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The passive voice in the Holy Quran: an exploratory study

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The passive voice represents a marked syntactic construction in language, and its usage requires a systematic analysis to fully comprehend its complexities. The role of the passive voice in the Holy Quran has not been adequately explored in previous studies. This research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of all passive verbs found in the Holy Quran. We identified 1107 passive verbs using the categorization provided by the Quranic Corpus. These verbs were analyzed in terms of tense, agents, and functions. The results indicate that the passive voice is employed sparingly in the Quran, accounting for only approximately 5% of the total 19,356 verbs. Furthermore, the agent-less passive form emerged as the default, while the most frequently occurring agents were Allah (the Almighty), indefinite agents, Satan or the self, prophets, unbelievers, and believers. The findings suggest that the passive voice in the Quran serves multiple functions, often operating simultaneously. The primary functions of passive constructions include brevity and conciseness, emphasizing the action or object, and expanding meaning.

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Introduction

The Quran, regarded by Muslims as the final revelation of God's message, is not merely a religious textbook but also a profound work in its own right. Its exceptional style and composition have long attracted the attention of scholars and linguists. Despite its linguistic complexity and the richness of its rhetorical strategies, several aspects of its language remain underexplored in the literature, particularly in Western scholarship (Neuwirth, 2019; Stewart, 2021). One such under-explored feature is the use of the passive voice, an important grammatical element that has often been overlooked (Stewart, 2021). When employed in the Quran, the passive voice is not simply a syntactic choice but a deliberate and meaningful one that enhances the theological, rhetorical, and interpretive dimensions of the text.

In certain languages, including Arabic—the language of the Quran—the passive voice assumes a complex grammatical function. It represents the marked voice, which is typically stigmatized and avoided when possible (Ferreira, 2020; Minton, 2015). However, its use is occasionally unavoidable and can introduce subtle nuances to the text (Zemni et al., 2024). Similar to other grammatical categories, the passive form of Arabic verbs is typically marked by vowel changes, distinguishing them from their active counterparts (Khalil, 1989). In the Quran, however, the passive voice transcends its grammatical function to become a significant rhetorical device, directing attention away from the doer of the action and toward the action or its result, thereby increasing the complexity of the text (Nofal, 2013). This usage invites readers to contemplate the actions at various levels and from multiple perspectives.

Previous research has suggested that the passive voice in the Quran is predominantly agent-less, aligning with global linguistic trends in which passive constructions frequently omit the agent (Givón, 1990; Keenan & Dryer, 2007). Scholars such as Mihailovic (1963) and Svartvik (1966) have noted that this feature foregrounds the action or its recipient while backgrounding or omitting the doer. In the Quran, this tendency is especially pronounced and reflects a theological intent to emphasize divine will and action or to universalize the message by removing specific references. By omitting the agent, the Quran conveys its messages more succinctly while maintaining a powerful and universal impact (Sweet, 1930; Shibatani, 1985). The omission of the agent also opens up new dimensions of meaning, inviting readers to engage with and interpret the text more deeply (Myhill, 1997). For instance, Gharaibeh (2018) observed that passive constructions without an agent are often used to describe acts of omnipotence by God or events that are unseen, where the identity of the performer is irrelevant.

Furthermore, the passive voice in the Quran is always tied to its stylistic and communicative goals. It serves to condense the text, making it more accessible while preserving the depth of meaning in each statement (Nofal, 2013). The passive voice also carries significant theological implications. It is frequently used to convey God's command and actions that embody impartiality and inevitability. Al-Shawwa (2007) and Gadalla (2010) noted that the passive voice often appears in verses related to the Day of Judgment or predestined events, emphasizing the reason for an event over the identity of its actor. This choice also helps avoid direct reproach or blame directed at Allah for negative events (Hamid, 2018; Hasan & Uddin, 2020).

The study of passive voice in the Holy Quran has not gained much interest. Existing literature has focused primarily on the passive voice in specific chapters or verses, examining its frequency and contextual usage. However, these studies have generally lacked a comprehensive analysis. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct a thorough investigation into how and when the passive voice appears in the Quran. This research aims to examine all instances of passive constructions in the Quran, focusing on their presence, frequency, grammatical forms, and communicative functions throughout the text. This study is significant as it addresses key questions concerning the use of the passive voice in the Quran, and holds theoretical importance, given the Quran's status as the most revered text in Islam, with far-reaching implications for its interpretation as a religious document.

Passive voice in Arabic

In Arabic, passive constructions are formed through a passivization process, where the verb undergoes internal vowel changes according to the template *fuʕila* ('was made') for the past tense, and *yufʕalu* ('is made') for the present tense (Khalil, 1989). These passive constructions are categorized into two types based on the presence of an agent: agentive and agent-less. The agentive passive includes a prepositional phrase expressing the performer of the action, while the agent-less passive lacks such a phrase. Prepositional phrases in this context include *min* ('from'), *ʕala yadi* ('at the hand of'), and *bi* ('by'). It is believed that these prepositional phrases were introduced into Arabic via translation from European languages (Khalil, 1989). However, this claim warrants reconsideration, as such prepositional constructions also appear in the Holy Quran, which is over 14 centuries old (cf. section 'Results and discussion').

