

Al-Ghazali's Sufism and Ethical Spiritual Leadership in Contemporary Islamic Politics

Tasawuf Al-Ghazali dan Kepemimpinan Etis-Spiritual dalam Politik Islam Kontemporer

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Abstract: *The crisis of integrity, political corruption, and moral disorientation in contemporary leadership has generated an urgent need for a leadership paradigm that integrates institutional effectiveness with ethical character formation and spiritual consciousness. This study aims to reconstruct Al-Ghazali's Sufi teachings in Ihya' 'Ulūm al-Dīn as a conceptual foundation for developing an Ethical–Spiritual Leadership model within the context of contemporary Islamic politics. Employing a qualitative library-based approach, the study utilizes philosophical-hermeneutic inquiry, conceptual textual analysis, and comparative analysis of Al-Ghazali's works alongside contemporary leadership theories. The findings reveal that central Ghazalian concepts such as ikhlās (sincerity), 'adl (justice), zuhd (self-restraint), and amānah (trustworthiness) constitute an integrated leadership framework that combines moral, spiritual, and political dimensions. Unlike contemporary leadership paradigms that primarily emphasize organizational effectiveness and social relations, Al-Ghazali's model places transcendental accountability and self-purification at the core of public decision-making. This study proposes an Ethical–Spiritual Leadership Framework as a synthesis between Ghazalian spirituality and contemporary leadership discourse, demonstrating its relevance to the development of Islamic political ethics amid the challenges of globalization, leadership crises, and moral decline. The study contributes to the advancement of Islamic political ethics and leadership studies by offering a leadership perspective that integrates public governance, character formation, and spiritual responsibility within a coherent conceptual framework.*

Keywords: Al-Ghazali; Sufism; Islamic political ethics; ethical–spiritual leadership; Ethical–Spiritual Leadership Framework.



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Abstrak: Krisis integritas, korupsi politik, dan disorientasi moral dalam kepemimpinan kontemporer telah mendorong kebutuhan akan paradigma kepemimpinan yang tidak hanya berorientasi pada efektivitas kelembagaan, tetapi juga pada pembentukan karakter dan kesadaran spiritual. Penelitian ini bertujuan merekonstruksi ajaran tasawuf Al-Ghazali dalam *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* sebagai landasan konseptual bagi pengembangan model Ethical–Spiritual Leadership dalam konteks politik Islam kontemporer. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan metode philosophical-hermeneutic approach, conceptual textual analysis, dan comparative analysis terhadap karya-karya Al-Ghazali serta teori kepemimpinan modern. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konsep-konsep sentral dalam tasawuf Al-Ghazali, seperti ikhlās (sincerity), 'adl (justice), zuhd (self-restraint), dan amānah (trustworthiness), membentuk suatu kerangka kepemimpinan yang mengintegrasikan dimensi moral, spiritual, dan politik secara holistik. Berbeda dengan paradigma kepemimpinan modern yang umumnya berorientasi pada efektivitas organisasi dan relasi sosial, model kepemimpinan Al-Ghazali menempatkan akuntabilitas transendental dan penyucian diri sebagai fondasi utama pengambilan keputusan publik. Penelitian ini mengusulkan Ethical–Spiritual Leadership Framework sebagai sintesis antara spiritualitas Ghazalian dan wacana kepemimpinan kontemporer, sekaligus menunjukkan relevansinya bagi pengembangan etika politik Islam di tengah tantangan globalisasi, krisis kepemimpinan, dan degradasi moral. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan teori etika politik Islam dengan menawarkan perspektif kepemimpinan yang menghubungkan tata kelola publik, pembentukan karakter, dan tanggung jawab spiritual dalam satu kerangka konseptual yang terintegrasi.

Kata Kunci: Al-Ghazali; tasawuf; etika politik Islam; kepemimpinan etis-spiritual; Ethical–Spiritual Leadership Framework.

