semantic force and the generality of the term "*Sabīl*" remains intact. Consequently, the verse is capable of indicating the negation of every form of domination of disbelievers over believers and, through this implication, may also support the negation of various forms of authority, including legislative authority.

Shaykh Ansari attempted to justify restricting the verse to the negation of domination in the Hereafter by appealing to the principle of "*Ibā' 'an al-Takhṣīṣ*." (resistance to specification) However, according to the selected theory, there is no contradiction between the occurrence of apparent domination in the external world and God's absolute negation of "*Sabīl*." The verse states that God has not established any "Domination-producing pathway" for disbelievers within the creational or legislative order. In other words, temporary and apparent domination by disbelievers in worldly affairs results from differing degrees of utilization of capacities and opportunities that God has made available to all human beings, rather than from God's creating an exclusive mechanism of domination for disbelievers.

Therefore, restricting the negation of "*Sabīl*" to the Hereafter overlooks the comprehensive and general implication of the verse and distances its interpretation from the actual logic of divine laws and the creational and legislative order.

7.2. Critique of the Second View: Restricting "*Sabīl*" to Proof and Argument

Interpreting "*Sabīl*" as meaning merely "Proof" is inconsistent with the apparent meaning of the noble verse "*Wa lan Yaj'ala Allāho lil Kāfirīna 'alal Mu'minīna Sabīlā.*" The verse explicitly negates God's establishment of any *Sabīl* in an absolute sense, not merely a particular type such as proof or evidence. If the Lawgiver had intended only to deny the disbelievers' proof against believers, one would expect more explicit and limited wording such as proof, as appears in other Qur'anic verses (e.g., al-Baqarah: 150; al-Nisā': 165).

The selection of the term "*Sabīl*," with its broad and unrestricted lexical meaning, indicates conceptual inclusiveness and encompasses every route, instrument, or mechanism that leads to domination. Although proof may conceptually constitute one instance of "*Sabīl*," limiting the meaning of the verse to this particular example without valid textual evidence conflicts with both the unrestricted wording of the verse and the lexical meaning of "*Sabīl*." Thus, interpreting "*Sabīl*" solely as proof lacks clear support and effectively reduces the verse's absolute negation to the denial of a narrow and specific matter.

The narrations cited by some exegetes to support interpreting "*Sabīl*" as proof refer only to the particular instance of proof and cannot restrict the broad semantic scope of "*Sabīl*." In other words, "*Sabīl*" is a comprehensive concept, and proof is merely one of its examples. Therefore, restricting the verse to proof does not adequately account for its application to other forms of domination, whether political, social, or creational (Khū'ī, n.d.: 5, 86).

From the perspective of chain authenticity, both narrations relied upon face notable difficulties:

- The first narration appears in "*al-Ja'fariyyāt*" (*al-Ash'athiyyāt*), whose reliability has been questioned. The attribution of the work to *Ash'ath* has not been firmly established, and the work itself does not occupy an authoritative position among Imami scholars (Najafī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 21, 398).
- The second narration is likewise problematic due to weak authentication of its two principal transmitters, *Tamīm ibn 'Abd Allāh* and *'Abd Allāh ibn Tamīm*, making it insufficiently reliable to justify restricting the meaning of the verse.

Therefore, although this interpretation emphasizes the negation of proof and argument in favor of disbelievers, both conceptual and Sanad-based analysis indicate that "*Sabīl*" carries a broader meaning and should not be confined to proof and argument alone. This highlights the importance of maintaining a comprehensive interpretation of "*Sabīl*" rather than adopting restrictive readings.

7.3. Critique of the Third View: Restricting Domination to Religious and Moral Influence

The third view reduces the meaning of "Domination" in the verse "*Wa lan Yaj'ala Allāho lil Kāfirīna 'alal Mu'minīna Sabīlā*" to religious and moral domination. From the perspectives of textual indication, contextual coherence, and the broader Qur'anic conceptual framework, this interpretation is difficult to defend. By assuming that political and social rule by disbelievers can coexist with the preservation of believers' religious dignity, this interpretation draws a distinction between objective domination and spiritual dignity, a distinction that neither emerges from the apparent wording of the verse nor accords with the internal logic of Qur'anic teachings concerning the negation of disbelievers' authority.