While other forms of passive constructions, such as *ʔinfaʕala* (e.g., *ʔinkasara* 'it broke'), exist, this study focuses specifically on true passive constructions. The passive voice in Arabic is typically employed to fulfill various pragmatic functions, such as emphasizing the action, highlighting the recipients or experiencers of the action, or when the agent is unknown (Givón, 1990; Al-Shawwa, 2007; Foley & Van Valin, 2009). It serves as a mechanism for foregrounding, directing attention to the affected participant (Keenan & Dryer, 2007). The passive is also utilized to avoid assigning blame or responsibility (Goatly, 2000).

Despite some notable studies, research on the passive in the Holy Quran remains insufficient. A systematic, comprehensive study addressing the use of the passive is still lacking. Khalil (1989) investigated the passive in the Quran and uncovered some interesting findings. He reported that 5.26% (957 out of 18,181) of the verbs in the Quran were passive. While this is a valuable contribution, this figure seems inaccurate (see section 'Results and discussion'). Nofal (2011) listed 25 semantic and pragmatic functions of the passive voice in the Quran; however, many of these functions overlapped. Additionally, his study was not comprehensive, focusing on only select Quranic verses.

A more recent study by Gharaibeh (2018) analyzed passive usage in one chapter, Al-An'am ('The Cattle'), and found that most passive constructions were agent-less. In these cases, the suppressed agent was either unspecified or could be inferred from the context. Gharaibeh concluded that the passive was used to emphasize events and to avoid redundancy when the agent was already mentioned.

Similarly, Hamed (2018) examined passive verbs in Surah Al-Baqara ('The Cow') and argued that the passive voice created a psychological effect on listeners, particularly when depicting unseen events, reprimanding the addressee, or glorifying Allah. However, his analysis could easily apply to the active voice in similar contexts. For example, Hamed suggested that the passive verb *qeela* ('it was said') was used to show disrespect when addressing the unbelievers; however, this verb is also used when addressing believers (see section 'Results and discussion'). This suggests that his analysis does not fully account for the broader use of the passive in the Quran.

Other studies have focused on the translation of the passive voice in the Quran. Gadalla (2010) analyzed how participial forms, including the passive, are translated into two English versions of the Quran, based on a corpus of 350 randomly selected sentences. He cataloged the translations but did not explore how the passive itself should be translated. Abdelaal and Rashid (2016) examined semantic losses in the translation of the Quran, while Farhan (2021), in a Spanish-language study, explored the rhetorical purposes of the passive in the Quran, particularly its translation into Spanish. Farhan identified three primary purposes of the passive: concision, emphasis, and redundancy of the agent. However, his study was limited to a small number of verses.

To summarize, previous research has identified several functions of the passive in the Quran. It is used to emphasize divine agency and control, often in verses related to destiny, predestination, and divine decree. The passive voice also introduces complexity and ambiguity in interpretation, elaborates on the agent, and retains the same grammatical subject. It is employed to avoid redundancy when the agent is already known or easily inferred, to avoid attributing negative actions to Allah, and to achieve assonance and parallelism in sentences. Additionally, the passive voice is used when the agent is unknown, unspecified, anonymous, or difficult to identify. This study aims to identify all passive verbs in the Quran and conduct a thorough analysis of their frequency, grammatical characteristics, and pragmatic functions. More specifically, we seek to answer the following questions:

1. How frequent is the passive in the Quran, and how is it distributed across the Quranic surahs? To address this, we will identify the frequency of passive verbs in each chapter, examine their tense, categorize them by type (Madani vs. Makki), and determine their overall frequency in the Quran.
2. What are the grammatical characteristics of passive constructions in the Quran? Here, we will identify the default passive structure in Arabic and investigate whether the agentive passive exists in Quranic Arabic and how its agent is expressed.
3. What are the functions of the passive voice in the Quran? This will shed further light on the claim that the passive is used to avoid attributing negative deeds to Allah.

Methodology
We utilized the Quranic Arabic Corpus (2024), an online annotated linguistic resource that provides the grammar, syntax, and morphology of each word in the Quran, to extract all passive verbs in the Holy Quran as narrated by Hafs on the authority of Asim. Subsequently, each verb was double-checked to ensure accurate categorization. For each verb, we identified its tense (present or past), whether it was agentive or agent-less, the intended agent in the agent-less passives, and the functions of the passive voice. To ensure consistency and reliability, the procedure was cross-verified by the other researchers. In cases where disagreements arose (which occurred in a few instances), the researchers discussed the discrepancies and reached a consensus. Among the 1130 passive verbs identified by the Quranic Arabic Corpus, 22 were incorrectly classified as passive. Examples of these misclassified verbs include *mitnaa* ('we died'), *linta* ('became lenient'), and *tuHaajoonani* ('remonstrate'). These were excluded from further analysis.

Results and discussion
This section presents an analysis of the frequency and distribution of passive verbs in the Quran, including their distribution across different tenses and grammatical characteristics. Additionally, we explore the pragmatic functions that underlie the use of the passive voice.

Distribution and proportion of passive verbs in the Quran. Out of the total 19,356 verbs found in the Quran, 1107 are passive verbs, accounting for 5.7%. This figure slightly differs from Khalil's (1989), who reported a total of 18,181 verbs in the Quran, with only 957 passive verbs (5.26%). Table 1 below provides the distribution of passive verbs across the various chapters of the Quran.

As evident from the table above, a total of 22 chapters do not contain any passive verbs; all of them—with the exception of two Madani chapters, namely *Al-Mum'taḥanah* and *Al-Nasr*—are Makki chapters. Conversely, eight chapters contain a passive verb usage exceeding 20%. The two chapters with the highest percentage of passive verbs are *Al-Takweer*, which contains 12 passive verbs out of 24 (50%), and *Al-Adiat*, which has two passive verbs out of five (40%). A total of 89 chapters exhibit a passive verb frequency of less than 6.4%, while only 11 chapters exceed 15%, all of which are relatively short in length.