Introduction

Leadership in Islam is not only concerned with power or administration, but also involves a deep spiritual dimension, which plays a crucial role in shaping a leader's character and ethics. Leaders in Islam are responsible not only to their communities but also to God, always upholding moral and religious values. One important teaching that can shape this kind of leadership is spirituality, which is the subject of discussion in Al-Ghazali's work *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*.¹ The concept of asceticism in Al-Ghazali's teachings emphasizes the importance of distancing oneself from excessive love of the world and prioritizing the interests of the afterlife. This concept, which can be called spirituality in leadership, teaches that a leader must possess a high spiritual awareness, enabling them to prioritize the values of justice, truth, and the welfare of the people.

The concept of spirituality in leadership has become highly relevant in the context of modern Islam. In recent decades, numerous studies have discussed the importance of moral and spiritual integrity for a leader. One relevant study by

Haqiqi Rafsanjani² shows that spirituality in leadership is not only crucial for character development but also for creating a just and clean system of government. Rafsanjani³ states that leaders with spiritual awareness will focus more on the public interest, rather than personal interests, which in turn will increase public trust in the government.⁴ Thus, the application of spiritual values in leadership can foster a more ethical political system that aligns with Islamic principles.

Taufikurrahman⁵ also added that the internalization of Sufism values developed by Al-Ghazali, especially in the context of spirituality, is highly relevant in developing the character of leaders in Islamic boarding schools. Taufikurrahman revealed that the concept of spirituality in Al-Ghazali's Sufism can be applied in leadership education in Islamic boarding schools, which creates leaders who are not only skilled in technical matters but also possess high moral and spiritual resilience. He also pointed out that this spirituality-based education helps create wise leaders who are better able to face political and social challenges.⁶

On the other hand, the application of political ethics in Islam, particularly those related to the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad, is also discussed in research by Ernawati et al.⁷ Their research shows that the principles of political ethics implemented by the Prophet Muhammad are highly relevant in contemporary Islamic politics. According to them, the application of political ethics based on Islamic spirituality and morality can help create a more just and clean political system. Thus, it is important to delve deeper into how the spiritual teachings of *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* can be applied in the context of contemporary Islamic political leadership.⁸

The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to connect Al-Ghazali's spiritual teachings with aspects of political leadership in Islam, as well as its relevance in building a more ethical political system based on Islamic morality. Most existing studies tend to focus more on spirituality in personal life and education, while this research attempts to apply it in the context of political leadership. Thus, this research aims to provide a new perspective on how Al-Ghazali's teachings can contribute to creating leaders with integrity and a just system of government. This research focuses on how the concept of spirituality is understood in Al-Ghazali's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*.⁹ How does Al-Ghazali describe spirituality in the context of a Muslim's life and how does this understanding relate to self-development and a relationship with God? It also answers the question of how the concept of spirituality is relevant to leadership in Islam. What spiritual values should a leader in Islam possess according to Al-Ghazali's thinking, and how can these values be applied in the context of ideal leadership?

Previous studies have examined Al-Ghazali's moral philosophy, educational ethics, and political thought. However, limited attention has been given to the

integration of Ghazalian spirituality and contemporary leadership theory into a coherent ethical–spiritual leadership framework. Marhani (2019) highlights the significance of Al-Ghazali’s moral teachings in shaping individual character and social harmony, emphasizing morality as the foundation of a prosperous society. Similarly, Arimbawa (2023) explores Al-Ghazali’s ethical thought in *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, particularly the relationship between worldly and spiritual happiness, and demonstrates its relevance to social, economic, and political life. Meanwhile, Iqbal (2010) examines the applicability of Al-Ghazali’s political ethics in contemporary governance, focusing on justice, honesty, and responsibility as essential principles of public leadership.

