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# The *Mustaḍʿafīn* in the Qur'an as Epistemic Subjects: The Shift of Knowledge Authority from the Elite to Marginalized Groups

**Heru Syahputra***
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Deli Serdang, Indonesia, 20371
Email: herusyahputra@uinsu.ac.id

**Amroeni Drajat**
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Deli Serdang, Indonesia, 20371
Email: amroenidrajat@uinsu.ac.id

**Saleh Adri**
Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Babussalam, Aceh Tenggara, Indonesia, 24651
Email: adrisaleh@stitbabussalam.ac.id

**Aljohani Mousa Qashqary**
The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia, ACT 2601
Email: u7829232@anu.edu.au

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## Abstract
The position of the *mustaḍʿafīn* (the oppressed/marginalized) in the Qur'an raises an epistemological question about how credibility and epistemic authority are distributed in relations between subordinate groups and elites. Studies of the *mustaḍʿafīn* have largely framed them in terms of social, political, and religious injustice; consequently, they have not systematically mapped their roles as actors who know, bear witness, recognize truth, and articulate their experiences. This research aims to identify the *mustaḍʿafīn*'s epistemic agency, map the mechanisms that legitimize and delegitimize knowledge claims in their interactions with elites, and formulate the implications for the Qur'an's social epistemology. This library-based study employs thematic exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍūʿī*) with social epistemology as its conceptual framework, utilizing semantic, intratextual, and narrative analyses as analytical tools. The corpus comprises verses containing the linguistic root *ḍ-ʿ-f* and narratives involving subordinate groups that feature acts of knowing, bearing witness, recognizing truth, making knowledge claims, and elite responses; the study uses both classical and contemporary interpretations to verify the consistency of the readings. The findings reveal three primary patterns. First, the *mustaḍʿafīn* emerge as epistemic subjects through experience, testimony, collective memory, the recognition of guidance, and the articulation of objections to elite claims. Second, elite authority is constructed through status, power, honor, wealth, and traditional authority—factors that shape credibility before assessing a claim's validity. In contrast, the legitimacy of the *mustaḍʿafīn* is determined by their capacity to know, the consistency of their testimony, their receptivity to guidance, and the integrity of their actions. Third, a marginal position provides an epistemic perspective that broadens social knowledge, though it does not guarantee truth. In conclusion, the

Corresponding author: herusyahputra@uinsu.ac.id*
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Qur'an corrects the distribution of credibility. It shifts the basis of legitimacy from social status to epistemic grounds, without transferring the authority of truth from the elite to the *mustaḍʿafīn*.

**Keywords:** *Mustaḍʿafīn*; Epistemic Subject; Epistemic Authority; Social Epistemology; Epistemic Credibility

**Abstrak**

Posisi kaum *mustaḍʿafīn* dalam Al-Qur'an menghadirkan persoalan epistemologis mengenai distribusi kredibilitas dan otoritas pengetahuan dalam relasi antara kelompok subordinat dan elite. Kajian tentang *mustaḍʿafīn* selama ini lebih banyak menempatkan mereka dalam kerangka ketidakadilan sosial, politik, dan keagamaan, sehingga fungsi mereka sebagai aktor yang mengetahui, bersaksi, mengenali kebenaran, dan menyampaikan pengalaman belum dipetakan secara sistematis. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi agensi epistemik *mustaḍʿafīn*, memetakan mekanisme legitimasi dan delegitimasi klaim pengetahuan dalam relasi dengan elite, serta merumuskan implikasinya bagi epistemologi sosial Al-Qur'an. Penelitian kepustakaan ini menggunakan tafsir tematik dengan epistemologi sosial sebagai kerangka konseptual, serta analisis semantik, intratekstual, dan naratif sebagai perangkat analisis. Korpus mencakup ayat dengan bentuk linguistik akar *ḍ-ʿ-f* dan narasi kelompok subordinat yang memuat tindakan mengetahui, kesaksian, pengenalan kebenaran, klaim pengetahuan, serta respons elite; penafsiran klasik dan kontemporer digunakan untuk menguji konsistensi pembacaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga pola utama. Pertama, *mustaḍʿafīn* tampil sebagai subjek epistemik melalui pengalaman, kesaksian, ingatan kolektif, pengenalan terhadap petunjuk, dan artikulasi keberatan terhadap klaim elite. Kedua, otoritas elite dibangun melalui status, kekuasaan, kehormatan, kekayaan, dan otoritas tradisi yang memengaruhi kredibilitas sebelum validitas klaim diperiksa, sedangkan legitimasi *mustaḍʿafīn* ditentukan oleh kapasitas untuk mengetahui, kesesuaian kesaksian, keterbukaan terhadap petunjuk, dan integritas tindakan. Ketiga, posisi marginal menyediakan perspektif epistemik yang memperluas pengetahuan sosial, namun tidak menjamin kebenaran. Kesimpulannya, Al-Qur'an mengoreksi distribusi kredibilitas dan menggeser dasar legitimasi dari status sosial menuju alasan epistemik, tanpa memindahkan otoritas kebenaran dari elite kepada *mustaḍʿafīn*.