This comparatively low frequency of passive verb usage in the Quran aligns with the observations of Bubenik (1979) and Zemni et al. (2024), who argue that Arabic, unlike English and French, employs the passive voice far less frequently. These findings stand in direct contrast to Alattaby's (2020) claim that passive constructions are as prevalent as active ones in the Holy Quran. Instead, our results indicate that the passive voice is not commonly used and appears to be employed selectively for specific rhetorical or textual purposes. This finding is particularly noteworthy given the expectation that the passive voice would be more recurrent in the Quran, considering that it represents a formal context where passive constructions are generally more prevalent (Cooray, 1967; Quirk et al., 1985).

The analysis further reveals that in Makki chapters, the percentage of passive verbs is slightly higher than in Madani chapters. Among the 86 Makki chapters, there are a total of 12,032 verbs, of which 700 (5.8%) are passive. In contrast, the percentage drops slightly to 5.5% in Madani chapters, where out of 7324 verbs, 407 are passive.

Regarding tense distribution, there is a near-equal split between past and present passive verbs. A total of 572 passive verbs (51.7%) occur in the present tense, while 535 (48.3%) are in the past tense. Generally, the past passive form denotes completed actions, whereas the present passive is predominantly used to indicate future events.

With respect to agency, agent-less passives are the norm, as the vast majority of passive verbs (97.7%) occur without an explicit agent. This observation aligns with the established unmarked status of agent-less passives in many world languages. Previous studies, including those by Mihailovic (1963), Svartvik (1966), Huddleston (1971), and Shintani (1979), have reported that in English, more than 70% of passive constructions omit an agent. This finding is consistent with the broader linguistic consensus that Arabic passive structures are typically formed without an overt subject (Gharaibeh, 2018). However, our analysis identified 26 instances (2.3%) where the passive verb includes an explicit agent. Some illustrative examples are presented in (2) (see Appendix for a complete list of passive verbs). The transliterations of the Quranic verses were sourced from IslamOnline.net (2024), and the translations were obtained from Corpus.Quran.com/translation.

Table 1 Distribution of passive verbs in the Holy Quran.

Range of passive use	Makki chapters	Madani chapters	Total chapters	Total verbs	Passive verbs	Average/percentage
0	AlFatiha AlMuzamil AlAala AlBalad AlShams AlDuha AlSharh AlTeen AlAlaq AlQadr AlQariaa AlAsr AlFeel Quraish AlMaoon AlKawther AlKafyroon AlMasad AlFalaq AlNas	AlMum'taḥanah AlNasr	22	316	0	0
1–4.99%	(17) Luqman AlIsraa Abassa AlNaziaat Ibrahim AlDokhan AlKahf AlAraf AlHijr Yusuf AlShuraa Sad AlRum Taha Noah Maryam	(9) AlSafat AlHujurat AlFateh AlSaf AlAnfal AlTalaq AlNisaa AlTawba AlWaqiaa	26	6976	250	3.58
5–9.99%	16 AlZumar AlTahrim AlNur AlAhzab AlBaqarah AlHadid AlMunafiqon AlRahman AlRaad Mohammed AlMaidah AlTaghabun Alimran AlMujadelah AlInsan AlHashir	26 Yunus AlAnbyaa AlMulk AlQassas Hud AlAnkabout Fatir AlNahl AlForqan AlQalam AlMuminun AlJin Qaf Yaseen AlNaml AlTuor Saba AlBorooj AlNajm AlNabaa Ghafer AlAna'am AlSajdah AlQamar AlLayl AlAhqaf	41	10,656	685	6.43

Table 1 (continued)

Range of passive use	Makki chapters	Madani chapters	Total chapters	Total verbs	Passive verbs	Average/percentage
10–14.99%	10 AlMudathir AlFajr AlZukruf Fussilat AlInfitar AlJathyia AlDharyat AlMaaarij AlMutaffeen AlTakathur	3 AlJumuaa AlHaj AlBayinah	14	1158	116	10
15–19.99%	3 AlQyiamah AlHumazah AlHaqa	0	3	107	16	15
>20%	7 AlMursalat AlInshiqaq AlIklas AlGhashyah AlTariq AlAdiat AlTakweer	1 AlZalzalah	8	143	40	28
Total			114	19,356	1107	5.7

(2) Agentive passive verbs

Ya ayyuha arrasooluballigh **ma onzila** ilayka min rabbika. Chapter 5: 67	O Messenger, announce that which **has been revealed** to you from your Lord
IttabiAA ma **oohiya** ilayka minrabbika. Chapter 6:106	Follow, [O Muhammad], what **has been revealed** to you from your Lord
kitabun **ohkimat** ayatuhu thumma fussilat min ladun hakeeminkhabeer. Chapter 11:1	[This is] a Book whose verses **are perfected** and then presented in detail from [one who is] Wise and Acquainted.

Table 2 Agents in passive verbs.

