

# The Evolution of the Concept of Fisq in the Qur'ān (Based on the Meccan and Medinan periods)

Saleha Sharifi

## Abstract

This study investigates the semantic development of *fisq*<sup>1</sup> in the Qur'ān tracing its evolution from the Meccan to the Medinan periods. While previous scholarship has approached *fisq* primarily through theological frameworks or synchronic semantic analysis, its diachronic development has not been systematically examined using both computational and close-reading methods.

Combining word2vec modeling with manual textual analysis, this study maps the semantic field of *fisq* across 54 Qur'ānic occurrences. The findings identify three interrelated transformations: (1) a conceptual shift from individual doctrinal disobedience to collective social deviation; (2) a transition in approach from passive warning to active community regulation; and (3) a functional shift from marking external boundaries between believers and non-believers to regulating internal norms within the Muslim community.

The frequency of root *f-s-q* increases from 20 occurrences in the Meccan period to 34 in the Medinan period, reflecting the transformation of the early Muslim community from a marginalized group into an organized socio-political entity. A comparison between manual and computational extracted semantic fields reveals notable differences: while manual analysis highlights associations with sin, faith, and punishment, computational methods uncover a discourse-level network centered on guidance, communication, and social division.

These results suggest that *fisq* operates not as a theological category but also as a dynamic mechanism of identity formation and social boundary-making in the Qur'ān. More broadly, the study demonstrates that integrating computational approaches with traditional textual analysis can reveal dimensions of Qur'ānic meaning that remain less visible in conventional exegesis.

**Keywords:** *Fisq*, Semantic Field, Qur'ānic Studies, Meccan and Medinan Period, computational linguistics.

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<sup>1</sup>. In this article, *f-s-q* is used to refer exclusively to the triliteral root; *fisq* denotes the concept or act of transgression; and *fāsiq* (pl. *fāsiqūn*) refers to individuals or groups characterized by *fisq*.

## Introduction

The root *f-s-q* and its derivatives—most notably *fiṣq* (the act) and *fāsiq* (the agent)—occupy a prominent place in Qur’ānic discourse and have generated extensive discussion in later Islamic scholarship. In pre-Islamic usage, the root referred to plants or animals, meaning “to come out” of their natural state. With the rise of Islam, it acquired a distinct ethical sense, referring to deviation from the right path and disobedience to divine commandments (Tatlı 2015: 414). Izutsu noted that this shift exemplifies a broader Qur’ānic pattern in which pre-Islamic vocabulary was reconfigured to express new religious meanings (Izutsu 2002a: 5).

Islamic scholars have interpreted *fiṣq* in theological, legal, and political terms, but these reflect post-Qur’ānic systematization rather than the Qur’ānic usage itself. Most studies either rely on later frameworks or treat *fiṣq* synchronically as a fixed concept. A diachronic analysis remains lacking—one that traces its development across stages of revelation. This study addresses this gap by examining how *fiṣq* functions in the Qur’ān and how its meaning evolves between the Meccan and Medinan periods.

This study has two objectives. First, it examines how *fiṣq* operates within the Qur’ānic semantic system. As Ferdinand de Saussure explained, linguistic analysis can be conducted synchronically—treating language as a system at a given moment—or diachronically, focusing on historical change over time (Saussure 1959: 79-98). This study traces semantic change over time, focusing on the Meccan-Medinan divide and the evolving context of the early Muslim community.

Second, it shows how computational semantic analysis can complement traditional close reading. While the focus remains on the evolution of *fiṣq*, the study demonstrates that tools such as word embedding reveal patterns not easily captured by conventional methods and help distinguish Qur’ānic usage from later interpretive.

This study contributes to both Qur’ānic studies and Islamic intellectual history. Clarifying the Qur’ānic use of *fiṣq* provides a stronger basis for evaluating later theological and legal interpretations. By situating the term in its revelatory and socio-historical contexts, it also sheds light on the formation of Islamic normative categories.

The paper proceeds as follows: After reviewing previous research, it presents a semantic and contextual analysis of *f-s-q*, followed by computational and chronological analyses. It then examines the transformations of *fiṣq* across revelatory periods before concluding key findings and their implications.

## Previous Research on *Fisq*

Beyond the Qur’ān itself, *fiṣq* has been discussed in Islamic theological, legal, and exegetical traditions. In post-Qur’ānic Islamic thought, the *fāsiq* is commonly defined as one who commits major sins (Gardet n.d.). *Fisq* is also

situated within a broader network of ethical concepts. Badry (n.d.), for example, associates *fiṣq* with *ẓulm* (injustice), especially in its social expressions such as bribery or partiality in legal affairs, while Tyan (n.d.) identifies *fiṣq* as the opposite of *ʿadl* (justice, or "a person of good morals"). In these frameworks, *fiṣq*—alongside *kufr* (disbelief) and *shirk* (polytheism)—is often positioned as the antithesis of *īmān* (faith) (Nour Mohammadi 2016). These formulations illuminate later Islamic ethical reasoning. But they largely reflect systematizations rather than the Qur'ānic text itself.

Theologically, scholars debated the status of a believer who commits grave sins. The Khawārij classified such a person as a *kāfir* (disbeliever) while Ash'arīs and Māturīdīs viewed them as a sinful believer (*fāsiq*). The Mu'tazila proposed an intermediate position, and the Murjī'īs deferred judgment to God (Gardet n.d.; Folorunsho, 1993: 48). In Islamic law (*fiqh*), being labeled *fāsiq* could lead to loss of legal credibility, such as disqualification from testimony (Salehi 2021: 275–297), and politically it raised questions about rebellion against unjust rulers (Gardet n.d.).

