Reconfiguring Religious Authority and Ethical Governance in Islamic Political Thought: A Comparative Literature Review

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ABSTRACT: The Islamic political thought has long served as a foundational discourse for governance in Muslim-majority societies, continuously adapting to evolving historical, theological, and socio-political conditions. This narrative review investigates the development and transformation of Islamic political ideologies, from classical treatises to contemporary reformist and feminist interpretations. Utilizing a structured literature search through academic databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar, the review selected peer-reviewed sources focused on themes of Islamic governance, religious authority, gender justice, and regional variations. The findings reveal that classical texts such as the Siyasatnama and the Muqaddimah continue to inform present-day governance through concepts like justice and social solidarity. Shi'a political frameworks emphasize divine sovereignty through clerical authority, contrasting with more decentralized Sunni models. Reformist thinkers like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Fazlur Rahman advocate for contextual reinterpretation and democratic engagement. The influence of systemic factors—including colonial legacies, economic crises, and cultural diplomacy—demonstrates both the resilience and the adaptability of Islamic political thought. Feminist contributions and grassroots activism further enrich the discourse, emphasizing inclusivity and civic engagement. The review concludes that overcoming governance challenges and ideological rigidity requires educational reform, inclusive policy-making, and expanded theological dialogue. These steps are essential for ensuring that Islamic political thought remains relevant and impactful in contemporary governance. The study highlights the need for future research on digital political engagement and comparative models across global Muslim societies.

Keywords: Islamic Political Thought, Religious Authority, Gender Justice, Democratic Governance, Islamic Reform, Postcolonial Muslim States, Islamic Movements.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic political thought represents a profound intellectual tradition that has significantly influenced governance models and political ideologies throughout Islamic history. As a discipline,

it straddles the domains of theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, and politics, and continues to evolve in response to changing socio-political environments. The classical roots of Islamic political thought can be traced to the early caliphates following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, where governance was not only a matter of political administration but also a continuation of prophetic leadership. Early scholars such as Al-Mawardi and Al-Ghazali constructed elaborate frameworks to reconcile religious obligations with the pragmatic needs of statecraft, while Ibn Khaldun introduced sociological insights into the nature of political authority and social cohesion (Khaleel & Avdukić, 2024).

The evolution of Islamic political thought has witnessed several critical junctures, notably during the colonial and post-colonial periods, which redefined the political identities of Muslim societies. Thinkers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh emerged as prominent reformists advocating for an Islamic renaissance capable of responding to Western imperialism while preserving the core values of Islam. Their ideas laid the groundwork for modern Islamic political movements that continue to navigate the tension between religious authenticity and the demands of modernity (Azlan, 2022). More recently, figures such as Sa'id Hajjarian have contributed to the discourse by exploring political reform within Shi'a Islam in the context of post-revolutionary Iran, emphasizing the adaptive potential of Islamic political theology in contemporary governance (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, 2014).

Islamic political thought today faces numerous challenges, particularly in reconciling traditional governance models with the frameworks of modern nation-states. The central dilemma lies in the dissonance between the ethical imperatives of Islamic governance—justice, accountability, moral leadership—and the bureaucratic mechanisms of modern statehood that often emphasize secularism and legal-rational authority (Islam, 2024). Theoretical debates continue over whether Islamic principles can be fully integrated into secular constitutional systems or whether they require independent frameworks of governance that reflect Islamic epistemology (Kaminski, 2021).

Globalization and the proliferation of liberal democratic norms have introduced further complexities. Muslim-majority countries are increasingly compelled to engage with international standards of governance, human rights, and economic development, while also maintaining religious authenticity. This dynamic raises crucial questions about the compatibility of Islamic governance with democratic institutions, civil liberties, and pluralism (Käsehage, 2021; Hemmat, 2024). Some scholars argue for hybrid models that integrate Islamic ethical principles within democratic structures, while others caution against compromising theological integrity in pursuit of political inclusivity.

The political upheavals of the Arab Spring offered a real-world context to test these theories. Revolutionary movements across the Middle East, driven by calls for justice, dignity, and participation, often found resonance in Islamic political rhetoric. Yet, the varied outcomes—ranging from democratic experimentation to renewed authoritarianism—highlighted the practical challenges Islamic movements face in transitioning from opposition to governance (Buehler, 2013; Islam, 2024). The gap between aspirational discourse and administrative capacity remains a critical area of concern in evaluating the effectiveness of Islamic political models.