Agent	Frequency
Allah/Angels	777
Indefinite or people in general	153
Satan/Self	55
Prophets	51
Believers	16
Unbelievers	19
Others	36

The agentive passive in Arabic is expressed using a single preposition, namely *min* ('from'). It is noteworthy that, with the exception of three cases, the agent in all instances is the Almighty Allah. In some cases, the passive verb is followed by the preposition *bi* ('by'), as seen in Chapter 69: *Waamma AAadun* **faohlikoo** *bireehinsarsarin AAatiya*—'And as for 'Aad, they **were destroyed** by a screaming, violent wind.' In such instances, it could be argued that the element following *bi* does not denote the true agent but rather the instrument employed in the action, while the actual agent is the entity that utilizes the instrument. To illustrate, consider the sentence 'The door was locked by the key.' Here, the key functions as the instrument, whereas the true agent is the individual who uses the key to lock the door.

The finding that only 26 out of 1107 cases involve an overtly expressed agent is significant, as it sheds light on two key issues. First, it reaffirms that the default passive construction in Arabic is agent-less. Second, it demonstrates that while agentive passives in Arabic are rare, they do exist and are not a linguistic borrowing from European languages, as previously suggested by some scholars. Khalil (1989) argued that Classical Arabic, unlike English—which has both agentive and agent-less passives— exclusively employs agent-less passives and that agentive passives were introduced into Arabic via translation. However, the

presence of these 26 instances in the Quran, a text dating back to the 7th century AD, confirms the existence of the agentive (or long) passive in Arabic. Nevertheless, it remains possible that the use of prepositional phrases to express agency may have been influenced by translations from European languages. The following section provides a detailed discussion of agents in passive constructions in the Quran.

The agent in passive sentences. Contrary to expectations, the passive is not employed when the agent is unknown. In Arabic, the passive is referred to as the *al-majhul* form, which literally means 'the unknown.' This designation suggests that the passive should be used in cases where the agent is unknown. However, in the Quran, the use of the passive in such contexts is rare. In all instances, the agent is either explicitly identified, inferable from context, or representative of a general group of people. Notably, in 70% of all passive constructions, the agent is the Almighty Allah. Table 2 below presents the distribution of agents across all passive verbs in the Quran.

As can be seen from Table 2, the most common agent refers to Allah or the angels who carry out Allah's orders. Some illustrative examples are given in (3).

(3) Allah as the agent

Wallatheena yu/minoona bima **onzila** ilayka. Chapter 2:4 Yawma **yunfakhu** fee assoorifata/ toona afwaja. Chapter 78:18	And who believes in what **has been revealed** to you The Day the Horn **is blown** and you will come forth in multitudes

The passive here is usually used to describe the events of the Last Day, unseen events, and Allah's orders because the focus is on the action, and there is no disagreement on the actor, which suggests that the performer of these actions is beyond any doubt. For example, the passive form of the verb *yanfux* 'blow' is used when referring to events on Dooms Day, as in the last example in (3), while its active form is used when referring to seen/known events happening on earth.

The second most common agent refers to indefinite agents or people in general (13.8%). Indefinite agents (in 66 cases) refer to Allah, angels, prophets, people themselves, other people, or any other force, as shown in (4).

(4) Indefinite agents

wala hum **yunsaroon**. Chapter 2:48 wala **yuraddu** ba/suhuAAani alqawmi almujrimeen. Chapter 6:147	nor will they **be aided**. but His punishment cannot **be repelled** from the people who are criminals.'

In the first example, using the passive verb *yunsaroon*, which appears 13 times in the Quran, suggests that these people cannot have any refuge from any source that comes to people's minds. Similarly, in the second example, the use of the passive verb *yuraddu* increases the number of agents making it indefinite as it could be anyone or force that comes to one's mind.

The agent in 86 cases can refer to people in general, as in (5).

(5) People in general as agents

wala ya/ba ashshuhadao itha **maduAAoo**. Chapter 2:282 Fakuloo mimma **thukira** ismuAllahi AAalayhi. Chapter 6:118	And let not the witnesses refuse when they **are called** upon. So eat of that [meat] upon which the name of Allah **has been mentioned**

In 5% of the cases, the agent is the person himself/herself, which is similar to the use of reflexive verbs where the subject and the object are the same, or the agent is the person himself/herself and Satan, especially with the verb *zuyyina* 'was made attractive', which appears in 10 cases. Some illustrative examples are given in (6).

(6) Self-involvement in the action

waohdirati al-anfusu ashshuhha. Chapter 4:128 **Waolqiya** assaharatu sajideen. Chapter 7:120 la ilaha illa huwa faanna **tu/ fakoon**. Chapter 35:3	And present in [human] souls is stinginess And the magicians fell down in prostration [to Allah]. There is no deity except Him, so how are you deluded?

The agent relates to prophets in 4.7% of the cases, as in (7).

(7) Prophets as agents

Wa-itha **yutla** AAalayhim Chapter 28:53 ma **onthira** abaohum fahum ghafiloon. Chapter 36:6	And when it **is recited** to them whose forefathers **were not warned**, so they are unaware.

Here the action is mainly performed by Allah's prophets, although it can be shared by others. The least common agents relate to unbelievers (2%) and believers (1.4%). Consider the examples in (8) and (9).

(8) The agent is the unbelievers

fallatheena hajaroo wa **okhrijoo** min Chapter 3:195 yuqatiloona fee sabeeli Allahifayaqtuloona **wayuqtaloona**. Chapter 9:111	So those who emigrated or **were evicted** from their homes They fight for the cause of Allah, so they kill and **are killed**.

(9) The agent is the believers

MalAAooneena ayna ma **thuqifoo okhithoo waquttiloo** taqteela. Chapter 33:61 **Sayuhzamu** aljamAAu. Chapter 54:45	Accursed wherever they **are found**, [being] **seized** and **massacred** completely. [Their] assembly will **be defeated**.