**Kata Kunci:** *Mustaḍʿafīn*; Subjek Epistemik; Otoritas Epistemik; Epistemologi Sosial; Kredibilitas Epistemik

## Introduction

Studies on the *mustaḍʿafīn* (the oppressed/marginalized) in the Qur'an have largely developed through frameworks of social justice, liberation theology, and critiques of oppressive structures. These perspectives characterize the *mustaḍʿafīn* as a group subjected to political, economic, or social subordination while simultaneously serving as the focus of the Qur'an's normative advocacy (Alwi et al., 2022; Haecal & Irfan, 2025). However, this social framework leaves unresolved epistemological questions regarding the position of marginalized groups as agents who know, bear witness, recognize truth, and convey knowledge. Oppression does not automatically confer epistemic authority. At the same time, social position may open up specific perspectives; epistemic authority requires a legitimacy traceable through knowledge structures and practices of knowing (Bacevic, 2023). This

perspective allows the *mustaḍʿafīn* to be viewed as epistemic subjects—actors possessing the capacity to know and epistemic agency—whose voices derive legitimacy from the interplay between revelation, social experience, and structures of authority. Consequently, the epistemological inquiry shifts from asking who is protected by the Qur'an to asking who is granted the credibility to know and articulate the truth.

The textual evidence within the Qur'an reveals patterns of interaction between social status and the legitimacy of knowledge that warrant further investigation. The narrative of Pharaoh illustrates the use of political power to define the boundaries of knowledge and obedience by asserting authority over what society ought to know and follow (Q. 28:38; Q. 40:29). The *al-malaʾ* (ruling elite) frequently appear as a group that influences collective decisions and rejects messages based on the social standing of the messengers—as seen, for instance, in the rejection of the Prophets Noah and Hud (Q. 7:60–66). The *mutrafūn* class associated their affluence and social status with the legitimacy of the prevailing order, viewing the prophetic call as a threat to their way of life (Q. 34:34–35; Q. 43:23). A different pattern emerges among social groups lacking structural power. The oppressed followers of Moses are portrayed as recipients of the promise of liberation and participants in historical transformation (Q. 28:5–6), while Pharaoh's sorcerers shift from agents of state legitimation to those who acknowledge the truth after encountering a prophetic sign (Q. 20:70–73). The story of the *aṣḥāb al-kahf* (Companions of the Cave) also depicts youths confronting the dominant order and upholding their convictions through an epistemic act (Q. 18:13–16). These narratives provide a textual basis for examining how credibility, testimony, the recognition of truth, and epistemic agency are shaped when marginalized actors confront dominant authority.

While various studies have addressed the *mustaḍʿafīn* from different angles, a unified explanation of the mechanisms of their epistemic legitimation remains elusive. Zulfahmi et al. (2024) view the *mustaḍʿafīn* as the foundation of a social liberation paradigm, emphasizing the Qur'an's critique of oppressive structures. However, while this approach elucidates the ethical and political orientation of the *mustaḍʿafīn* concept, it does not explain how oppressed groups acquire the status of knowers. Akmaliah (2024) links the *mustaḍʿafīn* to liberation theology and prioritizes transforming social structures, interpreting marginality as a basis for social change rather than an issue of credibility and epistemic authority. Belhaj (2025) identifies the diverse meanings of *mustaḍʿafīn* and their connections to injustice, *ḥijrah* (migration), and divine aid; while these linguistic and thematic findings clarify the term's semantic scope, they do not yet elucidate the role of *mustaḍʿafīn* actors as agents of knowledge. Mujahidin et al. (2024) demonstrate the links between the story of Moses and Pharaoh, political tyranny, and social oppression. Yet, the opposition between ruling authority and the oppressed remains unanalyzed through the lens of epistemic categories. Lynch (2020) bridges the

Qur'an and the theory of epistemic injustice by addressing issues of testimonial credibility and the recognition of vulnerable groups, but has not yet examined how the *mustaḍʿafīn* narrative itself constructs agency, credibility, and the legitimacy of knowledge.

Firestone (2024) illustrates a pattern of rejecting the prophetic message through social structures that uphold dominant groups' authority. In contrast, Aswar and Afifi (2024), Cyril V. Uy (2026), and Rashid (2026) respectively highlight the roles of political power, social elites, and economic establishment in shaping resistance to the message. A comparison of these studies reveals a fragmented focus: socio-theological research addresses oppression and liberation; semantic research clarifies semantic fields; political studies examine structures of domination; and studies on epistemic injustice provide tools to interpret credibility and the marginalization of knowledge. No analysis currently links these four realms to explain how a subordinate social position gains epistemic articulation through Qur'anic narratives. A research gap remains: no analytical model explains the relationships among marginal positions, social experiences, epistemic agency, voice legitimacy, and critiques of elite authority. This study addresses that gap through an integrative reading of narratives concerning the *mustaḍʿafīn* and dominant groups, using social epistemology as an analytical framework without assuming that oppressed status automatically proves truth.

This research addresses three questions: how Qur'anic narratives construct the *mustaḍʿafīn* as epistemic subjects; how their voices, experiences, and knowledge-based actions gain legitimacy while challenging elite authority; and what implications this construction has for understanding the Qur'an's social epistemology. The objectives are to identify the forms of epistemic agency possessed by the *mustaḍʿafīn*, analyze the mechanisms by which knowledge emerging from a marginal position gains legitimacy, and formulate the epistemological implications of the patterns of knowledge-authority distribution found in Qur'anic narratives. The study's initial argument proceeds from an interpretive proposition: social marginality can provide an experiential vantage point that allows specific knowledge perspectives to emerge; however, their epistemic authority within the Qur'an is determined through narrative and normative mechanisms—such as the recognition of truth, bearing witness, the articulation of the experience of injustice, the courage to convey knowledge, and the acceptance of the prophetic message. Thus, this research aims to deepen the discussion by refining the concept of the *mustaḍʿafīn* into a category that encompasses an epistemic dimension, rather than merely a socio-political one.