Collectively, these studies confirm the continuing relevance of Al-Ghazali’s thought for contemporary ethical and political discourse. Nevertheless, they generally approach morality, spirituality, ethics, and leadership as separate areas of inquiry. Existing scholarship has not sufficiently examined how Al-Ghazali’s Sufi concepts—such as *ikhhlās* (sincerity), *‘adl* (justice), *zuhd* (self-restraint), and *amānah* (trustworthiness)—can be systematically reconstructed into a comprehensive leadership paradigm. Furthermore, limited attention has been paid to the epistemological relationship between spiritual self-transformation and public leadership in contemporary Islamic politics. This study seeks to address that gap by developing an Ethical–Spiritual Leadership Framework that synthesizes Ghazalian spirituality, Islamic political ethics, and contemporary leadership discourse, thereby offering a conceptual model for ethical governance and morally grounded political leadership in the modern era.

In this study, the concept of spirituality and leadership in Islam is analyzed based on Al-Ghazali’s thoughts in *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*.¹⁰ This thought is contextualized with various modern studies related to Sufism, leadership, and Islamic political ethics. Spirituality in Islam is not only related to the vertical relationship between humans and God, but also has direct implications for the social, political, and moral dimensions of leadership. Al-Ghazali places spirituality as the foundation of leadership ethics that are oriented towards self-purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) and devotion to God as the ultimate goal of every human action.

Al-Ghazali’s view is closely related to several modern leadership theories, such as servant leadership and transformational leadership, although with fundamental paradigm differences. Servant leadership, as proposed by Robert Greenleaf,¹¹ positions the leader as a servant who prioritizes the welfare of others. Meanwhile, transformational leadership, introduced by James MacGregor Burns¹² and further developed by Bass & Riggio,¹³ emphasizes the leader’s ability to inspire, motivate, and transform his followers toward positive change. Both share similarities with Al-Ghazali’s teachings regarding service (*khidmah*), sincerity, and moral responsibility.

However, Al-Ghazali expanded this framework by adding a spiritual-transcendental dimension, where leadership is not only oriented towards worldly achievements, but also directed toward the ultimate goal of closeness to God and true happiness (*sa'adah*).

The fundamental difference between Al-Ghazali and modern leadership theories lies in the source of their legitimacy and moral orientation. In servant leadership, service to others is the pinnacle of leadership ideals, while in Al-Ghazali's thinking, such service is merely a path to devotion to God. Spirituality lies at the heart of all leadership practices, making a leader not only socially but also spiritually responsible. Similarly, while transformational leadership emphasizes the inspirational power and charisma of the leader, in Al-Ghazali's perspective, true charisma arises from inner purity, submission to divine values, and self-control over desires. True leadership power does not derive from personal influence or rhetorical skill, but from sincerity of soul and spiritual depth that guide moral action.

In contemporary leadership discourse, a debate has emerged regarding the relevance of spirituality in the context of modern politics, which tends to be pragmatic and secular. Some modern views, such as those put forward by Rahman (2019)¹⁴ and Rafsanjani (2017),¹⁵ view Islamic spirituality solely as a moral ethical framework without considering the metaphysical dimensions that are at the heart of Al-Ghazali's thought. This view tends to reduce spirituality to a neutral set of ethical values, without linking it to a transcendental responsibility to God. This is where this research identifies a crucial research gap: the need to reinterpret Al-Ghazali's concept of spirituality to make it relevant to the context of contemporary political leadership without losing its theological substance.

The contribution of this research lies in its attempt to bridge classical thought and modern leadership theory by positioning Al-Ghazali's spirituality as an ethical-spiritual framework for Islamic leadership. While modern leadership theory focuses on effectiveness and interpersonal relationships, Al-Ghazali's framework offers a more comprehensive paradigm: leadership as a form of divine trust encompassing moral, social, and spiritual dimensions. This approach not only returns leadership to its Islamic moral roots but also offers an alternative solution to the current crisis of moral leadership in the Muslim world.