Finally, miscellaneous agents account for 3.2%. They include Pharaohs, Prophet Solomon, Prophet Mohammed, Noah's nation, Jonah's whale, cave dwellers, the earth, family, mother, Persians, Prophet Lut, and Zulaikha (Potiphar's wife). Some examples are given in (10).

(10) Miscellaneous agents

Falamma raa qameesahu **qudda** min duburin, Chapter 12:28 Qalat ya ayyuha almalaoinnee **olqiya** ilayya kitabun kareem. Chapter 27:29 Waathinat lirabbiha **wahuqqat**. Chapter 84:2 **Ghulibati** arroom. Chapter 30:2	So when her husband saw his shirt **torn** from the back, She said, 'O eminent ones, indeed, to me **has been delivered** a noble letter. And has responded to its Lord and **was obligated** [to do so] The Byzantines **have been defeated**

Having established the agents in passive constructions, we explore the pragmatic functions of the passive voice in the Quran in the next section.

Pragmatic functions of the passive. Three main pragmatic functions account for most uses of the passive in the Quran. The most important function is brevity/conciseness (cf. Sweet, 1930; Nofal, 2013), where the agent is known and unambiguous, which agrees with the use of the passive in world languages when the agent is explicit or anonymous (Close, 1962, Corray, 1967, Murphy, 1985; Quirk et al., 1985). Using the passive here can contribute to giving the action or the object more focus. It can be argued that 668 cases (60% of the cases) relate to conciseness. All the cases but two refer to Allah or the angels who perform Allah's

orders. This use emphasizes divine agency and control, where passive constructions are often employed in verses dealing with matters of destiny, predestination, and divine decree with verbs such as 'send down', 'prescribe', 'bestow', 'order', 'reveal', 'forgive' and 'promise'. Some examples are given in (11).

(11) Use of passive for conciseness

Wallatheena yu/minoona bima **onzila** ilayka. Chapter 2:4	And who believe in what **has been revealed** to you
in attabiAAu illa ma **yooha** ilayya. Chapter 6:50	I only follow what **is revealed** to me.
Yawma **yunfakhu** fee assoori. Chapter 6:73	the Day the Horn **is blown**

Deleting the agent in these cases renders the sentence more concise with no compromise of the intended meaning as the agent is well-known. For instance, the use of the passive verb *onzila* in the first example is less verbose than its active counterpart, which could be 'anzala Allah'. Using the passive here is more concise and helps make the action foregrounded without any compromise of meaning. This aligns with world literature, where the passive is usually used when the agent is obvious (Murphy, 1985; Quirk et al., 1985). The only cases where the agent is not Allah relate to the verb 'was born,' which appeared three times, as in (12).

(12) The verb 'was born'

Wasalamun AAalayhi yawma **wulida** Chapter 19:15	And peace be upon him the day he **was born**
Wassalamu AAalayya yawma **wulidtu**, Chapter 19:33	And peace is on me the day I **was born**
Lam yalid walam **yoolad**. Chapter 112:3	He neither begets nor **is born**

Again, here the agent is self-evident, and deleting it will not affect meaning; rather, it will render the sentence more concise and focused. The use of the passive verbs here shows that the Quran avoids redundancy when possible. This runs against some orientalists' claims (e.g., Bell, 1958; Hasan & Uddin, 2020) that the Quran suffers from repetition and redundancy.

The second most common pragmatic function of the passive is to emphasize the action, the object, or both. This appeared in 293 cases (26.4%). Consider the following examples in (13).

(13) Use of the passive to focus on the action/object

Ghulibati arroom. Chapter 30:2	The Byzantines **have been defeated**
Lilfuqara-i almuhajireena allatheen **aokhrijoo** min diyarihim. Chapter 59:8	For the poor emigrants who **were expelled** from their homes
Itha ashshamsu **kuwwirat**. Chapter 81:1	When the sun **is wrapped up** [in darkness]

In these examples, we can see that the passive achieves a pragmatic function of agent defocusing, where the agent is obvious or general (Shibatani, 1985; Myhill, 1997) to 'topicalize'/foreground the action or the patient/receiver/experiencer (Keenan & Dryer, 2007). Using the active reduces focus on the action as it will add unnecessary cognitive load on the listener. By not explicitly naming the agent, the Quran directs the reader's attention to the action itself and the consequences thereof. This encourages contemplation and introspection, a hallmark of Quranic discourse.

The third most common pragmatic function of using the passive is agent expansion, which appeared in 104 cases (9.4%). This use increases the number of possible agents and, therefore, enriches meaning and interpretation. It is used mainly with indefinite agents (34 cases) and when the agent involves the person himself/herself (52 cases), besides other possible agents such as Allah, other people, or Satan. Some examples are presented in (14) below.

(14) Using the passive for meaning expansion

Wattakhathoo min dooni Allahialihatan laAAallahum **yunsaroon**. Chapter 36:74	But they have taken besides Allah [false] deities that perhaps they would **be helped**.
wa **qeela** alhamdu lillahi rabbi alAAalameen. Chapter 39:75	and it **will be said**, '[All] praise to Allah, Lord of the worlds.'
Zuyyina linnasi hubbuashshahawati, Chapter 4:14	**Beautified** for people is the love of that which they desire
Faolqiya assaharatu sujjadan. Chapter 20:70	So the magicians **were made to fall down** in prostration.