## Method

This library-based study uses a thematic exegesis design, employing social epistemology analysis as a conceptual framework and narrative discourse analysis as a tool to map the distribution of epistemic positions within the Qur'an. Primary

data include verses that explicitly contain morphological forms of the root *ḍ-ʿ-f* referring to the *mustaḍʿafīn*, as well as verses and narratives featuring subordinate groups and elites within the dynamics of knowledge, truth claims, testimony, and the legitimation of authority. Secondary data include classical and contemporary exegeses—selected for historical period, methodological diversity, and relevance to the verse corpus—alongside literature on Qur'anic studies, epistemic injustice, standpoint epistemology, and the authority of knowledge as interpretive tools. Data collection involved tracing relevant linguistic forms by root word and semantic field, verifying verse contexts, mapping inter-verse connections, selecting narratives based on indicators of epistemic relations, and comparing interpretations across works. Analysis used semantic, intratextual, and narrative readings to identify capacities for knowing, conveying, recognizing, and legitimizing knowledge; these positions were then compared with the elite's epistemic claims. Textual findings were validated by comparing exegeses and counter-cases, then engaged with social epistemology to formulate potential forms of redistribution, correction, or limitation of the authority of knowledge, without a priori assuming a shift within the Qur'anic structure.

## Results and Discussion

### The *Mustaḍʿafīn* as an Epistemic Subject in the Qur'anic Narrative

The meaning of *mustaḍʿafīn* in the Qur'an extends beyond mere individual weakness; rather, it refers to a group relegated to a subordinate position through specific power relations. Q. 28:4 depicts Pharaoh's actions using the verb *yastaḍʿifu ṭāʾifatan minhum*—rendering a portion of the population a weakened group—accompanied by the killing of male children and the sparing of females, thereby forcing them to live within a structure of oppression. Al-Ṭabarī (2001) interprets Pharaoh's actions as subjugation, domination, and the imposition of subordination on the Children of Israel, whereas al-Qurṭubī (1999) links them to the creation of social groups relegated to service roles under Pharaoh's authority. This context highlights a crucial distinction between weakness as a personal condition and *istidʿāf* as a social process that generates a specific status. Social status serves as the starting point for an epistemic reading, rather than automatic evidence regarding the capacity for knowledge.

The clearest instance of this dimension is found in Q. 4:75. This verse not only mentions the men, women, and children who are oppressed but also gives voice to them through their supplication: *rabbanā akhrijnā min hādhihi al-qaryati al-ẓālimi ahluhā* (Our Lord, take us out of this town whose people are oppressors). The verse's structure encompasses both the social experience and its articulation: the people identify their living space as a *qaryah* (town) inhabited by oppressors, express a need to leave, and plead for deliverance (ʿĀshūr, 1985). They do not appear merely as passive objects described by a narrator; the experience of subordination finds linguistic form through the very words of the group undergoing it. Its epistemic

dimension enables the presentation of knowledge from a specific social position—specifically, knowledge regarding the conditions of oppression directly experienced by the subjects.

Q. 4:97 presents a more complex scenario, as the voices of the *mustaḍʿafīn* emerge within a dialogue with angels. Following their deaths, the angels inquire about the circumstances that led them to remain in an environment incompatible with their religious life. They reply, *kunnā mustaḍʿafīna fī al-arḍ*: "We were those who were weakened on earth." This verse matters because the Qur'an depicts a process of asserting claims through social experience. The claim of oppression appears as a self-assertion that is subsequently met with a critical question: "Was not God's earth spacious enough for you to migrate within it?" This dialogic structure shows that while the experience of marginality can serve as testimony about social conditions, that testimony remains subject to scrutiny and evaluation. Thus, the epistemic dimension of the *mustaḍʿafīn* is not predicated on the assumption that the oppressed group is invariably correct. Instead, the Qur'an distinguishes between the experience articulated, the claims made about the situation, and the assessment of the capacity to act.

Q. 4:98 clarifies this distinction by presenting a group that truly faces limitations in devising a way out: *lā yastaṭīʿūna ḥīlatan wa lā yahtadūna sabīlā* (they are unable to devise a stratagem or find a way). This verse matters for constructing the epistemic subject because it shows that agency is not binary. Some individuals in a state of *istidʿāf* (oppression or powerlessness) may still articulate their experiences, make decisions, or respond to situations. In contrast, others face limitations that curtail their ability to formulate strategies and find solutions. The Qur'an even grants an exemption to those lacking practical capability, following its critique—in the preceding verse—of those who merely claimed to be oppressed. Q. 4:97–98 distinguish between claims of subordination and the actual capacity for action. From an epistemic perspective, this distinction allows agency to be contextualized appropriately: the ability to articulate an experience is not necessarily synonymous with the ability to determine a course of action, and limitations on action do not negate the validity of the experience itself as a source of knowledge. The construct of the *mustaḍʿafīn* thus becomes multi-layered, as the Qur'an does not treat all subordinated groups as a monolith.