Scholarship on *f-s-q* can be divided into two approaches: one examines it through theological schools and legal frameworks, while the other analyzes its Qur'ānic usage and semantic range. Both approaches provide valuable insights, but they have different methodological priorities and limitations.

Most existing studies approach *fiṣq* from a theological or legal perspective. They examine how the concept was interpreted and systematized in post-Qur'ānic Islamic thought. Gardet's entry "Fāsik" in the Encyclopedia of Islam defines *fāsiq* as "one who has committed major sin." But it does not provide the Qur'ānic basis for this categorization. While useful, this lexicographical approach reflects later systematization rather than Qur'ānic usage.

Özdemir (1998) builds on this foundation by analyzing how different theological schools interpreted *fāsiq*. Similarly, Folorunsho (1993) examines the concept in early Islamic debates, especially in Mu'tazilite thought, and Tatlı (2015) traces the historical evolution of *fāsiq*, showing how its meaning changed as it became part of complex legal and theological frameworks.

These studies illuminate theological debates but share a limitation: they focus on later interpretations rather than the Qur'ān itself. The categories and distinctions they analyze emerged centuries after revelation and may not reflect the semantic range or contextual nuances of *f-s-q* in the Qur'ān. As a result, they treat *fiṣq* as a fixed category and do not examine its development across revelatory periods.

Izutsu's *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (2002b) is one of the few studies that examine *fiṣq* in the Qur'ānic text. He analyzes it within a relational semantic network, highlighting its connection to *kufr* (disbelief). He argues that understanding the Qur'ānic term requires considering the system of related concepts. This approach marks a methodological shift from theological systematization to the Qur'ān's internal semantic structure.

However, Izutsu's study has limitations. It is largely synchronic, focusing on static relationships rather than diachronic development. It also prioritizes *kufr*, treating *fisq* as a partial synonym, and gives limited attention to socio-historical context and rhetorical function.

Prayoga (2023) examines the concept of *fāsiq* in Qur'ān 49:6, using Barthes' semiotic theory alongside classical commentaries. While informative, this analysis is limited in scope: it focuses on a single verse, relies heavily on later commentaries, emphasizes historical reports (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), and does not consider distribution of *f-s-q*. As Rippin notes, *asbāb al-nuzūl*—though important in classical exegesis—can reflect doctrinal constructions and vary in reliability (1988, 15). Other studies, such as Nour Mohammadi (2016), examine the semantic field of *fisq* but largely follow Izutsu's synchronic approach, emphasizing conceptual relationships without addressing diachronic development or wider contextual patterns.

The studies discussed here are selected for their direct engagement with *fisq* or their methodological relevance. In particular, Izutsu's work provides a foundational model for semantic analysis, which this study develops further. At the same time, the limited number of dedicated studies highlights a broader gap in both traditional and academic scholarship.

A significant gap remains: no study has systematically analyzed the diachronic development of *fisq* using computational tools and close textual analysis. Theological studies focus on later interpretations with limited attention to Qur'ānic usage. Meanwhile, semantic studies remain largely synchronic or narrowly focused, overlooking the term's broader distribution and evolution.

This study addresses that gap by combining diachronic analysis with semantic field mapping—both computationally and manually. It highlights development patterns and clarifies the distinction between Qur'ānic usage and later interpretations.

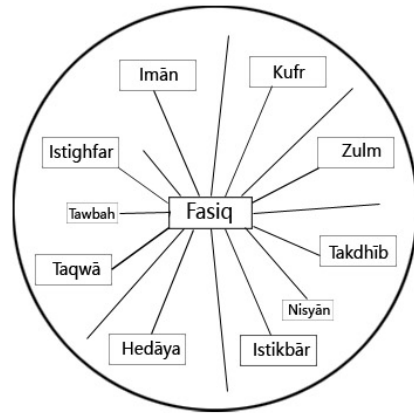
## Contextual and Semantic Analysis of F-S-Q

Stylistic variation in the Qur'ān contributes significantly to its rhetorical and theological depth, operating across multiple linguistic levels, including lexis, syntax, and morphology. These features actively shape meaning, particularly at the micro-linguistic level, where subtle morphological and syntactic choices are closely tied to context (Abdul-Raof 2018: 79). In particular, different morphological patterns derived from the same root convey distinct semantic and pragmatic values. Meaning, therefore, depends not only on lexical choice but also on the specific morphological form used in context.

The root *f-s-q* occurs 54 times in the Qur'ān in various grammatical forms: as a noun (*fisq*, *fusūq*), a verb (*yafsiqūn*, *fasaqū*), and an active participle (*fāsiq*, *fāsiqūn*). The noun typically denotes specific actions and behaviors, while the verb highlights the process of committing *fisq*. The active participle refers to a more stable state or identity, indicating persistent engagement

rather than occasional action. As noted in Arabic grammar, the active participle reflects a lasting characteristic (al-Fakhri 1996: 196). This form (*fāsiq*) occurs predominantly in the plural (35 instances) and only twice in the singular: once in reference to Iblis (Qur'an 18:50) and once in contrast with the believer (Qur'an 32:18).