Using passive with indefinite agents expands the number of referents and invites reflection. It is a sort of meaning expansion as it opens the door to involving more agents. Deleting the agent makes the listener/reader think of more actors rather than restricting the actor to one entity. For example, the use of the passive verb *yunsaroon* in the first example in (14) expands the meaning by invoking any agent one might think of, e.g., people themselves, other people, Satan and jinn, angels, or any other creatures or forces. Similarly, the use of the passive verb *qeela* in the second example in (14) expands referents by invoking more agents. Who said this? The angels, prophets, people, or any living thing. Likewise, the use of the passive in the third example in (14) expands the number of agents by involving the person himself/herself besides other actors such as Satan or other people. Similarly, the use of the passive verb *faolqiya* in the last example in (14) shows that the action is done with an internal force that pushes the subject to perform the action, besides an external force. In sum, using the passive here increases the number of agents, making it anyone/anything that comes to people's minds, expanding the intended meaning. Had the active been used, it would have restricted meaning by identifying one agent.

Another common function of the passive is rhythmical, which accounts for 187 cases; in 181 cases, the passive is used to retain the same verse-final rhyme beside another function. Note that the clausulae or cadenced phrases that close verses in the Quran do not always constitute perfect rhymes; some are imperfect/slant rhymes. In 118 cases, the passive is used for brevity/conciseness and rhyme as the example in (15) below shows. Rhyming words are underlined.

(15) Use of the passive for conciseness and rhyme

Walillahi yasjudu ma fee assamawatiwama fee al-ardi min dabbatin walmala-ikatuwahum la **yastakbiroon**-Yakhafoona rabbahum min fawqihimwayafAAaloona ma **yu/maroon**-Waqala Allahu latattakhithoo ilahayni ithnayni innama huwailahun wahidun fa-iyyaya **farhaboon**. Chapter 16: 49-51	And to Allah prostrates whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth of creatures, and the angels [as well], and they **are not arrogant**.—They fear their Lord above them, and they do what they **are commanded**.—And Allah has said, 'Do not take for yourselves two deities. He is but one God, so **fear** only Me.'

In the example above, we can see how the use of the passive verb *yu/maroon* maintains the rhyme in the other verses. Using the active voice would distort the rhyme for unwarranted reasons as the agent in these cases is unambiguous and deleting it avoids verbosity. In 34 cases, it is used to focus on the action/object and rhyme, as in (16). Here, the passive verb *tumna* contributes to the verse-end rhyme as well as adding focus to the action, as the agent is redundant and deleting it will not affect the intended meaning. In fact, mentioning the agent 'man' will distract the listener and reduce focus unnecessarily.

(16) The use of the passive for focus on action/object and rhyme

Waannahu khalaqa azzawjayni aththakara **wal-ontha**—Min nutfatin itha **tumna**—Waanna AAalayhi annash-ata **al-okhra**. Chapter 53: 45-47	And that He creates the two mates—the male and **female**— From a sperm-drop when it **is emitted**—And that [incumbent] upon Him is the **next creation**

Passive voice is used for meaning expansion and rhyme in 15 cases, as in (17). Consider how the passive verb *yunsaroon* in (17) invokes multiple agents emphasizing the meaning that they will not be helped, besides maintaining perfect rhyme with the other verses. Using the active verb with an agent would restrict meaning and distort rhyme, leading to unnecessary loss of meaning.

(17) The use of the passive for meaning expansion and rhyme

Walahum feeha manafiAAu wamasharibuafala **yashkuroon** —attakhathoo min dooni Allahialihatan laAAallahum **yunsaroon**—La yastateeAAoona nasrahumwahum lahum jundun **muhdaroon**. Chapter 36:73-75	And for them therein are [other] benefits and drinks, so will they not **be grateful**?—But they have taken besides Allah [false] deities that perhaps they would **be helped**.—They are not able to help them, and they [themselves] are for them soldiers in **attendance**.

In another 15 cases, the passive is used for self-involvement and rhyme, as in (18).

(18) The use of the passive for self-involvement and rhyme

Itha assamao **inshaqqat**— Waathinat lirabbiha **wahuqqat** —Wa-itha al-ardu **muddat**. Chapter 84: 1–3	When the sky **has split** [open] —And has responded to its Lord and **was obligated** [to do so]—And when the earth has **been extended**

In 6 cases only, it is mainly used for rhythmical functions as in (19). Consider how the use of the passive verb *wazdujir* in (19) achieves rhyme with the other verses. Using the active verb would result in the verb *wazdajaruuh* 'and they repelled him'. This would lead to rhyme loss unnecessarily as the meaning is clear and the agent is already mentioned in the same verse. Note that it can also be argued that the use of the passive here serves other functions, which confirms that the use of the passive in the Quran has multiple simultaneous pragmatic functions.

(19) The use of the passive for rhyme

MuhtiAAeena ila addaAAiyaqoolu alkafiroona hatha yawmun **AAasir**- Kaththabat qablahum qawmu	Racing ahead toward the Caller. The disbelievers will say, 'This is a **difficult Day**.'—The people of Noah denied before them, and
noohinfakaththaboo AAabdana waqaloo majnoonun **wazdujir**— FadaAAa rabbahu annee maghloobun **fantasir**. Chapter 54: 8–10	they denied Our servant and said, 'A madman,' and he **was repelled**.—So he invoked his Lord, "Indeed, I am overpowered, **so help**.'