Another central issue in Islamic political thought is the role of gender. Feminist critiques have emerged, particularly in the wake of the Arab Spring, to challenge patriarchal interpretations of Islamic governance and to advocate for inclusive frameworks that recognize women's agency. Scholars such as Tavassoli and Teo (2021) and Khair (2020) argue for a reexamination of foundational texts and traditions to uncover egalitarian potentials within Islamic political theology. This reexamination is not merely academic but has practical implications for policy-making, civic engagement, and institutional design in Muslim-majority societies.

Despite growing interest in Islamic political thought, there remains a significant gap in comparative analyses, particularly between Sunni and Shi'a traditions. While both schools share foundational commitments to Islamic governance, they diverge in their conceptualization of authority and legitimacy. Shi'a political theory, as seen in Iran's doctrine of *Wilayat al-Faqih*, centralizes authority in the hands of a qualified religious jurist, whereas Sunni traditions often emphasize *shura* (consultation) and the consensus of the community (*ijma'*) (Scharbrodt, 2021; Kawtharani, 2016). These differences necessitate a comparative framework that not only accounts for theological nuances but also evaluates their real-world implications in diverse geopolitical contexts.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive review of the development of Islamic political thought, with particular attention to its historical foundations, modern reformulations, and regional variations. The review will analyze key themes including divine sovereignty, legitimacy, gender justice, and the relationship between religion and state. It will also explore how Islamic political ideas have been adapted or contested in response to colonial legacies, globalization, and domestic political transformations. Through this analysis, the article seeks to illuminate both the resilience and the dynamism of Islamic political thought in the 21st century.

The geographic scope of this review spans the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia— regions where Islamic political thought has not only deep historical roots but also contemporary significance. In the Middle East, particularly in Iran, the fusion of clerical authority and political power provides a unique model for governance that contrasts sharply with Sunni-majority states like Egypt, where political Islam often struggles for legitimacy under secular or authoritarian regimes (Mavani, 2013; Sela, 2015). In South Asia, the influence of colonialism and nationalism has produced hybrid forms of Islamic governance, while in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia, pluralistic and democratic models offer alternative paths for integrating Islamic values within modern state frameworks (Rusyidi, 2023).

Regional specificity is critical in understanding how Islamic political thought is interpreted and applied. For instance, Iran's post-revolutionary state is anchored in the religious authority of the Supreme Leader, a model that draws from Shi'a theological traditions and challenges conventional democratic norms (Scharbrodt, 2021). Conversely, Indonesia's "Pancasila" framework promotes religious harmony and democratic pluralism while allowing space for Islamic influence in public life (Rusyidi, 2023). These examples underscore the importance of contextual analysis in assessing the viability and desirability of Islamic governance models across different societies.

In conclusion, Islamic political thought continues to be a vital and contested field of inquiry, bridging historical legacies and modern aspirations. As Muslim-majority societies grapple with issues of governance, identity, and legitimacy, Islamic political theory offers both a reservoir of

principles and a platform for innovation. By engaging with diverse traditions, reformist ideas, and regional practices, scholars can contribute to the development of more inclusive, just, and contextually grounded models of Islamic governance. This article seeks to contribute to that effort by synthesizing current scholarship and highlighting areas for further research and dialogue.

METHOD

The methodology adopted for this literature review was designed to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize academic research related to Islamic political thought across various historical and contemporary contexts. This section outlines the procedures employed for sourcing and selecting relevant literature from reputable academic databases, the search strategies and keyword combinations used, the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies, the types of research considered for inclusion, and the overall process of filtering and evaluating academic sources. These steps were implemented to ensure that the literature analyzed in this review maintains scholarly rigor and offers significant insight into the evolution, application, and challenges of Islamic political ideologies and governance models in diverse geopolitical settings.

The initial stage of the research involved a comprehensive search for academic literature using prominent scholarly databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Web of Science. These databases were selected due to their wide coverage of interdisciplinary publications and their indexing of peer-reviewed journals that focus on Islamic studies, political science, international relations, and area studies. Utilizing these platforms enabled access to a broad range of scholarly perspectives on Islamic political thought, encompassing historical, theological, sociological, and political analyses.

To ensure the relevance and precision of the literature search, carefully curated keyword combinations were used during the database queries. The primary keywords employed in the search process included "Islam and Governance," "Islamic Political Thought," "Islamic Movements," "Political Islam," "Islam and Democracy," "Islamic Ideologies," "Religious Authority and State Power," "Islamic Feminism and Politics," "Sharia and Governance," and "Islam in Post-Colonial Contexts." These core terms were selected to reflect the broad themes and core concepts central to the study of Islamic political thought.