The nominal form (*fisq*, *fusuq*) appears in three main contexts. First, they are used in verses prohibiting certain foods, such as blood, where consumption is described as *fisq* (Qur'an 5:3; 6:121). One verse specifies that this applies only when done without necessity (Qur'an 6:145), indicating that intentionality is central to *fisq*. Second, *fusūq* is associated with harmful social behaviors, such as name-calling (Qur'an 49:11) and harming a witness (Qur'an 2:282), suggesting disruption of social order. Third, *fusūq* appears alongside other concepts without concrete examples. For instance, it is mentioned with *rafath* (sexual relations) and *jidāl* (disputing) in the context of *Hajj*<sup>2</sup> (Qur'an 2:197), and alongside *Kufr* and *'Isyān* (rebellion) (Qur'an 49:7), where these are contrasted with *īmān*. These patterns suggest that *fisq* encompasses both outward actions and inner dispositions. Mentioning all three separately may suggest a distinct meaning. However, Izutsu notes that *fāsiq* and *kāfir* share many semantic features, which can make them difficult to distinguish in certain contexts (Izutsu 2002b: 157).



The semantic field of *fasiq*

Across these usages, *fisq* is consistently associated with harm, whether physical (forbidden foods), social (harmful interactions), or spiritual (disruption of religious focus). In its nominal form, the root is thus closely linked to actions that produce different forms of harm.

A semantic field can be understood as a network of interrelated words whose meanings emerge through their relationships rather than in isolation (Geeraerts 2009: 52-54). One way to identify such a field is by examining co-occurring patterns. Following Firth's (1957) principle of "meaning by collocation, these patterns reveal how meaning is shaped through association at the syntagmatic level (Firth 1957: 196). This aligns with Geeraerts' view that syntagmatic relations play a central role in meaning construction alongside paradigmatic relations (Geeraerts 2009: 58).

<sup>2</sup>. *Hajj*, in Islam, is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, and one of the Five Pillars of Islam, obligatory for all physically and financially able Muslims.

Manual analysis of co-occurrence patterns shows that *f-s-q* most frequently appears with terms related to *īmān*, suggesting conceptual opposition. It is also associated with *kufr*, indicating semantic proximity, as well as with *hedāya* (guidance), *ẓulm* (injustice/oppression), and *taqwā* (piety). Some of these co-occurring terms carry negative connotations, while others have positive ones. High co-occurrence with *īmān* suggests conceptual opposition, while frequent pairing with *kufr* indicates semantic proximity. This method reveals how the Qur'ān's constructs meaning through usage patterns rather than dictionary definitions alone.

This semantic network helps situate *fisq* within the Qur'ān's moral framework. It occupies an intermediate position between *īmān* and *kufr*, reflecting a spectrum of deviation. Factors such as *istikbār* (pride) and *nisyān* (forgetfulness) may lead individuals toward this state. While related to *kufr*, *fisq* retains a distinct meaning. Concepts such as *ẓulm* and *takdhīb* (denial) may result from *fisq*, whereas *istighfār* (asking for forgiveness) and *tawbah* (repentance) indicate the possibility of return. However, continued disobedience (*'isyān*) may lead further to misguidance (*īdlāl*).

### Computer-assisted semantic analysis

After mapping the semantic field of *fisq* through manual analysis, this study employs computational methods for two main purposes. First, it identifies semantic associations that may not be easily captured through manual reading of large corpora. Second, it offers a more systematic and replicable approach that helps reduce subjective bias. Rather than replacing traditional methods, this approach serves as a complementary tool to support, refine, or extend conventional analysis.

All morphological variations of the root *f-s-q* in the Qur'ān were normalized to their base form using the large language model Claude 3.5. This process resulted in two primary forms: the active participle (*fāsiq*) and the verbal noun (*fisq*). The results were then manually verified to ensure that the lemmatization conforms to standard Qur'ānic Arabic morphology.

The use of computational methods in Qur'ānic studies has expanded in recent years. Bashir et al. (2022) highlight the growing sophistication of Arabic natural language processing in this field. Building on this development, this study applies a word2vec model to identify semantic relationships beyond manual detection. Word2vec represents words as numerical vectors in a high-dimensional space. It positions words with semantic relationships (based on the contexts in which they appear) near each other. This allows semantic relationships to be measured quantitatively. Accordingly, the model identifies words associated with *fāsiq* and *fisq* based on their contextual proximity in the Qur'ān.

The model was trained on the Qur'ān at the verse level, with each verse treated as a contextual unit. Key parameters influence the result. The window size determines how many surrounding words are considered context; smaller

windows capture close associations, while larger ones reflect broader relationships. This study tests window sizes of 5 and 10. Vector dimensionality, which defines the number of features representing each word, was also varied (100 and 200). Higher dimensionality allows finer semantic distinctions but requires more computational resources. No major differences were observed across window size, though minor variations appeared with different dimensionalities.

The Qur'ānic corpus, with approximately 77,800 words, is relatively small for training word embedding models, which typically require larger datasets for stable results. Therefore, the analysis is exploratory rather than definitive. To assess internal consistency, results were compared across different parameter settings (window sizes 5 and 10; vector dimensions 100 and 200). The substantial overlap among top-ranked terms suggests reasonable stability, though not full validation. Accordingly, the findings are presented as complementary to manual analysis rather than as standalone evidence. For clarity, only the ten most strongly associated terms are reported, with similarity scores ranging from -1 (totally unrelated) to 1 (maximally related).