All the examples above show that musicality plays a paramount role in the Quranic text. This is in line with Stewart's (2009) observation that the Quranic text sometimes resorts to phonological and morphological changes that deviate from ordinary usage to facilitate verse-final rhymes. Other less common functions of the passive relate to denial and doubt on the part of the speaker and grammatical context. The former function appeared in 18 cases where the unbelievers express doubt about what comes from Allah as in (20), while the latter function appeared in 12 cases to maintain the same grammatical structure to retain the same subject, as in (21).

(20) Passive for denial/doubt

Laqad **wuAAidna** hatha Chapter 27: 68	We **have been promised** this,
Aolqiya aththikru AAalayhimin baynina Chapter 54: 25	Has the message **been sent** down upon him from among us?

(21) Passive for grammatical structure

yuqatiloona fee sabeeli Allahifayaqtuloona wa **yuqtaloona**. Chapter 9:111 waminkum man **yuraddu** ila arthalialAAumuri. Chapter 16:70	They fight in the cause of Allah, so they kill and **are killed**. And among you is he who **is reversed** to the most decrepit [old] age

Consider how the use of the passive verb *yuqtaloona* in the first example in (21) maintains the same grammatical subject. Using the active verb with its subject (people/unbelievers) would result in subject shift and consequently loss of focus. This use has been reported in other languages, such as English, where the passive is used to maintain the same grammatical subject in clauses as in 'George Foreman beat Joe Frazier, but he was beaten by Muhammad Ali.' (Celce-Murcia et al., 1983). Here, George was the subject of the first clause, and he remains so in the other clause. Lastly, the passive is used to emphasize that the action is performed involuntarily by the agent in three cases (given in (22)) and in three fixed idiomatic expressions (shown in 23).

(22) Use of the passive for involuntary actions

WaAAala aththalathatiallatheena **khullifoo** Chapter 9:118	And [He also forgave] the three who **were left behind**
Walamma an jaat rusulunalootan **see-a** bihim Chapter 29: 33	And when Our messengers came to Lot, he **was distressed** for them
wala yadribnabi-arjulihinna **liyuAAlama** ma yukhfeena min zeenatihinna. Chapter 24: 31	And let them not stamp their feet to **make known** what they conceal of their adornment.

Here the use of the passive suggests that the agents do this against their desire as if it was done without their intention or by an external force. For example, the use of the passive verb

khullifoo in (22) suggests that they were driven by external forces to do that, although they did the action themselves. Using the active verb *takhallafoo* would increase their misery, but it seems Allah the Almighty chose the passive to lessen their sadness and give them excuses for their serious wrong deed.

(23) Use of the passive in fixed expressions

Walamma **suqita** fee aydeehim, Chapter 7:149	And when **regret** overcame them
wathannoo annahum **oheeta** bihim. Chapter 10:22	and they assume that they **are surrounded**
Yawma **yukshafu** AAan saqin, Chapter 68:42	The Day the shin **will be uncovered,**

The passive verbs in the three examples in (23) represent idiomatic Arabic expressions that were in common use at the time of revelation.

Before closing this section, we elaborate on the use of the passive voice in negative contexts. Previous studies (cf. section 'Passive voice in Arabic') claimed that the passive voice is used when ascribing bad deeds to Allah, in negative contexts, and when referring to the unbelievers, as in (24)

(24) Use of the passive in negative contexts

Faamma thamoodu **faohlikoo** bittaghiya. Chapter 69:5	So as for Thamud, they **were destroyed** by the overpowering [blast].
Mimma khatee-atihimoghriqoo **faodkhiloo** naran. Chapter 71:25	Because of their sins they **were drowned** and put into the Fire

Although it can be argued that the use of the passive in such cases (*N* = 11) could relate to reverence to Allah where there is a tendency not to ascribe bad actions to Allah or his angels/ prophets (cf. Al-Shawa, 2007; Gharaibeh, 2018), this claim needs to be revisited here. On closer inspection, we found that this claim is unwarranted for many reasons. First, we found that the active voice rather than the passive is used in similar cases as when talking about destruction, even when the actor is the Almighty Allah, as in (25). Second, the passive voice is used when referring to both believers and unbelievers (although it can be more common when referring to unbelievers). Some examples of the use of the passive referring to believers are given in (26).

(25) Bad deeds in the active voice

Watilka alqura ahlaknahum lammathalamoo. Chapter 18:59	And those cities—We destroyed them when they wronged,
Alam yaraw kam ahlakna qablahum minaalqurooni. Chapter 36:31	Have they not considered how many generations We destroyed before them
Inna arsalna AAalayhim reehansarsaran. Chapter 54:19	Indeed, We sent upon them a screaming wind

(26) Passive voice to refer to believers

Faamma man **ootiya** kitabahubiyameenihi fayaqoolu haomu iqraoo kitabiyah. Chapter 69:19	So as for he who **is given** his record in his right hand, he will say, 'Here, read my record!

wanoodoo an tilkumualjannatu oorithtumooha. Chapter 7:43	And they will **be called**, 'This is Paradise, which you have been made to inherit
Falamma ataha **noodiya** yamoosa. Chapter 20:11	And when he came to it, he **was called**, 'O Moses,

To further explore this issue, we checked all instances of the passive and active forms of the verbs 'send down' and 'say' and found no conclusive evidence that the passive is used when the context is negative (including addressing the unbelievers or the hypocrites), and the active is used in positive contexts (including addressing the believers). For example, the verb 'send down' was used both when Allah was talking about the unbelievers and the believers, and more importantly, the active voice was used when talking about the unbelievers. Consider the examples below in (27) and (28). The same applies to the verb 'say', as exemplified in the examples below in (29) where the passive is used for positive contexts addressing believers and prophets.