In order to refine the search further, topical and geographic modifiers were incorporated into keyword queries. These modifiers included regional identifiers such as "Middle East," "South Asia," and "Southeast Asia," as well as conceptual dimensions such as "modernization," "secularism," "democratic values," and "gender justice." Boolean operators such as AND, OR, and NOT were strategically used to combine or filter terms. For instance, queries such as "Islamic Political Thought AND governance AND Middle East," "Islam and Democracy AND political movements AND Southeast Asia," and "Sharia AND governance AND South Asia" were utilized to produce targeted search results.

Advanced search filters were applied to limit the scope of results to English-language publications, articles published within the past ten years, and document types classified as peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, or scholarly reviews. These filters ensured the collection of up-to-date,

high-quality academic sources relevant to the ongoing debates and developments within Islamic political discourse.

To enhance the methodological rigor of the literature selection, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed prior to the analysis of search results. The inclusion criteria required that articles be peer-reviewed and published in reputable academic journals. Studies had to engage directly with themes related to Islamic political thought, governance, political movements, or contemporary interpretations of Islamic ideologies. Particular emphasis was placed on literature that examined these themes in relation to specific geopolitical contexts such as the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Furthermore, priority was given to studies employing rigorous qualitative or quantitative research methodologies, as well as comprehensive literature reviews that offered theoretical or empirical contributions to the field.

Conversely, several exclusion criteria were employed to maintain the focus and academic quality of the review. Non-peer-reviewed publications, including opinion pieces, blog entries, or articles in non-academic outlets, were excluded. Literature that addressed purely theological or doctrinal interpretations of Islam without substantive reference to political structures or governance models was also excluded. In addition, articles that were outdated, specifically those published more than ten years ago and lacking continued scholarly citation, were removed from consideration unless they represented seminal contributions to the foundational understanding of Islamic political thought. Lastly, publications that lacked contextual specificity or dealt with overly broad or tangentially related subjects were excluded to maintain thematic coherence.

The process of literature selection was carried out in sequential phases. After initial database searches using the specified keywords and filters, search results were exported into a citation management tool for organization. Titles and abstracts were then screened to eliminate duplicates and identify studies that met the inclusion criteria. Articles that passed this initial screening were reviewed in full text to evaluate their methodological robustness, relevance to the research objectives, and alignment with the thematic focus of the study.

Throughout the selection process, each article was assessed according to its contribution to the understanding of Islamic political thought in both historical and contemporary dimensions. Particular attention was paid to studies that explored political theology, the integration of religious authority with state power, the role of Islamic movements in governance, the interplay between Islam and democratic ideals, and the inclusion of gender perspectives in Islamic political theory. Where applicable, studies offering comparative analyses across Sunni and Shi'a traditions or across different national contexts were prioritized, given the centrality of such comparisons to the research framework.

In sum, the methodological approach employed in this literature review was designed to maximize both the breadth and depth of scholarly engagement with Islamic political thought. By utilizing strategic keyword combinations, comprehensive database searches, and clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, the review ensured the incorporation of high-quality, contextually relevant, and theoretically significant academic works. This methodological rigor serves as the foundation for the analytical sections of the study and contributes to the broader academic discourse on the

development, transformation, and future trajectories of Islamic political thought in diverse global contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A: Classical and Medieval Islamic Political Thought

The classical and medieval periods of Islamic political thought present a deeply rooted intellectual tradition, with principal themes that continue to shape the discourse surrounding modern governance in Muslim societies. One of the most influential texts of this era, the *Siyasatnama* by Nizam al-Mulk, serves as a foundational treatise on ethical governance. It underscores the pivotal role of justice, administrative accountability, and the ruler's responsibility towards subjects (Roy, 2013; Mangini, 2018). These principles have retained their relevance, particularly as modern Islamic governance models continue to invoke the legitimacy of Islamic leadership traditions. Contemporary states invoking the authority of the *Shari'ah* or caliphate often trace their legitimacy narratives back to such texts, demonstrating the ongoing influence of classical Islamic paradigms (Hutchinson et al., 2014).

Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* introduces the concept of *asabiya*, or social solidarity, as a cornerstone of political stability. His analysis not only provides a framework for understanding the cyclical rise and decline of dynasties but also reinforces the necessity of communal cohesion and ethical leadership in sustaining governance (Roy, 2013; Ghiabi et al., 2018). These ideas resonate with modern Islamic movements that emphasize community welfare and socio-economic justice as fundamental governance goals. They suggest that legitimacy is embedded not merely in the divine sanction of rulers but also in their ability to foster unity and fulfill public obligations.