Several terms appear consistently across both models, including *tabayyūn*, *balāgh*, *kalām*, *istakhaffa*, *shiqāq*, and *hādī*. Together, they point to a semantic field centered on the communication of guidance: a message that is made clear and conveyed, yet sometimes dismissed or resisted, leading to division. Additional terms in each model align with this general pattern.

Vector size 100	Vector size 200
1. <i>tabayyūn</i> (تبيين) [to become clear/evident]: 0.86	1. <i>tabayyūn</i> (تبيين) [to become clear/evident]: 0.84
2. <i>balāgh</i> (بلاغ) [conveying/message]: 0.84	2. <i>balāgh</i> (بلاغ) [conveying]: 0.84
3. <i>kalām</i> (كلام) [speech/words]: 0.81	3. <i>jahl</i> (جهل) [ignorance]: 0.83
4. <i>istakhaffa</i> (استخفف) [to take lightly/make light of]: 0.80	4. <i>kalām</i> (كلام) [speech/words]: 0.82
5. <i>shiqāq</i> (شقاق) [division/opposition]: 0.7997	5. <i>istakhaffa</i> (استخفف) [to take lightly]: 0.82
6. <i>hādī</i> (هادي) [guide]: 0.79	6. <i>hādī</i> (هادي) [guide]: 0.80
7. <i>muhtadī</i> (مهتدي) [guided one]: 0.78	7. <i>hujaj</i> (حجج) [arguments/proofs]: 0.80
8. <i>la'inna</i> (لإن) [indeed/certainly]: 0.78	8. <i>'āna</i> (عان) [to appear/become apparent]: 0.79
9. <i>maw'īza</i> (موعظة) [admonition/exhortation]: 0.78	9. <i>shiqāq</i> (شقاق) [division/opposition]: 0.79
10. <i>tawallā</i> (تولى) [to turn away]: 0.77	10. <i>lazima</i> (لزم) [to be necessary]: 0.79

The computational results outline a Qur'ānic discourse centered on the process of guidance. This discourse is conveyed through divine speech in forms such as *balāgh* and *maw'īza*, aiming to shape beliefs and behavior. Within this framework, the *hādī* communicates guidance and normative teachings to the *muhtadī*, guiding them away from *jahl*. Audience responses, however, vary and may include rejection, indifference, or resistance, expressed through turning away, scorn, and similar reactions. Such responses can lead to (*istakhaffa*) and ultimately to division (*shiqāq*).

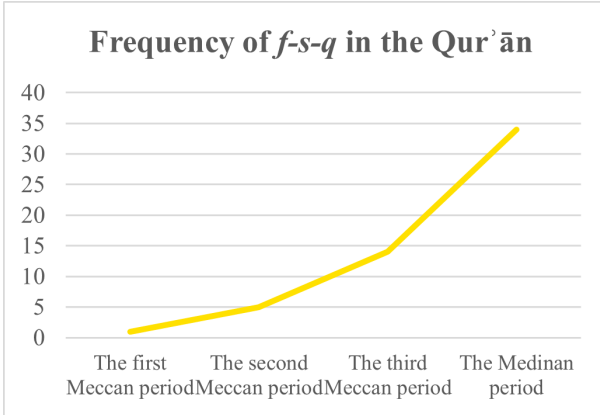
### Chronological Analysis of F-S-Q in the Qur'ān

While semantic and linguistic approaches provide important insights into *fīsq*, they often overlook its development throughout the revelatory period. A chronological analysis is therefore necessary to trace how its meaning and usage evolved. This study adopts Theodor Nöldeke's framework, which builds on the traditional Meccan-Medinan division but introduces several subdivisions within the Meccan phase. Although this model has been criticized—particularly for treating the Qur'ān as above all an authorial work rather than the reflection of an interaction between speaker and community (Neuwirth 2010: 20)—it remains widely used. Therefore, Nöldeke's model is used not as an endorsement of his theoretical assumptions but because it provides a clear, widely accepted historical division suitable for investigating diachronic semantic change in the use of *fīsq*.

In *The History of the Qur'ān* (2013), Nöldeke divides the revelatory period into three Meccan phases and one Medinan phase, based on formal and stylistic features. Within this framework, the root *f-s-q* appears once in the first Meccan phase, five times in the second, fourteen times in the third and thirty-four times in the Medinan period. Despite the longer duration of the Meccan period, the significantly higher frequency in the Medinan is notable and may indicate increased conceptual and social relevance. In Mecca (610–622 CE), Qur'ānic discourse focused mainly on core beliefs such as monotheism, prophethood, and the afterlife, reflecting the community's marginal status. The migration to Medina in 622 CE marked a turning point, as Muslims became the dominant socio-political group, formed the first Islamic community, managed relations with other religious groups, engaged in military conflict, and faced internal challenges such as hypocrisy. These new conditions required ways of addressing issues absent in Mecca, including legal authority, treaty obligations, and military responsibility. The increased use of *fīsq* may reflect the Qur'ān's response to these changes.

In the first Meccan period the root *f-s-q* appears only once, referring to the followers of Nūḥ (Qur'ān 51:46). In the second phase, it describes groups such as Pharaoh's people, the followers of Lot, the people of a township, and Satan (Qur'ān 27:12; 21:74; 17:16; 18:50). This pattern continues in the third phase, where the term is applied to earlier communities, including the Children of Israel (*Banī Isrā'īl*), alongside references to their punishment,

misguidance, and destruction. The concept also begins to appear in legal contexts, such as forbidden foods, and is explicitly contrasted with the believer (Qur'ān 32:18).