Thus, spirituality, in Al-Ghazali's view, has strong relevance to the formation of Islamic political ethics. Values such as *ikhlas*, *zuhd*, and *'adl* can serve as a foundation for leaders to uphold justice and distance themselves from corrupt and authoritarian practices. Leadership grounded in true spirituality emphasizes not only efficiency and performance but also morals and awareness. By integrating Al-Ghazali's classical thought and reflections on modern leadership theory, this study demonstrates that

Islamic spirituality can serve as an ethical foundation for political governance that is just, humanistic, and oriented towards the welfare of the people.

The spirituality taught by Al-Ghazali

This study conceptualizes the Ghazalian-based Ethical-Spiritual Leadership Framework as an organic triadic model that circularly integrates ontological, methodological, and teleological dimensions. The foundation of this framework rests upon a *qalb-centered* ontology, wherein the leader's spiritual state serves as the primary determinant of leadership efficacy. The inter-conceptual dynamics within this framework operate cohesively: existential awareness at the ontological level necessitates *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) as an internal transformative methodology to eradicate the pathologies of power, such as *ḥubb al-jāh* (the love of status). This inner transformation does not terminate in passive individual piety; rather, it causally manifests into a robust ethical character (*akhlāq*) that drives a transformative political praxis oriented toward the establishment of justice (*ʿadl*) and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*). Through this intricate interconnectedness, external state governance (*al-siyāsah al-khārijīyyah*) is explicitly positioned as a direct projection of the leader's successful internal self-governance (*al-siyāsah al-dākhiliyyah*).

At the epistemological level, the introduction of this Ghazalian framework constructs a novel paradigm that both challenges and complements the boundaries of contemporary secular leadership theories. Its primary epistemological implication lies in the expansion of the sources of knowledge, seamlessly integrating the authority of revelation (*waḥy*), rational intellect (*ʿaql*), and spiritual intuition (*kashf*) derived from soul purification—thereby transcending the empirical-positivistic reductionism inherent in modern political science. Furthermore, this model subverts the instrumental dualism of power by shifting the locus of accountability from mere rational-legalistic compliance and formal performance indicators to transcendental accountability (*murāqabah*). The epistemic certainty of divine oversight redefines the leader's moral consciousness, wherein the ultimate boundary of political responsibility no longer relies on formal institutional visibility, but on an existential awareness before God. Consequently, this framework offers a resilient epistemic anchor to address the acute moral deficits and pragmatism in the contemporary Islamic political landscape.

The spirituality taught by Al-Ghazali through *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* presents a highly relevant moral dimension in responding to the contemporary leadership crisis in the Muslim world. Literature review shows that many modern leadership theories. Contemporary leadership theories have been criticized for insufficiently addressing transcendental dimensions of moral accountability. Such as servant leadership and transformational leadership, have attempted to emphasize moral values and

empathy, but have not fully addressed the spiritual-transcendental aspects that are at the core of Islamic teachings. This is where the importance of presenting a new paradigm that not only places leadership within a moral and psychological framework, but also within the context of faith and divine responsibility. Al-Ghazali's thinking emphasizes that true leadership is impossible to achieve without purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), because from this comes justice, honesty, and sincerity in carrying out the mandate of power.

From the analysis of classical and contemporary literature, it appears that Al-Ghazali's concept of spirituality holds great potential for reconstructing the paradigm of modern Islamic leadership. The moral crisis, pragmatic political practices, and the loss of value orientation in various government sectors indicate that modern leadership theory has not been able to address the spiritual challenges facing Muslim society. Therefore, Al-Ghazali's thought needs to be actualized as an alternative paradigm that combines ethics and spirituality in leadership. In this context, the idea of the Ethical–Spiritual Leadership Framework emerged, a conceptual framework that integrates moral values and spiritual awareness as the foundation of ideal Islamic leadership.