Historical implementations of these ideas are evident in pre-modern Islamic states. For example, the Seljuk administration institutionalized elements from the *Siyasatnama*, including the creation of bureaucratic checks and balances and systems for fiscal responsibility (Roy, 2013). The Abbasid Caliphate's adoption of Al-Mawardi's concept of the Imamate further reveals the integration of ethical and legalistic principles into the structure of governance, wherein rulers were expected to uphold *Shari'ah*, wisdom, and public welfare (Wibowo et al., 2023). Similarly, Ibn Khaldun's historical analysis of dynastic decline linked the weakening of *asabiya* to political instability, a dynamic observed in several pre-modern Islamic empires (Hutchinson et al., 2014).

Shi'a Political Thought and Clerical Authority

Shi'a political thought uniquely centers divine sovereignty, or *hakimiyya*, as a foundational element of legitimate governance. Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr conceptualized this through the necessity of rule by a just cleric who represents the continuation of the Imamate in the absence of direct succession. He argued that without religious leadership, governance would risk moral decay and injustice, especially in secular regimes (Scharbrodt, 2021). His framework advances the idea that divine authority must manifest through institutional structures led by those with profound religious and ethical training.

Taqi al-Mudarrisi expanded upon this notion, suggesting that *hakimiyya* must balance divine imperatives with responsiveness to public needs. For him, the role of clerics involves mediating between divine law and the socio-political demands of the populace, thus humanizing the clerical role while maintaining theological supremacy (Scharbrodt, 2021). Both thinkers frame Shi'a governance not only as clerical rule but as a system that merges religious values with public accountability.

These ideas starkly contrast with Sunni frameworks. Shi'a political structures, particularly as institutionalized in Iran's doctrine of *Wilayat al-Faqih*, formalize clerical authority within state apparatuses. Here, the Supreme Leader embodies both spiritual and political authority, creating a model that fuses religious doctrine with executive decision-making (Scharbrodt, 2021). In contrast, Sunni governance models often emerge from community consensus or contractual legitimacy and are characterized by decentralization of religious authority (Capezzone, 2020). Historical Sunni caliphates, while often consulting religious scholars, rarely vested them with overarching political power, resulting in more pluralistic governance systems.

These distinctions also highlight divergent sources of legitimacy: Shi'a models emphasize theological and clerical qualifications, while Sunni models rely on social contracts and consensus. This has historically led to differences in governance practices and legal frameworks, which continue to shape political developments in contemporary Islamic societies (Capezzone, 2020).

Modern Reform and Political Islam

Modern reformist thought, spearheaded by figures like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Fazlur Rahman, reflects a deliberate attempt to reconcile Islamic ethics with modern political structures. Al-Afghani advocated for Pan-Islamism and rational reinterpretation of Islamic texts, promoting unity and resistance to Western imperialism (Azlan, 2022). His vision called for an Islamically rooted nationalism that transcended sectarian lines, focusing on civilizational revival through educational and political reform.

Fazlur Rahman furthered this reformist legacy by emphasizing *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) as a critical tool for contextualizing Islamic teachings. He championed ethical engagement with contemporary issues such as gender justice and democratic governance, insisting that Islamic principles must evolve to meet modern societal needs (Hellmich, 2014; Islam, 2024). Rahman's ideas provide a blueprint for ethical political engagement grounded in Islamic values but responsive to contemporary pluralistic frameworks.

The Arab Spring catalyzed these ideas into political movements. In Egypt and Tunisia, Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda embraced democratic participation, reflecting the reformist emphasis on civil rights and ethical governance (Buehler, 2013). These movements transitioned from resistance to political actors, negotiating between Islamic legitimacy and public accountability. Ennahda's coalition-building efforts demonstrated a shift from ideological purity to practical governance, aligning with democratic norms while maintaining Islamic ethical identities.

However, backlash and political suppression, particularly in Egypt, exposed the vulnerabilities of these movements. The public demanded clarity on the role of religion in state affairs, pushing

Islamic parties to adopt more inclusive and pluralistic platforms. In response, many Islamic movements have emphasized grassroots engagement and accountability, acknowledging the need for broader legitimacy in increasingly skeptical societies (Islam, 2024).