With the transition to Medina, the use of the *f-s-q* expands in both frequency and scope. In addition to earlier patterns, Medinan verses provide more concrete specifications, explicitly labeling certain actions as *fisq*. The term is also applied more broadly to followers of earlier prophets. At the same time, Medinan passages emphasize their consequences, including misguidance, divine displeasure, punishment, and spiritual neglect by God (Qur'ān 5:108; 9:96; 2:59; 59:19).

As the Muslim community became more structured in Medina, new relationships emerged with other groups, including *Ahl al-Kitāb*<sup>3</sup> (people of the Book). In this context, some among them are described as *fāsiq*. The term is also applied to both historical and contemporary groups. Notably, one verse explicitly identifies the *munāfiqūn* as *fāsiqūn* (Qur'ān 9:67).

Overall, the usage of *fisq* evolves in response to changing historical conditions. In the Meccan period, it functions mainly as a general and historical concept, describing earlier communities that rejected divine messages, with limited application to contemporaries. In the later Meccan phase, warnings become more explicit, but the term remains largely non-specific. In contrast, the Medinan period marks a shift toward concrete application, where *fisq* became a criterion for evaluating individuals and groups—including contemporaries such as polytheists, hypocrites, and some Muslims. This development reflects the growing role of religion in structuring the social and political life of the emerging Muslim community.

<sup>3</sup>. This term, in the Qur'ān and the resultant Muslim terminology, denotes the Jews and the Christians, repositories of the earlier revealed books. (Vajda, n.d.).

## Multidimensional Transformations of Fisq: From Mecca to Medina

The increasing frequency of the root *f-s-q* suggests not only greater usage but also possible semantic development. Analysis of the relevant verses indicates that the concept of *fisq* undergoes a significant transformation over time. This pattern aligns with Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's framework, which regards the Qur'ān as a text whose linguistic and semantic structures evolved through distinct historical stages (Abu Zayd 1999: 145). While other scholars—such as Fazl Rahman (1982), Abdullah Saeed (2006), and Amina Wadud (1999)—emphasize the importance of socio-historical context, Abu Zayd's approach is particularly relevant here because it directly addresses semantic change within the text. Unlike Rahman's emphasis on deriving general principles (Rahman 1982: 4-5), Saeed's focus on contemporary application of Qur'ānic teachings (Saeed 2006: 40-77), or Wadud's contextual interpretation of gender (Wadud 1999: 81-99), Abu Zayd adopts a linguistic-historical approach that treats the Qur'ān as a text shaped by its socio-historical environment (Abu Zayd 1999:18).

Abu Zayd's emphasis on the formative stages of revelation supports the diachronic method used in this study. Rather than treating context as a secondary background, he understands the Meccan and Medinan periods as distinct phases in the formation of the Qur'ānic text. This perspective provides a useful framework for examining how the semantic range of *fisq* develops and shifts across these periods.

### A. Conceptual Transformation: From Doctrinal Fisq to Social Fisq

The evolution of *fisq* reflects a shift from individual theological disobedience to collective social deviation, paralleling the transformation of the early Muslim community from a marginalized group in Mecca to an organized society in Medina.

In the Meccan verses, *fisq* is presented primarily in conceptual and theoretical terms. Some verses emphasize the certainty of divine law in dealing with those who commit *fisq* (Qur'ān 10:33), while others link it directly to punishment (Qur'ān 6:49). The Qur'ān adopts a pedagogical progression: from the destruction of Nūḥ's people (Qur'ān 51:46) to the articulation of God's eternal law regarding the fate of those who commit *fisq* (Qur'ān 32:20). Other verses similarly attribute the destruction of past communities to *fisq* (Qur'ān 17:16; 7:165; 29:34; 6:49; 46:35).

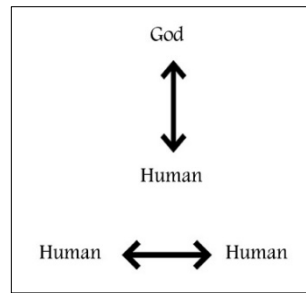
These verses also outline a recurring pattern of societal deviation. Divine commands are first directed to the affluent (*mutrafīn*), who reject them (*fasaqū*) (Qur'ān 17:16). Their influence then shapes broader society, normalizing deviation (Qur'ān 43:54). Once *fisq* becomes widespread and entrenched, the possibility of repentance diminishes, and divine punishment follows (Qur'ān 10:33).

More broadly, Meccan usage of *fisq* remains primarily theological, encompassing acts such as Satan's rebellion (Qur'ān 18:50), rejection of divine signs (Qur'ān 6:49), and opposition to prophetic guidance (Qur'ān 27:12). These acts challenge core principles such as *tawhīd* (monotheism) and *īmān* (faith), positioning *fisq* as the opposite of faith and submission. This suggests that in the Meccan context, *fisq* primarily reflected individual and doctrinal disobedience. References to the destruction of earlier communities function mainly as moral examples (*'ibra*), offering warnings rather than addressing immediate social realities.