Q. 8:26 introduces another dimension through the collective memory of the Muslims regarding the early phase of the Medinan community: *wa-dhkurū idh antum qalīlun mustaḍʿafūna fī al-arḍ* (and remember when you were few and deemed weak in the land). According to Quṭb (2004), this verse reminds the community of the time when they were few in number and perceived as weak, before subsequently gaining protection and support. Its epistemic function is to preserve social experience as collective knowledge about the community's origins. This experience becomes integral to how the community comprehends the transformation of its own

circumstances. The structure of the verse also indicates that a marginal position is not a fixed category inherent to an individual's or group's identity throughout history; rather, that status emerges within specific relationships and shifts as social configurations change. This relational character aligns with Q. 28:4–5, where Pharaoh's actions first created a condition of *istidʿāf*, followed by a verse declaring God's will to bestow favor upon the weakened group and appoint them as leaders and heirs. Consequently, Q. 28:4–5 and Q. 7:137 best provide the context for the formation of the *mustaḍʿafīn* status, rather than serving as direct evidence of the act of knowing. Q. 28:4 illustrates the mechanism of *istidʿāf* through a ruler's actions that divide society and subjugate specific groups. At the same time, verse 5 states the intention to elevate the weakened group to the status of leaders and heirs. Q. 7:137 links this inheritance to the Children of Israel and their steadfastness in the face of oppression. These narratives show that subordination becomes part of a community's historical identity, but that does not make all of that community's actions epistemic acts.

A comparative analysis of the narratives concerning the prophets reveals why the category of *mustaḍʿafīn* cannot be equated with every group of low social status. Q. 11:27, for instance, records the elite's assessment of Prophet Noah's followers as *arādhilunā bādiya al-raʾy*—individuals viewed with contempt and deemed to have followed Noah hastily. Q. 6:52 and Q. 18:28 also present groups that held little social influence within the sphere of the Prophet's religious interactions. While these three instances offer useful points of comparison for marginalized groups' involvement in receiving and responding to the prophetic message, they should not be conflated with the specific terminological meaning of *mustaḍʿafīn*. Distinctions of this kind matter because the *mustaḍʿafīn*, *fuqarāʾ*, *masākīn*, *yatāmā*, and groups viewed as lowly have distinct semantic and narrative functions.

A narrative reading of the primary corpus reveals three forms of accountable epistemic action. The first form is articulating experience through speech—most clearly evident in Q. 4:75 and Q. 4:97—where oppressed groups convey their condition in their own words. The second form is the bearing of witness to social circumstances through self-identification as those experiencing *istidʿāf*. The statement *kunnā mustaḍʿafīna fī al-arḍ* does not merely denote status; it also links identity to concrete experiences within a specific social space. The third form is the community's response to subordination through collective memory and action, as in Q. 8:26. These three forms do not carry equal weight. Articulation and testimony constitute direct evidence, as they appear through the speech of the actors themselves. In contrast, collective memory constitutes indirect evidence shaped by the divine narrative regarding the community's experience. Consequently, the epistemic subject in the Qur'anic narrative manifests through capacities observable in the structures of speech and action, rather than through social status alone.

**Elite Monopoly and the Delegitimization of Marginal Knowledge**

Epistemic dominance within the Qur'anic narrative operates through ruling groups' ability to determine who is trustworthy, whose claims merit a hearing, and which social standards apply to assess truth. In this context, elites are actors or groups with the political, social, economic, or symbolic resources to influence public acceptance of a claim (Joule, 2022). Epistemic authority refers to a party's capacity to gain recognition as a credible source of knowledge. In contrast, epistemic delegitimization refers to the process of diminishing or rejecting a speaker's credibility without adequately evaluating the content of their claim (Hameleers & Meer, 2025). This conceptual framework allows for a more precise reading of the *mala'*, *mutrafūn*, and Pharaoh, as each represents a distinct source of power.

Pharaoh exemplifies dominance rooted in political power and the ability to define threats in public. Q. 28:4 depicts the Egyptian ruler exalting himself, splitting the population into factions, and systematically weakening one group through policy. This political structure creates an imbalance in the communicative space, as those controlling the government have a greater capacity to define social categories and the consequences attached to them. This pattern becomes particularly evident when Moses confronts Pharaoh. Q. 26:34–35 shows Pharaoh labeling Moses a skilled sorcerer and linking his actions to threats against the land and the disruption of the existing power structure. Invoking sorcery shifts attention from the message's content to the messenger's identity and perceived danger. Delegitimization thus occurs through social framing before the claim's substance can be evaluated. Pharaoh's question—*fa-mādhā ta'murūn* (so what do you advise?)—in the sequence of verses Q. 26:34–37 reveals a subsequent stage of this mechanism. Once Moses was framed as a threat, the issue was no longer a quest for truth but a political matter for the inner circle of power. Pharaoh sought counsel from the elites on how to deal with Moses, thereby placing the claim of prophethood within the framework of state security and stability. Q. 40:26 reinforces a similar pattern through Pharaoh's concerns regarding religious change and the emergence of corruption in the land. Such narratives illustrate a shift in the arena of judgment: religious claims—which ought to be evaluated through signs, argumentation, and responses to the message—were instead relocated to the arena of political threats. The mechanism of domination lay not in proof that Pharaoh controlled all information, but in his ability to establish an interpretive framework wherein the speaker was perceived, from the outset, as a threat. Credibility thus depended on the speaker's political status and the message's social consequences.