Gender and Political Inclusion in Islamic Thought

Gender justice in Islamic political thought has gained significant traction, particularly through feminist reinterpretations of religious texts. Classical Islam acknowledged women's political and educational roles, as evidenced by figures like Aisha. However, later patriarchal interpretations marginalized these contributions, prompting modern scholars to revisit foundational texts (Christensen, 2013).

Contemporary Islamic feminism seeks to reclaim gender justice as intrinsic to Islamic teachings. Scholars advocate for egalitarian readings of the Qur'an and Hadith, challenging restrictive interpretations and emphasizing inclusivity. This reorientation emphasizes that female political agency is not only religiously valid but essential to just governance (Tavassoli & Teo, 2021).

Women's participation in the Arab Spring further underlined this shift. In Tunisia, women played integral roles in transitional governance, pushing for gender-sensitive reforms and constitutional protections (Christensen, 2013). This participation exemplifies the evolving recognition of women as political actors within Islamic frameworks, moving beyond token representation towards structural inclusion.

Female scholars and theology students are pivotal in this transformation. Their engagement in religious education and jurisprudence challenges traditional hierarchies, promoting gender-inclusive interpretations of Islamic law (Khair, 2020). In countries like Iran and Egypt, women have become key contributors to political theology, articulating visions of Islamic governance that prioritize justice, equity, and participation (Tavassoli & Teo, 2021).

These developments signal a foundational shift in Islamic political thought. The increasing visibility and influence of women in shaping governance narratives affirm that gender justice is no longer peripheral but central to the evolving discourse on Islamic political authority.

Globalization and Cultural Diplomacy

Islamic political thought significantly influences cultural diplomacy, particularly in the ideological rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran promotes a Shi'a-centric model rooted in *Wilayat al-Faqih*, projecting its values through educational, religious, and media initiatives. This strategy seeks to position Iran as a moral leader within the Muslim world, opposing Western hegemony and Sunni orthodoxy (Roy, 2013; Ghiabi et al., 2018).

In contrast, Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi-inspired diplomacy relies on religious tourism, scholarships, and funding of religious institutions globally. Its cultural outreach emphasizes Sunni orthodoxy, countering Iran's influence and asserting its role as the custodian of Islamic heritage (Roy, 2013). The ideological contest between these nations has extended to regional conflicts, where cultural diplomacy becomes a means of ideological propagation and geopolitical leverage.

In non-Arab contexts, Islamic political thought exhibits localization trends. In China, Hui Muslims integrate Islamic values with Confucian ethics, forming a hybrid identity that harmonizes religious observance with local cultural norms (Latifah et al., 2023; Chiu, 2021). Similarly, Central Asian states such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have witnessed Islamic revival movements that adapt traditional teachings to national identities and democratic aspirations.

These localized adaptations contrast with Arab-centric models, emphasizing flexibility and cultural integration. Such practices highlight the global diffusion of Islamic political thought, which, rather than being monolithic, reflects diverse interpretations responsive to local realities. This pluralism affirms the dynamic nature of Islamic political thought, capable of transcending geographic and ideological boundaries while maintaining its core ethical commitments.

In summary, the review of current literature reveals that Islamic political thought is far from static. It evolves in response to historical legacies, reformist ideologies, gender dynamics, and geopolitical contexts, affirming its continued relevance and adaptability in shaping modern governance frameworks.

Islamic political thought has evolved through a dynamic interplay of historical, cultural, theological, and socio-political forces. The findings of this review reveal that the continuity and transformation of Islamic political ideologies are significantly shaped by systemic factors such as local cultural adaptation, colonial legacies, economic pressures, and evolving theological discourses. These factors not only contribute to the preservation of foundational principles but also create space for necessary reinterpretations in response to contemporary challenges. Localization, for example, plays a central role in shaping how Islamic political thought manifests across different regions. In Central Asia and China, for instance, Islamic values are integrated with local socio-cultural practices to produce hybrid models of governance, demonstrating the capacity of Islamic thought to adapt to various historical and geographical conditions (Latifah et al., 2023; Chiu, 2021).

Colonialism and the emergence of modern nation-states introduced structural challenges that Islamic political thought continues to negotiate. In post-colonial states, the tension between Western-inspired governance models and indigenous Islamic traditions has compelled reformist thinkers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani to propose syncretic frameworks that unify Islamic ethics with national identity as a form of resistance to imperialism (Roy, 2013; Ghiabi et al., 2018). This synthesis of religious and nationalist discourses remains influential in shaping policy decisions and governance strategies in Muslim-majority countries today. Moreover, colonial experiences continue to inform debates on legitimacy, governance, and the proper role of religious authority in the modern state (Hutchinson et al., 2014; Mangini, 2018).