With the establishment of the Medinan community, *fisq* expands in both scope and function. Muslims developed from a persecuted theological minority into an organized society with complex internal and external relationships. New norms were thus required to regulate not only individual faith but also social, legal, and political conduct. While some Meccan themes persisted—such as *fisq* of rejecting divine revelation (Qur'ān 2:99) and the fundamental contrast between the *mu'min* and the *fāsiq* (Qur'ān 3:110)—*fisq* increasingly comes to denote concrete social violations that threaten communal order. This expanded social dimension of *fisq* appears in several domains:

- **Judicial and legal domain:** *fisq* expanded beyond theological disobedience to broader social and ethical violations. This expansion includes issues of communication and the credibility of speech (Qur'ān 49:6), as well as false testimony and judicial corruption in commercial and legal contexts (Qur'ān 2:282).
- **Religious deviation:** Unauthorized religious practices (Qur'ān 57:27), as well as altering divine revelation or substituting false teachings in its place (Qur'ān 2:59), are classified as *fisq*. It reflects Qur'ān's emphasis on protecting communal religious integrity and its rejection of innovations that undermine social and spiritual cohesion.
- **Active Social Corruption:** Unlike the more abstract Meccan usage, Medinan *fisq* involves deliberate harm, including false accusation (Qur'ān 24:4), which threatened social stability, deception that undermined community trust (Qur'ān 9:8), violation of covenants (Qur'ān 3:82), and misleading the community (Qur'ān 5:49).

- **Resistance to Authority:** *fisq* also denotes opposition to prophetic and political authority, including organized resistance to establish the social order (Qur’ān 59:5) and avoidance of military obligations (Qur’ān 9:24). Here, *fisq* reflects not general disobedience but specific defiance of divine command.



Overall, this development shows that *fisq* evolves from a primarily vertical concept—concerning the relationship between human and God—into one that also encompasses horizontal dimensions, regulating social relations within the community.

### B. Approach Transformation: From a Passive to an Active Approach

The transformation of the Muslim community from a persecuted minority to an established society with institutional authority reshaped both the understanding and application of *fisq*. This shift reflects not only semantic development but also a change in governance and theological emphasis.

In the Meccan period, Muslims formed a minority whose identity developed in opposition to a polytheistic environment. During this phase, *fisq* is presented as a reversible moral condition. The *fāsiq* is portrayed as potentially open to guidance, and misguidance is not treated as final. The Prophet is instructed to remain patient and avoid hastening punishment (Qur’ān 46:35), reflecting expectation of transformation. This approach aligns with the Qur’ānic strategy of inviting to Islam through persuasion rather than coercion.

Meccan discourse emphasizes awareness through narrative, reasoning, and moral exhortation. Stories of past nations destroyed due to *fisq* serve as warnings (Qur’ān 7:165; 29:34), while other verses highlight patterns of deviation (Qur’ān 43:54), its consequences (Qur’ān 10:33), and its defining features (Qur’ān 7:165). Together, these strategies aim to encourage acceptance of divine guidance.

In this context, the consequences of *fisq* are mainly depicted as worldly destruction, functioning as a warning to those who reject the divine message. The repeated expression “*bimā kānū yafsuqūn*” (because they used to transgress) underscores *fisq* as a central cause of the downfall of earlier communities.

Notably, Meccan verses do not provide clear instructions on how to deal with *fāsiq*. This reflects the specific conditions that the Qur’ān emphasized on invitation and persuasion over confrontation. With the migration to Medina, however, *fisq* became a social and political concern requiring active regulation. Medinan verses introduce practical measures, including verifying reports from a *fāsiq* (Qur’ān 49:6), rejecting their legal testimony (Qur’ān

24:4), and limiting their harmful influence (Qur'ān 5:49). The emphasis shifts from invitation to regulation and community protection.

In Medinan discourse, *fiṣq* is framed as an entrenched condition that obstructs guidance and leads to misguidance (Qur'ān 2:26), and the *fāsiq* is positioned in opposition to the guided (Qur'ān 57:26). The Prophet's role is limited to conveying the message. Interventions such as seeking forgiveness (*istighfār*) on their behalf, or expressing concern are presented ineffectively (Qur'ān 9:84; 5:26). While *fiṣq* may initially be reversible, persistent transgression leads to spiritual hardening and loss of receptivity to guidance (Qur'ān 61:5; 57:16).

This more protective approach is also evident in legal and political contexts. For example, those who judge by laws other than God's are labeled *fāsiq* (Qur'ān 5:47), reinforcing the authority of the emerging Islamic legal order. In this setting, *fiṣq* functions not only as a moral category but also as a marker of opposition that threatens communal cohesion. It thus plays a role in defining authority, regulating behavior, and establishing social boundaries.

Overall, this shift reflects the transformation of the Muslim community from a vulnerable minority to an established authority capable of defining and enforcing its norms.

### C. Functional Transformation: From External Boundaries to Internal Regulation

The transition from Mecca to Medina marks a functional shift in the concept of *fiṣq*: from a boundary marker distinguishing believer from outsiders to a regulatory mechanism governing conduct within the community.

In the Meccan period, *fiṣq* primarily functioned as a tool of external boundary-making. It established a clear theological distinction between believers and those who rejected divine guidance. This binary opposition is explicitly articulated:

Is one who is a believer like one who is a *fāsiq*? They are not equal (*lā yastawūn*) (Qur'ān 32:18).

This distinction goes beyond theology to imply a social hierarchy. By denying equivalence between the believer and the *fāsiq*, the Qur'ān constructs a framework in which *fiṣq* undermines both religious legitimacy and social standing. Meccan verses consistently associate *fiṣq* with spiritual blindness and divine rejection.

This verse establishes a clear out-group boundary by defining *fiṣq* as a condition leading to the loss or absence of faith and placing individuals outside the believing community:

Thus, the decree of your Lord has come true against the wicked (*fasaqū*), that they will never believe (Qur'ān 10:33).