The study's findings demonstrate that Al-Ghazali not only wrote about personal morality but also developed a comprehensive system of thought about the role of humans in managing power. He positioned leaders as figures who must combine hikmah (rational wisdom), *'adl* (social justice), and *ikhlas* (purity of intention). In this view, leadership is not merely a political instrument, but rather a spiritual mandate that requires a balance between the worldly and the hereafter. These findings emphasize the need to develop a leadership model rooted in Sufi values, capable of shaping leaders with integrity, justice, and a focus on the welfare of the people.¹⁶

Al-Ghazali's thoughts on spirituality and leadership stem from the fundamental principles of Sufism, which place the heart (*qalb*) as the center of human moral and spiritual awareness. In *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, he explains that all human actions, including leadership and the management of power, will lose their meaning if not guided by purity of heart. Spirituality is not merely an individual inner experience, but rather an ethical foundation that determines the quality of one's social and political actions. Thus, for Al-Ghazali, true leadership can only emerge from a process of self-purification and profound control of desires. Leaders who fail to subdue their egos will easily fall into the trap of greed, abuse of authority, and lose the divine orientation of their leadership.

Al-Ghazali taught that a leader's success is not measured by the extent to which he can control territory or expand his power, but by the extent to which he is able to uphold justice and maintain trust. The value of justice (*'adl*) in Al-Ghazali's

perspective is not administrative, but spiritual. Justice, he believed, is the result of a balance between reason, desire, and the heart. A just leader is one who is able to put everything in its proper place enforcing the law with wisdom and upholding the truth without being clouded by worldly interests. Within this framework, the concept of justice is not only a social principle, but also a spiritual path to achieving closeness to God.¹⁷

Besides justice, sincerity (*ikhlas*) is also a key pillar of spiritual leadership according to Al-Ghazali. For Al-Ghazali, sincerity means purifying intentions from all motives other than pleasing God. In the context of leadership, this means that every policy and political decision must be based on the intention to uphold the welfare of the people, not for popularity, power, or personal gain. A sincere leader will view his position as a heavy responsibility, not as a means to gain prestige or social status. This attitude stands in stark contrast to the phenomenon of contemporary leadership, which is often trapped in political pragmatism and material orientation. From this perspective, Al-Ghazali actually offers a sharp moral critique of modern leadership patterns that have lost their spiritual orientation.

The concept of asceticism also occupies a crucial position in Al-Ghazali's construction of ethical leadership. Asceticism does not mean rejecting the world, but rather placing it in a proper place. For Al-Ghazali, an ascetic leader is not one who abandons worldly affairs, but rather one who is able to control ambition and not be enslaved by power. Asceticism guides leaders to be modest, shun luxury, and place the interests of the people above personal gain. Within the framework of Islamic leadership, this concept serves as a moral bulwark that prevents abuse of power and corruption.¹⁸ This ascetic spirit is one of the main foundations in building the Ethical-Spiritual Leadership Framework, as it lies the balance between worldly responsibilities and an orientation toward the hereafter.

The value of trustworthiness is also a crucial aspect emphasized by Al-Ghazali in *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. Trustworthiness does not merely mean administrative responsibility, but encompasses spiritual and moral dimensions. A trustworthy leader is one who recognizes that every decision they make will be accounted for before God. In this view, trustworthiness is not a burden of office, but rather a form of worship. Therefore, Al-Ghazali views power as a major test of one's morality. A leader who fails to uphold trustworthiness will lose his spiritual legitimacy, even if he retains political power. Thus, trustworthiness, in Al-Ghazali's view, is the core of the integrity of Islamic leadership, ensuring that every political action is always rooted in divine responsibility.

If sincerity, justice, asceticism, and trustworthiness are the four core values of Al-Ghazali's spiritual leadership, then they are interconnected in forming a holistic ethical system. Sincerity serves as the foundation of intention, justice as the direction

of action, asceticism as control over desires, and trustworthiness as the measure of responsibility. Through the integration of these values, Al-Ghazali constructs a leadership framework that is not only moral but also spiritual. This demonstrates that Islamic leadership, in his view, must begin with self-development before developing the community. A leader who cannot manage himself will not be able to manage society.

