



POLITICAL FREEDOM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU'S SOCIAL CONTRACT AND ITS RELEVANCE IN ISLAM

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the concept of political freedom from the perspective of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's social contract theory and its relevance in Islam. This study is motivated by the importance of understanding the relationship between political freedom, popular sovereignty, and moral values in the life of a nation. This study aims to analyze the concept of political freedom according to Rousseau, understand the relationship between humanity and political freedom within social contract theory, and examine its relevance from an Islamic perspective. The research method employed is qualitative research using a literature review approach. The primary data source is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's book titled "The Social Contract," while secondary data is obtained from relevant scholarly articles. All collected data is analyzed through descriptive and thematic analysis. The research findings indicate that political freedom according to Rousseau is a freedom based on compliance with laws formed through the general will. From an Islamic perspective, this concept is relevant to the principles of shura, justice, equality of rights, and public participation in political life. The implications of this research indicate that political freedom must be exercised responsibly, grounded in moral values, justice, and the common good in the life of the state.

Keywords: Political Freedom, Social Contract, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Islam, Democracy

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INTRODUCTION

Humans are beings who naturally possess the freedom and will to determine their own lives. In the history of Western political philosophy, human freedom has been a central theme explored by modern thinkers, one of whom is Jean-Jacques Rousseau through his theory of the social contract. Rousseau argued that the natural state of humanity is a non-social state, in which humans—who in many ways are still similar to animals—live apart from one another, without reason and without language ([Kusmawati et al., 2023](#)). Every person, regardless of who they are, possesses equal freedom; they all have the capacity to determine their own fate ([Maesaroh, 2024](#)).

However, the development of social life gives rise to various interests and inequalities that lead to the gradual restriction of human freedom. It is this situation that prompted Rousseau to propose the concept of the social contract as the foundation for the formation of political life that guarantees shared freedom ([Haloho & Simanjuntak, 2024](#)). For Rousseau, political freedom does not mean that humans are free to act as they please, but rather the freedom to obey laws agreed upon collectively for the common good. Through the social contract, humans transform from individuals living on their own into citizens who possess rights, duties, and political responsibilities ([Nuna & Moonti, 2019](#)). Therefore, public participation in political life is a crucial element in realizing freedom and social justice.

Rousseau's ideas on the social contract have had a significant influence on the development of modern political thought, particularly regarding the concepts of popular sovereignty and political freedom ([Siswanto & Aufa, 2025](#)). Rousseau asserts that legitimate political power must be based on the consent of the people as the holders of sovereignty ([Rousseau, 2010](#)). Through the concept of the general will, Rousseau prioritizes the common good over the interests of individuals or specific groups. Therefore, public participation in political life is an essential component in upholding freedom and justice within the state ([Prabowo, 2023](#)).

Nevertheless, Rousseau's concept of political freedom is not without criticism. The concept of general freedom, which forms the basis of popular sovereignty, is seen as potentially disregarding individual interests if not accompanied by moral values and justice ([Febrianasari, 2022](#)). Furthermore, the democratic ideas proposed by Rousseau are considered difficult to implement in modern states with vast territories and large populations. Nevertheless, Rousseau's thought remains relevant as it emphasizes the importance of public participation, equality of rights, and oversight of state power ([Rousseau, 2010](#)).

This study is a qualitative study using a descriptive approach. This research design is appropriate given that the primary objective is to describe J.J. Rousseau's views on the modern social contract and to interpret his work titled *The Social Contract*. The data sources in this study are categorized into two groups: primary data sources and secondary data sources. The primary source in this study, as indicated by the title, is J.J. Rousseau's work titled *The Social Contract*. Additionally, the secondary data sources in this study consist of writings related to the topic of discussion, including books, articles, academic journals, theses, dissertations, and others. The initial step taken by the researcher in addressing the subject matter was to study books relevant

to the research topic, particularly those concerning Jean-Jacques Rousseau's views on humanity and political freedom within the social contract. After all data – both primary and secondary – was collected, the next step was the data analysis phase. This study employs a historical approach. Therefore, the author analyzed the data using historical methods, which involve the process of collecting data and then interpreting phenomena, events, or ideas that emerged in the past.

METHODS

This study is a qualitative study using a descriptive approach. This research design is appropriate given that the primary objective is to describe J.J. Rousseau's views on the modern social contract and to interpret his work titled **The Social Contract**. The data sources in this study are categorized into two groups: primary data sources and secondary data sources. The primary source in this study, as indicated in the title, is J.J. Rousseau's work titled **The Social Contract**. Additionally, the secondary data sources in this study consist of writings related to the topic of discussion, including books, articles, academic journals, theses, dissertations, and others. The initial step taken by the researcher in addressing the subject matter was to study books relevant to the research topic, particularly those concerning Jean-Jacques Rousseau's views on humanity and political freedom within the social contract. After all data – both primary and secondary – was collected, the next step was the data analysis phase. This study employs a historical approach. Therefore, the author analyzed the data using historical methods, which involve the process of collecting data and then interpreting phenomena, events, or ideas that emerged in the past.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Social Contract in the Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Rousseau begins his theory with the view that humans originally lived in a natural state that was free, equal, and unbound by law or government. In this state, humans lived according to their instincts and basic needs, yet without complex social inequalities (Rousseau, 2010). Thus, every individual possessed the freedom to sustain their own life and determine their own will. However, the development of society led to the emergence of private property, competition, and conflicting interests among people. This situation subsequently gave rise to social inequality, which resulted in the gradual restriction of human freedom. Rousseau argues that this change marks the beginning of conflict in human life. Therefore, a form of collective agreement is necessary to maintain order and protect the freedom of every individual within society (Ilham & Rahman, 2024). Based on this, Rousseau proposed the concept of the social contract as the foundation for the formation of a political society. The social contract is an agreement among individuals to surrender a portion of their freedom in exchange for mutual protection and security (Pesurnay & Pesurnay, 2021). Through the social contract, humans are no longer viewed merely as individuals living in isolation, but also as citizens possessing rights, duties, and responsibilities in life (Laksono, 2019).