Meccan discourse on *fisq* revolves around three core themes: identifying the out-group, explaining the causes and consequences of deviation, and outlining its defining characteristics. Historical examples—such as people of Pharaoh and Lot—serve as archetypes of *fāsiq* communities whose transgressions led to destruction.

With the transition to Medina, *fisq* retains its boundary-making function but is increasingly applied to new relational contexts. As Muslims interacted with Jews and Christians (*Ahl al-Kitāb*), *fisq* continued to distinguish the Muslim community from them (Qur'ān 5:47; 59).

More significantly, *fisq* becomes a tool for internal regulation. It is applied to members of the community who maintain faith but violate specific norms:

O you who have believed, [...] Neither a scribe nor a witness should suffer harm, for if you do cause them harm, it is indeed a sin on your part (*fa-innahū fusūqun bikum*) (Qur'ān 2:282).

O you who have believed, [...] Do not speak ill of one another, nor call one another by [offensive] nicknames. How evil is the name of wickedness (*bi'sa al-ismu al-fusūq*) after having faith (Qur'ān 49:11).

In the Medinan period, the regulatory function of *fisq* operates across several domains:

- **Religious Violations:** action incompatible with divine commands, consuming forbidden substances, judging outside divine law, and misconduct during religious rituals (Qur'ān 2:59; 5:3; 5:47; 2:197).

- **Social and Moral Norms:** regulation of interpersonal conduct, including prohibition of slander, false accusations (Qur'ān 24:4), requirements of proper conduct in society (Qur'ān 2:282), respect for dignity (Qur'ān 49:11), and truthfulness in testimony (Qur'ān 5:107).

- **Hypocrisy (*nifāq*):** *fisq* helps identify those whose outward expressions of belief conceal inner rejection (Qur'ān 9:8), and whose loyalty remains uncertain (Qur'ān 9:24).

- **Norm formation:** by identifying *fisq*, the Qur'ān implicitly establishes positive values such as piety (*taqwā*) as the highest virtue (Qur'ān 2:197, 192; 5:108), enjoining good and forbidding evil as a communal obligation (Qur'ān 3:110), and inner humility (*khushū'*) as a spiritual ideal (Qur'ān 57:16).

This internalization of *fisq* significantly shapes the social structure of the Muslim community. Labeling individuals as *fāsiq* affects their social standing. This introduces differentiated levels of belonging, where one may retain formal membership while facing varying degrees of restriction based on one's adherence to community norms.

The tripartite framework proposed in this study—conceptual, approach, and functional transformations—closely aligns with the broader shifts identified by Sinai in his analysis of Meccan and Medinan surahs. Sinai

highlights three major developments in the Medinan period: a shift from passive expectation to active engagement, the emergence of a distinct communal identity vis-à-vis other religious groups, and the Prophet's transition from a warner to a communal leader with judicial and spiritual authority (Sinai 2017: 188). While different in terminology, this convergence reinforces the validity of the present analysis and situates it within broader scholarly discussions of Qur'ānic development.

Aspect	Meccan Period	Medinan Period
Usage Frequency	20 occurrences	34 occurrences
Predominant Form	Mainly verbal (e.g., <i>yafsiqūn</i> )	Mainly active participle ( <i>fāsiq</i> ), Mostly plural ( <i>fāsiqūn</i> )
Main Focus	Individual theological disobedience	Social and political opposition
Manifestations	Denial of divine signs, arrogance	Betrayal, injustice, breach of trust
Target Groups	Polytheists and past nations	Polytheists, <i>Ahl al-Kitāb</i> , and some Muslims
Consequences	Eschatological punishment	Legal and social consequences (e.g., rejected testimony)
Function	Defining out-group boundaries	Regulating in-group behavior
Response	Passive (warnings)	Active (verification, exclusion, legal control)
Role in Qur'ānic Discourse	Universal theological message	Community formation and regulation

Comparison of *F-s-q* in the Meccan and Medinan Periods

### Complementary Perspectives: Manual and Computational Semantic

As noted earlier, this study combines computational linguistic methods with manual semantic field analysis to provide a more precise account of *fisq* in the Qur'ān. The computational approach identifies distinct lexical patterns that reveal semantic layers not immediately visible through manual analysis alone.

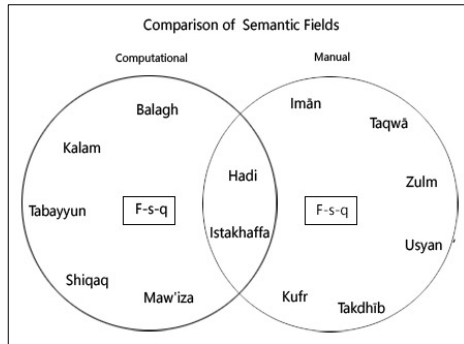
Notably, the highest-ranked computational associations do not prominently include concepts such as sin, injustice, faith, or disbelief—terms central to traditional semantic understanding of *fiṣq*. Only two themes overlap between the computational and manual fields: guidance and contempt. Manual analysis, by contrast, emphasizes vocabulary related to individual actions, sin, punishment, and the *fāsiq*'s position in relation to belief and disbelief. This perspective reflects established theological frameworks, in which the *fāsiq* is typically defined as one who commits major sins (*kaḥīrah*), and debate centers on their status within or outside the boundaries of faith. Methodologically, this approach relies on linear, contextual, and verse-based reading.