The transformation of Sufi values into the context of modern Islamic leadership is relevant because the contemporary world is experiencing a moral and spiritual deficit. Many Muslim leaders are caught in a dilemma between religious idealism and a political reality full of compromise. In this situation, Al-Ghazali's thought offers a middle ground by presenting a paradigm that combines spirituality and rationality. He does not reject politics, but emphasizes the need for purification of intentions and moral orientation before one enters the realm of power. Thus, Sufi values are not an escape from social reality, but rather a means to improve and ennoble political practice.

This thinking became the basis for the development of the Ethical–Spiritual Leadership Framework, in which every aspect of leadership must be rooted in the principles of sincerity, justice, asceticism, and trustworthiness. This framework emphasizes that the ethical dimension is inseparable from spirituality in the structure of Islamic leadership. Ethics without spirituality will be dry and formalistic, while spirituality without ethics risks falling into passive mysticism. By combining the two, Al-Ghazali presents a concept of leadership that balances the heart, reason, and action.

This framework also rejects the dualistic view of this world and the afterlife, which often separates political affairs from religious morality. For Al-Ghazali, the two must be combined to produce leaders who are both socially responsible and spiritually aware. In this context, the Ethical–Spiritual Leadership Framework is not only a conceptual result but also a practical proposition for modern Muslim societies. This paradigm offers an alternative to leadership models that are overly oriented toward technocratic effectiveness, by restoring the divine dimension to public leadership.

Integrating Spirituality and Ethics: Foundations of the Ethical–Spiritual Leadership Framework

The integration of spirituality and ethics within the framework of Islamic leadership, as conceived by Al-Ghazali, represents a profound synthesis of personal morality and social responsibility. In Al-Ghazali's view, spirituality is not an end in itself separate from social life, but rather the foundation that animates all human activity, including politics and leadership. In *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, Al-Ghazali asserts

that any form of true leadership must begin with ethical and spiritual awareness, for without this awareness, power can easily turn into a source of injustice.¹⁹ Spirituality serves as a moral guide, while ethics acts as a practical guideline in regulating human relationships.²⁰ When the two are united, leadership is formed that is not only administratively effective but also morally noble and transcendental.

Within Al-Ghazali's framework, spirituality and ethics are inseparable because they complement each other. Spirituality shapes a leader's inner orientation, while ethics guides their outward actions. A leader recognizes that but rather a trust that This awareness fosters responsibility commitment to justice. hand, provides a structure and public-benefit Thus, the relationship and ethics can be likened the body: spirituality meaning, while ethics



Figure 1. Ethical-Spiritual Leadership Framework

From this integration, what can be called the Ethical-Spiritual Leadership Framework was born, a leadership model that combines moral, spiritual, and social dimensions based on Al-Ghazali's Sufism principles. This framework is based on four main elements: *ikhlaṣ* (sincerity of intention), *ʿadl* (justice), *zuhd* (self-control towards the world), and *amanah* (responsibility). These four elements do not stand alone, but rather form a dynamic, mutually supportive whole. *Ikhlaṣ* serves as the basis for moral motivation, *ʿadl* guides policies and decisions, *zuhd* acts as a regulator of the desire for power, and *amanah* ensures that every action is carried out with a sense of responsibility to God and society. With this structure, Al-Ghazali's framework displays a balance between the inner and outer aspects, as well as between the orientation of the hereafter and worldly interests.²¹

The Ethical-Spiritual Leadership Framework in this diagram represents a holistic leadership model that integrates noble values and dynamic processes. The fundamental concept supporting this framework stems from four primary principles: sincerity (*Ikhlas*), justice (*Adil*), trustworthiness (*Amanah*), and detachment (*Zuhd*). Through an 'Integration Process' involving 'Dynamic Feedback Loops', 'Ethical Alignment', and 'Spiritual Awareness Synthesis', these four values melt into a mutually reinforcing system. The conceptual flow depicted by color-coded arrows

illustrates the synergy among these principles, ultimately leading to the attainment of significant leadership outcomes.