The *mala'* demonstrate a different mechanism, as their power stemmed from their standing as a distinguished group that shaped social judgment within the community. In the story of the Prophet Noah, Q. 11:27 records their rejection by describing Noah's followers as *arādhilunā bādiya al-ra'y*—people viewed as lowly

and judged superficial or hasty in judgment. They also asserted that they saw no superiority in Noah over themselves (Al-Bayḍāwī, 1997). The structure of the argument is significant because the rejection was not initially directed at the content of Noah's message. The social standing of the followers is used as a pretext to disparage the quality of their judgment. At the same time, the group's sense of honor serves as the criterion for determining who is worthy of embracing the truth. Thus, the *mala'* operate by shifting the standard of evaluation from the content of the testimony to the social status of the message's bearer or recipient. Q. 7:60 and 7:66 illustrate a similar pattern, wherein the elite class attaches negative labels to Noah and Hud. This mechanism creates a credibility deficit rooted in prejudice regarding social status.

The role of the *mala'* in establishing social credibility is further evident in Q. 7:75–76. While some notables recognized Ṣāliḥ as a messenger of God, the opposing faction challenged the social standing of his supporters. References to individuals deemed weak or lowly in their eyes reveal a social hierarchy used to evaluate truth. This pattern differs from the mechanism Pharaoh used. Pharaoh utilized governmental authority to frame the messenger as a threat, whereas the *mala'* leveraged group prestige to determine who possessed the standing to make such judgments. This distinction demonstrates that epistemic dominance does not rely on a single form of power. Q. 23:24 and Q. 26:111 illustrate a similar pattern regarding the response to the Prophet's followers, who hailed from lower social strata. Rejection proved effective because social status was treated as an indicator of credibility, even though status itself offers no epistemic grounds for determining the veracity of a testimony.

The *mutrafūn* group demonstrates a more indirect mechanism. The Qur'an provides no sufficient basis to equate all *mutrafūn* with holders of political authority or to view wealth as direct evidence of intellectual superiority. The term refers to a group living in luxury (Shihab, 2010). Yet its epistemic function becomes apparent when material affluence is linked to defending an inherited order (Hurnawijaya et al., 2025). Q. 43:23 depicts the mutrafūn of a land who followed the path of their ancestors upon the arrival of a warner. Their response reveals the connection between social affluence and the acceptance of traditions that have sustained the community's way of life. Q. 34:34–35 depicts a group that acquires vast wealth and numerous offspring, subsequently using this abundance as grounds to feel secure against punishment. Here, wealth does not automatically confer epistemic authority; rather, it creates a social position that lets the lived experience of the established elite serve as the benchmark for what is considered reasonable. The epistemic mechanism lies in the ability to transform social success into a basis for justifying the prevailing order.

In several Qur'anic narratives, the appeal to ancestral tradition takes a different form of delegitimization, as its power does not rest with any single actor. Q.

2:170 describes a group that persists in following the ways of its forebears, even after clearer guidance has arrived. Q. 43:22–24 elaborates on this same pattern by framing the ancestral path as the justification for religious practices. The argument's structure reveals a shift in tradition's function: what is inherited from the past becomes a criterion of validity that takes precedence over scrutiny of new claims. The community's historical experience shows that a practice acquires normative standing simply through inheritance. This mechanism differs from the power wielded by Pharaoh and the *mala'*, as it requires no single ruler or group of notables to act as a central authority. Social legitimacy arises from repetition and the collective acceptance of the heritage. Thus, the Qur'an illustrates a form of epistemic domination sustained through habitual judgment, in which a claim's novelty serves as grounds for rejection before its arguments are even examined.

Comparing the cases reveals four pathways of delegitimization, each drawing on distinct resources. Pharaoh relied on political power to frame prophetic claims as a threat to the realm's order. The *mala'* utilized hierarchies of honor to link low social status with a lack of credibility. The *mutrafūn* (affluent class) upheld the order that secured their established position by grounding acceptance in the experience of abundance and the continuity of tradition. Ancestral tradition itself operated through the repetition of social norms, eventually elevating that heritage to the standard by which truth was measured. None of these four mechanisms resulted in a monopoly on knowledge in the absolute sense; the Qur'an does not suggest that these groups controlled the entirety of knowledge production. What is evident, rather, is their control over the social conditions governing the acceptance of knowledge: who was deemed worthy of being heard, how speakers were categorized, and the criteria applied before a claim was even considered.

## The Epistemic Legitimacy of the *Mustaḍʿafīn* and the Reversal of Credibility Standards

Epistemic legitimacy within the Qur'anic narrative differs from social recognition, propositional truth, and institutional authority. Social recognition refers to a group's acceptance within the social structure (Schweiger & Souza, 2026). In contrast, epistemic credibility concerns the reasons that make an individual's testimony or claim worthy of consideration as a source of knowledge (McKinnon, 2016). Truth pertains to the validity of a claim's content (Drummond & Tipton, 2024), while authority refers to the normative or social capacity to influence the acceptance of knowledge (Bristol & Rossano, 2020). This distinction is crucial when reading Q. 6:52 and Q. 18:28 in tandem. Both verses feature groups around the Prophet who were perceived as lacking high social status, and they forbid their expulsion to satisfy elite demands. Al-Ṭabarī (2001) and Ibn Kathīr (2004) both situate these verses within the context of elite requests to keep people experiencing poverty away from the Prophet's gatherings; thus, the Qur'anic correction targets

the social criteria used to determine who merits access to the prophetic circle, rather than conferring epistemic privilege upon poverty itself.