The computational analysis, however, introduces a discourse-level perspective. Rather than examining verses in isolation, it maps semantic relations across the text as a network. Within this framework, *fiṣq* appears in a discourse centered on guidance and the communication of truth—processes grounded in dialogue, admonition, and reasoned discourse. Individuals are positioned as responding to this message either through acceptance, leading to guidance, or rejection, resulting in misguidance.

Significantly, this perspective foregrounds social and discursive consequences rather than individual ethical descriptions. It does not focus on cataloguing specific sins or punishments; instead, it highlights the broader effects of rejecting the divine message, such as discord and social fragmentation. In this respect, computational patterns reveal dimensions that are less emphasized in traditional theological discussions, which have typically focused on individual responsibility, legal classification, and eschatological outcomes.

Another notable finding concerns the intentional and conscious nature of the *fiṣq*. The presence of terms related to admonition, communication, and reasoning suggests that divine guidance is conveyed through clear articulation and rational engagement, and that rejection occurs as a conscious response. This dimension appears less central in much of classical theological discourses.

The divergence between manual and computational semantic fields indicates that each approach captures different dimensions of meaning. Manual analysis reflects explicit theological relationships preserved in exegetical tradition, while computational methods uncover broader discourse patterns and rhetorical functions. These approaches are therefore



complementary rather than contradictory, offering a more layered understanding when combined.

These findings suggest that prevailing interpretations of key Qur'ānic concepts may be shaped by methodological preferences that foreground particular dimensions of meaning. Re-examining such concepts through diverse analytical tools can enrich, rather than replace, established interpretations. At the same time, the use of computational methods requires careful evaluation. Without sufficient methodological scrutiny, such tools risk introducing new forms of interpretive bias. Further research is therefore needed to assess their reliability and potential within Qur'ānic studies.

## Conclusion

This study examines the semantic evolution of *fiṣq* from the Meccan to the Medinan periods, departing from approaches that treat the concept primarily within later theological frameworks. By focusing exclusively on the Qur'ānic text, it identifies patterns that illuminate both the development of Qur'ānic discourse and the social dynamics of the early Muslim community.

The findings challenge the dominant theological view of *fiṣq* primarily as an individual moral failing. Instead, the Qur'ān's usage suggests that *fiṣq* functions largely as a social phenomenon. This is reflected in its frequent plural usage and its repeated association with collective entities such as *qawm*, indicating that deviation is often framed in communal rather than purely individual terms.

The study also demonstrates that *fiṣq* undergoes a significant transformation across the revelatory periods. In the Meccan context, it primarily denotes doctrinal deviation and serves to define external boundaries between believers and others. In the Medinan period, however, it expands to address social, legal, and political concerns, reflecting the needs of an increasingly complex and organized community. These shifts—conceptual, procedural, and functional—show how Qur'ānic discourse responds dynamically to changing historical conditions while maintaining its ethical and theological core.

In the Medinan period, *fiṣq* extends beyond polytheists to include certain members of the *Ahl al-Kitāb*, reflecting the complex social and political relationships in Medina. It is also applied to Muslims who fail to meet specific communal obligations, such as participation in collective responsibilities, further broadening its scope. As a result, *fiṣq* functions as an identity marker within the Qur'ānic discourse. While Meccan usage emphasizes external boundary-making, distinguishing believers from outsiders, the Medinan context introduces more complex internal distinctions. The concept comes to regulate relations within the community, addressing individuals whose behavior challenges communal norms despite their formal affiliation with Islam. Thus, beyond the theological dimension, *fiṣq* emerged as a mechanism for defining social boundaries and shaping communal identity.

The findings carry significant implications for multiple scholarly domains. For theological discourse, recognizing *fisq* as a socially constructed boundary marker rather than merely an individual sin category challenges traditional juridical classification. The evolution from doctrinal disobedience to social regulation suggests that early Islamic theological categories emerged as dynamic responses to community needs rather than static doctrines.

More broadly, these findings highlight the close interconnection between theology, law, and social organization in early Islam. The classification of individuals as *fāsiq* carries legal and social implications, particularly in matters such as testimony, trust, and authority. This demonstrates that theological categories functioned not only as doctrinal constructs but also as mechanisms shaping social and legal structures.

From a methodological perspective, this study demonstrates the value of diachronic semantic analysis in Qur'ānic studies. By tracing the development of key terms across different contexts, it reveals dimensions of meaning that remain less visible in synchronic or verse-based approaches. At the same time, the comparison between manual and computational semantic fields shows that each method captures distinct aspects of meaning. Traditional analysis highlights explicit theological relationships, whereas computational methods reveal broader discourse patterns. Together, they offer a more comprehensive interpretive framework.

These results also call for greater methodological reflexivity in Islamic studies. Interpretations of Qur'ānic concepts are often shaped by later theological assumptions, which may obscure patterns present in the text itself. Integrating computational tools with established philological methods offers new possibilities for more text-centered analysis, while also requiring careful evaluation to avoid introducing new biases.

Future research could extend this interdisciplinary approach to other central Qur'ānic concepts, such as *kufr*, *nifāq*, *jihād*, and *'adāla*, to determine whether similar patterns of semantic development emerge. Further investigation into how post-Qur'ānic theological and legal traditions reinterpreted these concepts would also help clarify the relationship between Qur'ānic discourse and later Islamic thought. Such work would contribute to a more historically grounded and methodologically diverse understanding of Islamic intellectual history.

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