The unrestricted negation of "*Sabīl*" suggests the rejection of every domination-producing pathway. Accepting the rule of disbelievers, even under the justification of preserving religious rituals or maintaining doctrinal immunity, implicitly entails accepting a mode of faithful life under the framework of tyranny domination. Such a position conflicts with the Qur'anic prohibition against inclining toward oppressors and with the principle of avoiding tyranny that lies at the core of monotheistic teaching.

In addition, narrative evidence supports this understanding. Among such reports is a reliable narration transmitted from Imam *Kāzīm* (AS) condemning approval of the continuation of unjust governments. The chain of transmission is considered reliable because *Ḥamdawayh* is counted among the trustworthy teachers cited by Kashshī (Ṭūsī, 1953 AD/1373 SH: 421); *Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Rāzī* is identified as *Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl Barmakī*, whose reliability is affirmed in biographical sources (Khū'ī, 1992 AD/1413 AH: 16, 99, 116); and *Ḥasan ibn 'Alī ibn Faḍḍāl* is likewise regarded as a trustworthy Imami transmitter (Ṭūsī, 1953 AD/1373 SH: 354). Accordingly, the narration may be considered dependable from the perspective of transmission.

In this narration, Imam *Kāzīm* (AS) states: "Whoever desires their continuation is among them, and whoever is among them will enter the Fire."

The implication of the narration is that even inward approval of the persistence of oppressive governments is censured. Accordingly, the issue is not limited to preserving religious symbols or maintaining individuals' doctrinal integrity; rather, the very acceptance of and satisfaction with the domination of non-divine powers is considered unacceptable. Therefore, recognizing the legitimacy of disbelievers' domination over the community of believers is inconsistent with the spirit of these teachings.

7.4. Critique of the Fourth View: Restricting Domination to Legislative and Legal Authority

Interpreting "*Sabīl*" solely as legislative, legal, or juristic domination is inconsistent with the broad and absolute wording of the verse "*Wa lan Yaj'ala Allāho lil Kāfirīna 'alal Mu'minīna Sabīlā.*" The verse negates "*Sabīl*" absolutely and without qualification, such that every form of domination-producing pathway, whether creational or legislative, and whether concerning prescriptive or declarative rulings, falls within the scope of negation. Consequently, restricting the meaning of the verse to only one dimension of domination lacks support from the text itself.

Undoubtedly, many of those who invoked this verse were jurists, and it is natural that jurists, seeking to derive legal rulings, would focus particularly on its legislative and legal implications. For this reason, some legal works interpret "*Sabīl*" within the framework of legal and juristic forms of domination. However, such a methodological focus does not imply that the Divine Legislator intended "*Sabīl*" in the verse to be limited exclusively to legislative or legal pathways. Rather, this emphasis may reflect the jurist's interpretive perspective during legal deduction rather than the exclusive semantic scope of the verse.

Accordingly, any interpretation that reduces the verse to the negation of legislative or legal domination conflicts with the unrestricted wording of "*Sabīl*" and the context of absolute negation in the verse and thus constitutes a restrictive interpretation. The lexical meaning of "*Sabīl*" and its use within a context of negation indicate that the verse denies every effective and domination-producing pathway, not merely one specific type of domination. Therefore,

limiting the verse exclusively to legal or juristic authority, without valid textual or contextual evidence, is difficult to justify.

7.5. Critique and Evaluation of the Fifth View: Absolute Negation of Domination and Its Justifications

The fifth view, relying on the absolute wording of the noble verse "*Wa lan Yaj'ala Allāho lil Kāfirīna 'alal Mu'minīna Sabīlā*," interprets "*Sabīl*" as encompassing all forms of domination, including both legislative and creational domination. However, since the apparent domination of disbelievers over believers throughout history is undeniable, proponents of this interpretation have proposed explanations to reconcile the apparent meaning of the verse with historical and social realities.

The fundamental flaw in this account is the conflation of the empirical reality of domination with creational "*Sabīl*."