Political Freedom in the Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Political freedom in Rousseau's thought is not the freedom to act as one pleases, but rather the freedom to obey the laws we create ourselves as part of a community, to participate actively in the process of lawmaking and decision-making, and to live as

autonomous and responsible citizens, not as subjects subjugated to rulers. Therefore, political freedom is related to the active participation of society in the process of lawmaking and decision-making within the state (Nurfadilla & Sahyana, 2024). Through the concept of the social contract, Rousseau explains that humans undergo a transformation from individuals living according to personal interests into citizens who bear responsibility for communal life (Rousseau, 2010). This transformation gives rise to a political identity as citizens who possess equal rights and obligations before the law. Furthermore, Rousseau distinguishes between a mere gathering of people and a political society. A political society is not merely composed of the relationship between rulers and the people, but is also formed through shared interests, laws, and moral bonds among fellow citizens (Muzaki et al., 2024).

However, Rousseau's concept of political freedom also has several weaknesses. The concept of the general will has the potential to lead to the dominance of the majority over individual interests if it is not accompanied by moral values and justice. Furthermore, the idea of direct democracy proposed by Rousseau is considered difficult to implement in modern states with vast territories and large populations (Rousseau, 2010). Therefore, Rousseau's ideas must be critically analyzed to prevent the abuse of power in the name of the common good. According to Rousseau's thought, the social contract leads humans to surrender part of their freedom to society for the sake of creating the common good. Through the general will, every individual holds an equal standing in political life, ensuring that the laws established do not prioritize the interests of specific individuals (Putri et al., 2023). Although humans lose their natural freedom, they gain civil liberty and legal protection as part of the political community. Thus, Rousseau's concept of the social contract demonstrates that political freedom is not only related to individual rights but also to shared responsibility in maintaining social order and justice.

The Relevance of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Thought from an Islamic Perspective

From an Islamic perspective, human beings are viewed as creatures who possess both freedom and moral responsibility toward themselves, society, and Allah SWT. Islam grants human beings the right to think, express their opinions, and participate in social and political life. However, this freedom is not absolute, as it must be grounded in the values of justice, morality, and religious teachings. The principles of shura (consultation), justice, and amanah (trust) in Islam are closely related to Rousseau's ideas regarding the importance of public participation in political life. The concept of consultation indicates that political decisions must take into account the common good and involve the public in the decision-making process. This is as explained in the Quran, Surah Asy-Syura, verse 38, which emphasizes that public affairs are resolved through consultation. Allah SWT states in Surah Asy-Syura, verse 38:

وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ

“(It is also better and more enduring for) those who accept (and obey) God’s call and perform prayer, while their affairs are (decided) through consultation among themselves. They spend part of the sustenance We have bestowed upon them”

Furthermore, the values of equality and justice put forward by Rousseau also align with Islamic teachings, which place all people on an equal footing before the law (Rousseau, 2010). In Islam, justice is a fundamental principle in political and social life to prevent oppression and the abuse of power. Therefore, political freedom in Islam must remain directed toward achieving the common good and safeguarding the rights of every individual in society (Nuna & Moonti, 2019). Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference between Rousseau’s thought and the Islamic perspective regarding the source of sovereignty. Rousseau places sovereignty entirely in the hands of the people through the general will, whereas in Islam, supreme sovereignty remains with Allah SWT. Therefore, political freedom in Islam is not based solely on human will but must also align with the values of Sharia and moral responsibility. In Islam, humans are granted the freedom to engage in social and political life, but this freedom remains within the boundaries set by religious principles.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research on “Human Beings and Political Freedom from the Perspective of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Social Contract” – through the literature review conducted by the researcher – it can be concluded that this study confirms the initial assumption that Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s concept of the Social Contract did not arise spontaneously, but rather was shaped through Rousseau’s dialectical engagement with the reality around him. Rousseau argued that in the state of nature, humans live freely, equally, and peacefully, yet are prone to conflict due to inequalities arising from private property. The solution is the social contract – a voluntary agreement to surrender a portion of one’s freedom to the general will in the interest of order, justice, and political freedom. Using a qualitative descriptive method based on a literature review, this study found that political freedom, according to Rousseau, is bound by laws agreed upon collectively for the collective good. The relationship between human beings and political freedom is reflected in the direct participation of citizens without representatives, which does not diminish popular sovereignty. This line of thought is relevant to modern democracy in affirming equality, participation, and the protection of citizens’ rights.

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