Q. 6:52 illustrates a more specific mechanism of legitimation through the nature of the Prophet's interaction with groups of low social standing. The phrase *yurīdūna wajhahū* links their presence to a divine orientation. At the same time, the prohibition *mā ʿalayka min ḥisābihim min shayʾin* rejects transferring the burden of their social status onto the Prophet. This narrative provides no information regarding the intellectual competence of specific individuals, nor does it frame the experience of poverty as an epistemic privilege. Its epistemic function lies in rejecting social prejudice as grounds for diminishing an individual's standing within the arena of truth-seeking and truth-acceptance. Q. 18:28 reinforces this pattern with the command *wa-lā taʿdu ʿaynāka ʿanhum* (do not let your eyes turn away from them), requiring the Prophet to maintain his attention on those who call upon God morning and evening. The distinction between these verses yields a more calibrated mechanism: it grants initial legitimacy to the subject's right to remain present in the epistemic space before assessing the quality of their individual claims. Thus, the Qur'an severs the link between low social status and low epistemic worth, without replacing it with the assumption that marginalized groups invariably produce true knowledge.

Q. 11:27 presents a different testing ground, as the issue shifts from access to religious space to the credibility of those responding to the message. The notables among Noah's people labeled his followers *arādhilunā bādiya al-raʾy* (our lowest, acting on mere superficial judgment), conflating the message's truth with the status of those who accepted it. Al-Rāzī (2001) interprets this objection as an argument linking low social standing to poor judgment, whereas al-Bayḍāwī (1997) highlights the disparagement of Noah's followers, who were viewed as lacking social honor. These differing interpretations clarify the locus of the epistemic issue: the content of the followers' claims is not scrutinized first; rather, their social identity is used as a pretext to devalue their response to the revelation. The Qur'anic narrative does not counter this prejudice by asserting poverty as proof of truth. Instead, it rejects this elitist logic by decoupling two categories previously conflated: social standing and the validity of judgment.

The distinction between legitimacy and truth becomes clearer in Q. 7:75–76. The people of *ṣāliḥ* faced an internal schism between believers and a group that rejected the message, using social hierarchy as the criterion for judgment. The verse reveals two distinct stages: an individual might gain or lose social recognition based on the group's honor structure, yet the message's validity remains independent of such status fluctuations. The Qur'an frames the response to the message as determined by the subject's relationship to the divine message, rather than by inherited standing. This mechanism differs from that in Q. 6:52 and Q. 18:28. While the former two verses uphold marginalized groups' access to the epistemic sphere,

Q. 7:75–76 highlights a conflict over the basis on which the message's recipients are judged. This distinction is significant because epistemic legitimacy extends beyond the mere right to be heard. The right to participate in the sphere of knowledge is an institutional prerequisite, whereas credibility hinges on reasons related to the message's content and the response to it. The Qur'an dismisses social status as sufficient grounds for rejecting a claim, without equating social acceptance with truth.

Q. 28:5 introduces a different mechanism of legitimacy, as the verse's structure does not feature direct testimony from the marginalized group. The statement *wa-nurīdu an namunna ʿalā alladhīna ustuḍʿifū fī al-arḍ* frames the shift in the oppressed group's position as a divine act, subsequently designating them as leaders and heirs. This verse cannot be used to infer that oppression automatically confers superior knowledge. Its epistemic function is both more limited and more potent: social position holds no permanent normative power to determine who is worthy of fulfilling roles of value to society. Al-Qurṭubī (1999) interprets this verse as signifying a reversal of the Children of Israel's fortunes after Pharaoh's oppression. In contrast, Ibn ʿĀshūr (1985) links it to a historical shift that transformed the relationship between a subjugated group and structures of power. Both interpretations allow for a distinction between socio-political elevation and epistemic legitimacy. Ascension to leadership does not prove that a group possesses the truth simply by virtue of its suffering. Rather, the verse establishes a normative premise: marginalization cannot serve as a permanent basis for precluding a group from attaining a position previously monopolized by a dominant party.

Q. 8:29 offers a more direct criterion for discerning truth, grounded in the relationship between *taqwā* (God-consciousness/piety) and *furqān* (discernment). The verse makes no mention of the *mustaḍʿafīn* and thus cannot be cited as direct evidence for the epistemic privilege of marginalized groups. Its value to the argument lies in establishing a normative criterion that can subsequently be applied to assess a subject's legitimacy across the corpus. Ibn Kathīr (2004) compiles various accounts regarding the meaning of furqān—including the ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood—thereby linking the verse's connection to the process of knowing with a capacity for discernment rooted in *taqwā*. This perspective shifts the argument: Qur'anic credibility cannot be reduced to mere possession of information, status, or group recognition. Nevertheless, *taqwā* should not be equated with epistemic authority; the category of furqān is more accurately understood as a normative capacity to recognize the distinction between right and wrong.

Q. 29:69 further narrows the relationship between human action and guidance by stating *wa-alladhīna jāhadū fīnā la-nahdiyannahum subulanā* (and those who strive for Us—We will surely guide them to Our ways). This verse speaks of those who earnestly pursue the path of Allah, rather than the *mustaḍʿafīn* group

specifically. Consequently, the verse serves as a general criterion rather than direct evidence regarding the experience of marginality. Its relevance emerges when compared with Q. 6:52 and Q. 18:28: the subject's legitimacy is not determined by social class, whereas moral orientation and earnestness in seeking guidance are part of the normative Qur'anic criteria. This relationship remains conditional. Earnestness does not create truth, nor does it elevate personal experience to the status of revelation; guidance still originates from Allah.