As a result of this framework's implementation, the diagram shows three measurable leadership outcomes. First, an increase in team cohesion and morale based on mutual trust and respect. Second, better performance, where team goals and motivation are aligned with leadership values. Third, sustained organizational success, characterized by long-term resilience and strong public trust. Therefore, the ESLF offers a leadership approach that not only focuses on short-term results but also on human well-being and organizational sustainability as a whole, making it a valuable human systems model in various contexts.

When compared to modern leadership theories, these frameworks share both fundamental similarities and differences. The servant leadership theory proposed by Robert Greenleaf positions leaders as servants who prioritize the needs of others and emphasizes the values of empathy, caring, and humility. Meanwhile, transformational leadership Bass & Riggio,²² focuses on the leader's ability to inspire, motivate, and transform the behavior of followers for the better through moral and intellectual vision. Both share similarities with Al-Ghazali's thinking, particularly regarding service (*khidmah*), sincerity, and moral character formation.²³ However, the fundamental difference lies in the transcendental dimension Al-Ghazali added: leadership is not merely a means to achieve social goals, but also an act of worship that leads to closeness to God.

In this context, Al-Ghazali's framework broadens the scope of modern leadership by adding divine awareness as the core of moral responsibility. Leaders who focus solely on worldly effectiveness tend to be pragmatic, while leaders with spiritual awareness balance policies with moral values and eternal accountability. Therefore, the Ethical–Spiritual Leadership Framework is not simply an adaptation of modern leadership theory, but an alternative model that rejects the secularization of values in the political and managerial realms. In this model, power is viewed as a spiritual test that demands sincerity of intention, moral integrity, and eschatological awareness.²⁴

The integration of spirituality and ethics is also reflected in Al-Ghazali's understanding of the relationship between leaders and their people. In *Ihya'*, he asserts that true leaders are those who love their people and strive to uphold justice selflessly. This love is not merely emotional, but a reflection of God's compassion (*rahmah*).²⁵ Al-Ghazali argued that a leader must have compassion for his people as a father does for his children. This perspective demonstrates that power in Islam is not an instrument of domination, but rather a medium of service. While servant leadership emphasizes service to fellow human beings, Al-Ghazali adds service to

God as the highest orientation, making leadership an act of worship with eternal spiritual value.²⁶

This ethical-spiritual framework also provides an evaluative dimension to contemporary political leadership in the Muslim world. The leadership crisis plaguing many Islamic countries is often rooted in the separation between religion and politics, between morality and power. When spirituality is excluded from the public sphere, power loses its value. In this situation, Al-Ghazali's thought becomes relevant because it offers a synthesis between faith and rationality, between power and moral responsibility. He reminds us that corruption, tyranny, and injustice are not only forms of social deviation but also spiritual illnesses arising from a damaged relationship between humans and God. Therefore, the renewal of Islamic leadership cannot be achieved solely through structural reform, but also through spiritual reconstruction.²⁷

In the context of modern public management, the Ethical–Spiritual Leadership Framework can be interpreted as a leadership approach that emphasizes integrity, self-awareness, and social responsibility based on religious values. This model rejects the dichotomy between “professional” and “spiritual” that often arises in secular government systems. A Muslim leader, according to this framework, is required to possess both a deep ethical awareness and strong spiritual discipline. Thus, decision-making is measured not only by efficiency and rationality, but also by honesty, justice, and the resulting social benefits. This principle serves as the foundation for the birth of leadership with integrity oriented towards the welfare of the community.