By *creational "Sabīl"* is meant the general, stable, and law-governed divine order governing existence, not every historical event or outward victory. God has never established, within the creational order, a law that inherently and structurally leads to the domination of disbelievers over believers. What occurs in external reality is the result of human actions, differing degrees of use or neglect of shared divine means, and failure to comply with the conditions of divine support and guidance, not the establishment by God of a "Domination-producing pathway" for disbelievers.

Numerous Qur'anic verses support this understanding, including:

- "Indeed, We will surely support Our messengers and those who believe in the life of this world and on the Day when the witnesses arise." (Ghāfir: 51)
- "Is it not enough for you that your Lord should reinforce you with three thousand angels sent down?" (Āli 'Imrān: 124)
- "Then Allah sent down His tranquility upon His Messenger and upon the believers and sent forces you did not see." (al-Tawbah: 26)

These verses indicate the existence of a creational order centered on divine support for believers and suggest that within the structure of divine laws, no pathway has been established that inherently results in the domination of disbelievers over believers.

Accordingly, the justifications proposed to reconcile the verse with apparent historical domination rest on an imprecise understanding of the concept of creational "*Sabīl*" and therefore lack interpretive force.

Here is the translation in academic English style:

7.5.1. Critique of the First Justification (Restricting the Verse to "True Believers")

The first justification confines the negation of domination to "True Believers" and attributes the domination of disbelievers over others to weakness of faith. This interpretation faces several fundamental objections:

First, this interpretation is inconsistent with the apparent meaning of the verse, because the verse attributes the negation of domination to "The Believers" in an absolute sense, not to believers conditioned by a particular level of religious practice. In Qur'anic usage, faith primarily refers to belief and inward affirmation, while righteous action, although closely associated with and resulting from faith, is mentioned independently. If the verse intended

only practicing believers, one would expect an explicit qualifier or textual indicator supporting such restriction.

Second, even if this justification were accepted with respect to creational domination, it would not function with respect to legislative domination. The establishment or negation of authority and legal rulings is not contingent upon the practical commitment of the believer. For example, the legal question of whether a disbeliever may possess authority over a Muslim is a juridical and legislative matter and is unrelated to the degree of an individual Muslim's practical faith.

Third, in practice, domination by disbelievers over an Islamic society affects all members of that society, including both weaker believers and sincere believers alike. History demonstrates that even prophets and the infallible Imams (AS) lived at certain times under the rule of tyranny. Clearly, this did not mean that God had established a legislative or creational "*Sabīl*" for disbelievers over them.

Accordingly, this justification is neither compatible with the apparent meaning of the verse nor capable of accurately explaining the relationship between the verse and historical realities.

7.5.2. Critique of the Second Justification (Interpreting Domination as Total or Destructive Domination)

Restricting "*Sabīl*" to a particular kind of domination, such as complete, annihilating, or root-destroying domination, is contrary to the unrestricted wording of the verse.

The verse negates the establishment of "*Sabīl*" without any qualification or condition and provides no indication that the negation applies only to a specific type of domination. Introducing such a restriction constitutes a form of interpretive imposition and reduces the comprehensive scope of the verse's indication.

7.5.3. Critique of the Third Justification (Restricting "Disbelievers" to the Jews)

Restricting the term "Disbelievers" exclusively to the Jews lacks textual and contextual support.

In cases where the Qur'an intends a particular group of disbelievers, such as Jews or Christians, it explicitly names them. The unrestricted expression "*al-Kāfirīn*" in the present verse carries a general implication, and interpreting it as referring only to a particular group without valid evidence is insufficient.

7.5.4. Critique of the Fourth Justification (Negation of Final Domination)

Interpreting "*Sabīl*" as referring only to ultimate domination or final victory at the end of events is likewise inconsistent with the apparent meaning of the verse.

The verse negates "*Sabīl*" absolutely and without temporal qualification. If the intended meaning were the negation of only final domination, one would expect an explicit indication of such limitation, just as verses concerning the ultimate success of the righteous or the final triumph of truth clearly state such qualifications. Therefore, the unrestricted wording of the verse does not permit this type of limitation.