(27) Passive voice is used to refer to believers and positive contexts

Wallatheena yu/minoona bima **onzila** ilayka. Chapter 2:4	And who believe in what **has been revealed** to you, [O Muhammad]
Shahru ramadana allathee **onzila** feehi alqur-anu. Chapter 2:185	The month of Ramadhan [is that] in which **was revealed** the Qur'an
Amana arrasoolu bima **onzila** ilayhi min rabbihi. Chapter 2:285	The Messenger has believed in what **was revealed** to him from his Lord

(28) Active voice is used to refer to unbelievers and negative contexts

faanzalna AAalaallatheena thalamoo rijzan mina assama, Chapter 2:59	So **We sent** down upon those who wronged a punishment from the sky
anyakfuroo bima **anzala** Allahu. Chapter 2:90	that they would disbelieve in what Allah **has revealed**
saonzilu mithla ma **anzala** Allahu. Chapter 6:93	I will reveal [something] like what Allah **revealed**.

(29) Passive voice is used to refer to believers and prophets

Qeela ya noohu ihbitbisalamin Chapter 11:48	It **was said**, 'O Noah, disembark in security
Qeela odkhuli aljannata. Chapter 36:26	It **was said**, 'Enter Paradise.'
waqudiya baynahum bilhaqqi **waqeela** alhamdu lillahi rabbi alAAalameen. Chapter 39:75	And it **will be judged** between them in truth, and it **will be said**, '[All] praise to Allah, Lord of the worlds.'

The examples above indicate that the passive cannot be categorically associated with negative contexts, nor the active voice exclusively with positive contexts. Instead, the passive appears to be employed for other rhetorical purposes, such as foregrounding the patient/experiencer or emphasizing the action, as demonstrated in Chapter 69:5: *Faamma thamoodu faohlikoo bittaghiya*—'So as for Thamud, they were destroyed by the overpowering [blast].' Here, the passive construction shifts focus onto the action and the affected entity, which occupies the theme position. However, the claim that the passive is used exclusively in

negative contexts holds true only in specific cases, such as when other beings refer to Allah. For example, in *Surat Al-Jinn*, the jinn discuss humankind, employing the passive to avoid ascribing negative actions directly to Allah: *Waanna la nadree asharrun oreeda biman fee al-ardi am arada bihim rabbuhumrashada* —'And we do not know [therefore] whether evil is intended for those on earth or whether their Lord intends for them a right course.'

Conclusion

This study has examined the occurrences of the passive in the Quran, analyzing its frequency, distribution, and pragmatic functions. The findings offer valuable insights into the linguistic sophistication of the Quran, demonstrating that its use of the passive extends beyond mere grammatical structure to serve communicative and stylistic purposes. The study has revealed that passive verbs constitute approximately 5.7% of the total verbs in the Quran, indicating that passivization is applied selectively. A key characteristic of the Quranic passive is its overwhelming tendency to be agent-less: 97.7% of Quranic passive verbs lack an explicitly stated agent. This strategy aligns with cross-linguistic tendencies favoring agent-less passives, which emphasize the action or resulting state rather than the performer. Such a construction enhances the universality and timeless relevance of the message, shifting focus from the agents to the consequences of their actions, thereby reinforcing the Quran's authoritative and divine nature.

The passive serves multiple rhetorical and communicative functions, the most prominent of which include brevity and conciseness (60% of cases), emphasis on the action or object (26.4%), and agent expansion (9.4%). By omitting the agent, the Quran achieves a concise narrative while simultaneously embedding profound theological and moral content without sacrificing clarity. Additionally, this strategy elevates divine will and action, positioning them at the center of discourse. The use of the passive to emphasize the action or object is particularly significant in verses concerning laws, judgments, and divine acts, where the outcome or decree is more consequential than the entity performing it. This structural choice underscores the impartiality and inevitability of divine actions and judgments, reinforcing the theological core of the Quranic message. Furthermore, agent expansion enhances interpretative potential, allowing for broader applicability of the verses across different contexts and periods. This deliberate textual strategy encourages readers to engage deeply, considering multiple layers of meaning.

These findings carry important implications for both linguistic and theological research. From a linguistic perspective, they contribute to our understanding of how language structure and function adapt to the communicative needs of speakers (cf. Abu Guba & Abu Qub'a, 2020). Theologically, the findings highlight how the Quran employs language to shape perceptions of divine actions and ethical principles, fostering reflective and introspective engagement with the text.

One limitation of this study is that it did not comprehensively compare the use of active and passive constructions across all verbs in the Quran, analyzing only two specific cases. Future research should extend this analysis to all verbs occurring in both voices, providing a more systematic examination of their functions. Additionally, further studies should explore the implications of these findings for Quranic translation and interpretation. Since different languages possess distinct syntactic structures and stylistic conventions, translators must carefully navigate these linguistic differences to preserve the Quran's rhetorical precision. Comparative analyses with other sacred texts could also enhance our understanding of shared and unique uses of the passive voice in religious discourse, shedding light on its rhetorical and communicative functions across traditions.

In conclusion, this study not only highlights the sophisticated use of the passive in the Quran but also invites scholars and readers to explore the broader implications of these linguistic choices. By doing so, it provides deeper insights into the interplay between language and meaning in the Quran, enriching our appreciation of its rhetorical and theological dimensions.

Data availability
Data is available on request.

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Additional information
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