In addition to providing a normative foundation, this framework also has practical implications for shaping the behavior and character of leaders. The value of *ikhlas* trains leaders to introspect and maintain purity of intention; *adl* encourages objective and proportional behavior; *zuhd* instills moderation and moderation; and *amanah* strengthens a sense of responsibility toward public trust.²⁸ When these four values are consistently internalized, leadership transforms from a mere structural position into a moral calling. This model also implicitly addresses criticisms of modern leadership theories that tend to emphasize the performative dimension and neglect the development of individual spiritual awareness.

The results of this study confirm that Al-Ghazali's thoughts in *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* have strong relevance to the development of an ethical and spiritual Islamic leadership paradigm. The integration of ethical and spiritual dimensions produces a conceptual framework that is not only normative but also applicable, especially in addressing the moral crisis and value disorientation in the world of modern Muslim leadership. These findings demonstrate that leadership in Islam is truly a multidimensional responsibility that simultaneously involves reason, heart, and action. The values of *ikhlas*, *adl*, *zuhd*, and *amanah* are not only moral principles,

but also mechanisms for controlling power so that it is not separated from the goals of justice and the welfare of the people.

This discussion also demonstrates that modern leadership theories such as servant and transformational leadership can be enriched through Al-Ghazali's spiritual dimension, which emphasizes accountability for the afterlife. While modern theories emphasize empathy, motivation, and service to others, Al-Ghazali adds the aspect of submission to God as a source of moral legitimacy.²⁹ Thus, the Ethical-Spiritual Leadership Framework is not only an adaptation of universal leadership values, but also an epistemological reconstruction that emphasizes the close relationship between faith, morality, and power.

In a contemporary context, this framework can serve as a foundation for building a culture of civilized, integrated, and humanistic leadership. Muslim leaders are required to be not only intellectually competent but also spiritually mature. Spirituality, in Al-Ghazali's view, is not an escape from political reality, but rather a moral strength that maintains purity of intention and direction of action. Thus, this research makes an important contribution to the development of modern Islamic political ethics rooted in classical Sufi values and relevant to contemporary socio-political dynamics.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the spiritual doctrines of Al-Ghazali, as articulated in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, offer a transformative framework for Islamic political ethics. By employing a qualitative literature review, the research demonstrates that leadership in the Islamic tradition transcends mere administrative governance; it is fundamentally rooted in the purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun naḥs*). Consequently, the study posits that an ethical political order is contingent upon the leader's internal spiritual maturity, where political authority is exercised not as an end in itself, but as a sacred trust to achieve both temporal welfare and spiritual salvation.

Al-Ghazali's ethical-spiritual leadership framework is constructed upon profound philosophical-theological foundations, it possesses the structural viability to be operationalized into the practical realm through three systematic pathways of empirical implementation. First, within the academic sector, this model can be realized through curriculum reform in higher education such as integrating *tazkiyat al-naḥs* methodologies into civics and Islamic political education to foster moral competency from an early stage. Second, in governance, this framework can be formally operationalized by establishing policy audit criteria based on *'adl* and *maṣlahah*, designed to evaluate the moral integrity and public welfare impacts of local regulatory frameworks. Lastly, the conceptual framework can be institutionalized through spiritual mentorship programs for public officials,

cultivating a continuous awareness of transcendental accountability (*murāqabah*) within strategic decision-making processes to effectively counteract contemporary secular pragmatism.

The findings of this research highlight the contemporary relevance of Ghazalian Sufism in addressing the ethical deficits within modern political praxis. Through a systematic analysis of classical texts, the study identifies a ‘spiritualized’ model of leadership that prioritizes ethical character over power dynamics. The principle of *zuhd* acts as a safeguard against political corruption and hedonism, while *‘adl* and *amānah* provide the normative basis for social equity and public transparency. The conclusion asserts that Al-Ghazali’s teachings provide a robust alternative to secular Machiavellianism, suggesting that the restoration of ethics in Islamic politics requires a return to the metaphysical foundations of responsibility, where the ruler’s primary duty is the service of the creation as an expression of devotion to the Creator.

Endnotes

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