Q. 49:13 reinforces the distinction between social recognition and normative standards through the statement *inna akramakum ʿinda Allāhi atqākum* (indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous/God-fearing). This verse does not establish *taqwā* as a license to command knowledge, nor does it eliminate all differences in human aptitude. The verse's structure moves from genealogical diversity to the measure of nobility before Allah, implying that lineage cannot serve as the ultimate yardstick of human worth. Ibn Kathīr (2004) links this verse to the rejection of pride in lineage, while Ibn ʿĀshūr (1985) emphasizes the shift from lineage to moral quality as the measure of nobility. When read alongside Q. 6:52, Q. 18:28, and Q. 11:27, the principle becomes more specific: social status does not provide sufficient grounds to determine an individual's eligibility to participate in the quest for truth or to evaluate the quality of their response to revelation. Nevertheless, this verse does not designate every pious person as an authority on knowledge.

This series of verses demonstrates three distinct mechanisms of legitimation without positing marginality itself as the source of truth. The first mechanism involves safeguarding epistemic access, as seen in Q. 6:52 and Q. 18:28, which uphold the presence of groups held in low regard within the Prophet's milieu. The second mechanism addresses credibility deficits; Q. 11:27 and Q. 7:75–76 show the failure of social status as a metric for evaluating recipients of the divine message. The third mechanism establishes normative criteria independent of status—specifically *taqwā*, *furqān*, and earnestness in seeking guidance (as in Q. 8:29 and Q. 29:69), as well as the standard of nobility defined in Q. 49:13. These three mechanisms serve distinct functions: access determines who must not be excluded from the epistemic sphere; credibility explains why social status is insufficient grounds for dismissing testimony; and normative criteria provide a more relevant basis for assessing the capacity to receive and respond to guidance. This structure reverses credibility standards in a specific sense: the Qur'an invalidates social status as an adequate indicator. It replaces it with normative criteria rooted in the subject's response to revelation.

## The Distribution of Epistemic Authority in the Social Epistemology of the Qur'an

From a Qur'anic perspective, distributing epistemic authority does not mean transferring the source of truth from the elite to the *mustaḍʿafīn*. The shift occurs at

a different level: who is recognized as an agent of knowledge, who has the opportunity to articulate their experiences, and what factors are deemed appropriate for assessing a claim's credibility. The Qur'an critiques situations where status, wealth, influence, or lineage replace scrutiny of a claim's content (Pratama et al., 2026). The resulting correction is not a reversal of hierarchy, but a reconfiguration of the relationship between social position and epistemic acceptance. The *mustaḍʿafīn* gain recognition as subjects capable of knowing, speaking, and bearing witness; however, their marginalized status does not automatically guarantee truth.

Distinguishing between epistemic agents, credibility, and social authority has direct implications for interpreting the relationship between the elite and marginalized groups. An individual may possess relevant experience without holding social authority. In contrast, someone with social authority may have the power to steer decisions without epistemic justification beyond their position. This structure helps explain why the Qur'an's critique of the elite is not tantamount to rejecting all forms of expertise, leadership, or social differentiation. The issue is using status as a standalone basis for determining the value of knowledge. Epistemic authority requires a connection between the claim, the supporting reasons, relevant experience, the capacity for judgment, and the integrity of the person conveying the information. While social position can influence an individual's access to experience, information, and platforms for speech, that position alone does not resolve the question of validity.

Social experience holds epistemic value because it provides a specific perspective on reality, not because suffering automatically yields true knowledge. This distinction allows for a more precise application of the "standpoint" concept when interpreting Qur'anic narratives. A perspective emerging from a subordinate position can reveal aspects of reality that are less visible from a dominant position—particularly regarding experiences of injustice, limited access, and the consequences of social policies. Its epistemic value remains contingent upon the relationship between experience, articulation, reasoning, and the object of the claim (Kunst et al., 2017). Such an interpretation differs from the assumption that every marginalized voice must be accepted without scrutiny. The Qur'an provides a basis for acknowledging the experiences of marginalized groups without establishing an epistemic principle that equates social position with truth. Thus, a marginalized position signifies a perspectival condition that can enrich social knowledge, rather than a source of inherent epistemic privilege.

This conception also explains why credibility must be distinguished from power. Credibility assesses the worthiness of a testimony or claim for consideration (Kojonen, 2025). In contrast, social power determines the extent to which an individual can have their claims heard, disseminated, or institutionalized (Willmott, 2015). Inequality arises when power disproportionately inflates credibility or when

a subordinate position reduces credibility regardless of the claim's quality. This pattern resembles "testimonial injustice" in Miranda Fricker's theory (2007), which identifies a credibility deficit stemming from identity-based prejudice as a form of injustice against an individual in their capacity as a "knower." This framework helps elucidate the social mechanisms at play in knowledge relations without imposing modern categories as if they were intrinsic to the Qur'an.

Hermeneutical injustice calls for greater caution. This concept relates to limitations in shared interpretive resources that make the experiences of certain groups difficult to understand or communicate within dominant social spaces (Falbo, 2022). The research corpus does not provide grounds—as strong as those regarding credibility—to designate this category as a primary finding; the most prominent epistemic problem lies in how the speaker's voice and position are received. Subordinate groups express their experiences in recognizable language, yet the epistemic issue arises when those experiences are situated within social structures that devalue the individuals conveying them. This distinction has a significant implication: the epistemic problems presented in the Qur'an are best understood through the interplay of recognition, credibility, and power, rather than by assuming a conceptual void within marginalized experiences.