Conclusion

This study aimed to reassess the interpretive implications of the verse "*Nafy al-Sabīl*" and to propose an interpretation that remains faithful to the apparent wording of the verse while remaining consistent with historical realities. The noble verse, "And Allah will never grant the disbelievers a way over the believers," has been subject to numerous interpretive approaches. By collecting and critically analyzing the major exegetical and juristic views concerning the meaning of "*Sabīl*," this study demonstrated that many existing interpretations either fail to fully correspond with the generality and apparent meaning of the verse or, in order to reconcile the verse with historical realities, resort to qualifications and interpretive assumptions lacking clear textual support.

The principal contribution of this study is the proposal of a new formulation of the verse's meaning based on distinguishing between the occurrence of domination and the divine enactment of domination. According to this interpretation, the verse does not negate the external occurrence of domination by disbelievers over believers; rather, it denies attributing such domination to divine legislation or making. Accordingly, the meaning of the verse is that God has not established, within the ontological or legislative order, any path, rule, or mechanism of domination that inherently and asymmetrically results in the superiority of disbelievers over believers.

Another innovation of this study is the introduction of a three-level analytical framework for understanding the verse:

- Distinguishing between non-dominating pathways and domination-producing pathways;
- Deriving the concept of domination from the phrase "For the disbelievers over the believers";
- Establishing the criterion for attributing domination to divine enactment.

According to this criterion, only domination whose source lies within the very structure of divine enactment and the granting of privilege may be attributed to God as the "Maker of the pathway," not domination arising from unequal human utilization of commonly available means and opportunities.

This interpretation, in addition to being more consistent with the apparent wording and context of the verse, offers a resolution to the apparent tension between the verse and historical instances of domination over believers. The occurrence of domination in external reality does not imply that such domination was divinely instituted.

In particular, regarding the verse: "Had Allah not repelled some people by means of others, the earth would surely have become corrupted," (al-Baqarah: 251) it should be noted that this notion of divine repelling refers to a temporary and contingent intervention rather than the establishment of a permanent and intrinsic rule; therefore, it does not conflict with the theory of negating divinely enacted domination-producing pathways.

The findings of this study carry significant implications across the fields of Qur'anic exegesis, theology, and Islamic jurisprudence.

- In exegesis, the study offers a new framework for understanding verses related to "*Nafy al-Sabīl*" and their relationship with social realities.
- In theology, it provides a more precise account of the relationship between divine justice, human agency, and historical events.

- In jurisprudence, it may contribute to reassessing legal arguments based on the principle of "*Nafy al-Sabīl*," particularly in discussions concerning authority, custody, legal relations, and other matters involving domination and legal influence.

This study also encountered several limitations. First, its primary focus was semantic analysis of the verse and critique of exegetical views; detailed juristic derivation of the "*Nafy al-Sabīl*" principle across various legal domains, such as transactions, marriage, criminal law, and international relations, was beyond its scope and may serve as the subject of future research. Second, it did not include a comprehensive examination of Sunni exegetical narrations. Third, it did not undertake an extensive historical and sociological application of the proposed theory in Muslim societies. Therefore, the conclusions reached should be regarded as a step toward clarifying the meaning of the verse rather than as the final word on the subject.

The proposed theory also opens new avenues for future scholarship. Questions that merit further investigation include:

- What criteria determine a domination-producing enactment within legal and institutional structures?
- How can this interpretation be integrated with applications of the "*Nafy al-Sabīl*" principle across different branches of Islamic law?
- What implications does this theory have for interpreting Qur'anic verses concerning dignity, divine support, and the victory of believers?
- How may this framework be applied to the analysis of contemporary social and political phenomena?

Addressing these questions may contribute to expanding and refining the theoretical framework proposed in this study.

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How to Cite: Dehghani, H. (2026). Interpretive Analysis of the Term "Sabīl" in Verse 141 of Surah al-Nisā': A Critique of Common Views and the Presentation of a Novel Theory, *Journal of Quranic Knowledge*, 17(64), 81-104. DOI: 10.22054/rjqk.2026.91004.3248



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