Social relations remain integral to knowledge formation, as claims never circulate in a structureless void. A speaker's reception is shaped by their position, social networks, evaluative habits, and the institutions that determine who may speak and who is heard (Bruggisser, Hervais-Adelman, & Roswandowitz, 2026). Social epistemology is relevant here because it focuses on the social conditions governing the production, transmission, and evaluation of knowledge (Levy & Alfano, 2020). Applying this framework to Qur'anic narratives does not require creating categories such as "epistemic communities" if the text lacks sufficient evidence of the collective mechanisms needed to support such a term. A more fitting concept is the "social space of knowledge reception"—a relational environment where credibility is established, maintained, or denied. This perspective avoids two forms of reductionism: it does not reduce knowledge to a purely individual matter, nor does it treat society as an autonomous source of truth. Truth retains a normative horizon, whereas social processes determine how human claims gain recognition or face rejection.

The Qur'an's normative criteria further place moral qualities in a proportional relationship with knowledge. Qualities such as *taqwā*, *amānah* (trustworthiness), honesty, and responsibility shape how one employs knowledge and exercises authority (Nasution et al., 2023); however, moral quality cannot be equated with epistemic competence. A conveyor of information still requires relevant knowledge, the ability to comprehend the subject matter, and adequate grounds; piety does not obviate the need for verification. Conversely, technical competence does not automatically confer moral legitimacy upon an authority figure. This distinction

yields a layered model of authority: epistemic capacity relates to the ability to know; credibility relates to trustworthiness in the context of specific claims; and moral legitimacy relates to how knowledge and power are exercised. This layered structure aligns more closely with the Qur'an's normative patterns than the notion that marginalized groups replace elites as the new holders of authority.

The most significant consequence for the Qur'an's social epistemology is the shift in the basis for evaluating the subject of knowledge. Social status no longer suffices as grounds for elevating or diminishing credibility. This principle does not imply epistemic equality in the sense that all claims must be accorded equal weight. Rather, the relevant equality lies in the opportunity to be heard, in scrutiny free from status-based prejudice, and in applying relevant reasoning when assessing a claim. A division of epistemic labor remains possible—and indeed necessary—provided that authority does not devolve into immunity from criticism. Within this framework, the *mustaḍʿafīn* gain epistemic standing because their experiences and testimonies cannot be dismissed solely because of their social position. Elites do not lose all authority either; what loses legitimacy is any claim to credibility that rests exclusively on social privilege. The correction is distributive and normative, not revolutionary in the sense of shifting who holds the truth.

This model presents three interconnected layers of epistemic distribution. The first layer concerns access: marginalized subjects must be able to enter the spaces where experiences and claims are scrutinized. The second layer concerns credibility: assessing testimony must be guided by relevant reasons rather than prejudices about the speaker's status. The third layer concerns authority: the power to influence shared knowledge must be open to scrutiny and correction. None of these is synonymous with truth-validity, as the social acceptance of a claim can still be mistaken. This framework also explains why correcting epistemic dominance does not require reversing hierarchies. Its primary goal is to sever the automatic link between social privilege and epistemic privilege. The result is an order of knowledge that evaluates subjects based on epistemic relevance, openness to scrutiny, and responsibility in the use of knowledge.

## Conclusion

The Qur'anic narrative constructs the *mustaḍʿafīn* as epistemic subjects through their capacity to know, experience, bear witness, voice the truth, and act against injustice; marginalized experiences offer a relevant perspective for shaping social knowledge, and credibility is not determined by status, wealth, lineage, honor, or elite dominance. Epistemic legitimacy emerges from the interconnection of experience, testimony, the capacity to grasp the truth, moral courage, and openness to guidance, thereby stripping social authority of its privilege as the sole basis for accepting knowledge claims. This pattern reveals a shift from status-based dominance toward a distribution of credibility that evaluates actors based on epistemic capacity and integrity, while affirming the agency of the *mustaḍʿafīn*

without automatically equating marginalized perspectives with absolute truth. Theoretically, this expands the Qur'an's social epistemology by distinguishing between sources of truth, epistemic actors, credibility, and social authority; standpoint epistemology helps elucidate the perspectival value of marginalized experiences, while epistemic injustice serves as a heuristic tool for interpreting the delegitimization of testimony. Limitations include the scope of the verse corpus, the selection of exegeses, the nature of the literature, and potential biases inherent in modern analytical categories; consequently, the conceptual transferability is best confined to textual and hermeneutic analysis rather than being generalized as a direct representation of knowledge authority across all contemporary Muslim societies. Further research should compare exegetical interpretations, trace the history of the *mustaḍʿafīn* concept's reception, and examine the practical application of the principle of marginalized credibility through empirical studies of Muslim communities across diverse periods, regions, and configurations of authority.

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HS contributed to the conceptualization, research design, data analysis, manuscript writing, and publication correspondence. AD contributed to data collection, literature review, and manuscript drafting. SA contributed to interpreting findings, critical analysis, and substantive revision of the manuscript. AMQ contributed to data verification, strengthening scientific arguments, and editing the manuscript. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and are responsible for their respective contributions.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest that could influence the objectivity of the research, the writing process, the interpretation of results, or the publication of the article. None of the authors have any financial, professional, or personal interests or affiliations that could influence the conduct and reporting of this research.

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The author used artificial intelligence (AI) to a limited extent to enhance language quality, correct grammar, and assist with manuscript formatting. The author generated all research results, findings, concepts, analyses, ideas, interpretations, and conclusions without AI assistance. The author bears full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and entire content of the published manuscript.

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