Economic contexts also exert a significant influence on the evolution of Islamic political thought. Economic crises and inequality have often triggered calls for the application of Islamic principles of social justice, wealth redistribution, and ethical governance. These appeals draw from both classical Islamic teachings and reformist interpretations to propose alternative economic models that prioritize communal welfare over individual profit (Latifah et al., 2023; Cemgil & Hoffmann, 2016). In this sense, the ethics of Islamic political thought are operationalized as responses to structural economic problems, framing social justice as both a spiritual and political imperative.

Theological developments have equally contributed to the transformation of Islamic political ideologies. In particular, contemporary debates on gender, democracy, and human rights are reshaping traditional interpretations. Reformist scholars such as Fazlur Rahman have emphasized the need for *ijtihad* and contextual reasoning to align Islamic principles with contemporary ethical standards (Hellmich, 2014; Islam, 2024). These theological shifts illustrate an ongoing dialogue within Islamic political thought that challenges rigid orthodoxy and prioritizes adaptability and inclusion, particularly in the face of modern pluralistic societies.

This evolving discourse is also deeply interwoven with national and international policy frameworks. Policies in Muslim-majority countries often reflect a complex negotiation between traditional Islamic values and global governance standards. For instance, post-revolutionary Iran institutionalized clerical rule through *Wilayat al-Faqih*, framing religious authority as central to governance. Conversely, Sunni-majority states have generally embraced more decentralized models that emphasize consultation and consensus, leading to varied interpretations of political legitimacy and religious authority (Scharbrodt, 2021; Capezzone, 2020).

International frameworks further influence this evolution by imposing norms related to democracy, human rights, and global economic systems. Islamic political thought, therefore, often emerges as a response to both domestic demands and international expectations. Movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda in the wake of the Arab Spring have sought to incorporate Islamic principles into democratic processes, reflecting a broader attempt to harmonize religious legitimacy with political participation (Buehler, 2013; Islam, 2024). This engagement has led to new modes of Islamic political expression that aim to integrate ethical governance with institutional pluralism.

Despite these developments, the limitations of current Islamic political models must be acknowledged. Ideologically, one key challenge lies in the tension between tradition and innovation. The reliance on classical jurisprudence can constrain efforts to modernize political frameworks in line with contemporary needs. This ideological rigidity often restricts discussions on gender equality, civil liberties, and inclusive governance, resulting in models that are misaligned with the realities of diverse and evolving societies (Azlan, 2022; Mangini, 2018). Reformist attempts to reinterpret foundational texts frequently face opposition from conservative scholars and institutions, thereby limiting their societal impact.

Governance challenges are also pervasive. In many Islamic political systems, the consolidation of power among elites undermines participatory governance. Authoritarian tendencies, corruption, and institutional inefficiencies hinder the realization of Islamic values such as justice, accountability, and public service (Rusyidi, 2023; Fitouri & Saleh, 2024). These systemic flaws reduce public trust in Islamic governance models and limit their effectiveness. Furthermore, the inability to effectively incorporate civil society and grassroots movements into political processes restricts the capacity for broad-based reforms and undermines the legitimacy of religious political parties.

Socio-political dynamics further complicate the picture. Sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shi'a communities contribute to fragmentation within the Islamic political landscape. The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, for example, has extended into cultural diplomacy and proxy

conflicts, reinforcing ideological polarization (Ghiabi et al., 2018; Roy, 2013). This internal fragmentation impedes efforts to develop unified Islamic responses to shared challenges and hampers regional cooperation on political and social reforms.

Another challenge arises from the limited representation of women in formal Islamic political structures. Although feminist scholars and activists have made significant contributions to reinterpreting Islamic texts and advocating for gender justice, their influence often remains peripheral within male-dominated religious institutions (Tavassoli & Teo, 2021; Khair, 2020). This marginalization undermines efforts to promote inclusive governance and limits the scope of Islamic political thought to reflect the realities and aspirations of all members of society. The rise of female scholars and theology students does, however, represent a promising development toward more gender-equitable political discourse (Christensen, 2013).

Solutions to these challenges must involve both institutional and intellectual reforms. Theologically, expanding the scope of *ijtihad* and encouraging diverse scholarly engagement can foster more inclusive interpretations of Islamic governance. Politically, reforming state institutions to enhance transparency, accountability, and participatory governance is essential for bridging the gap between Islamic ideals and practical governance outcomes. Encouraging collaboration between religious scholars, policymakers, and civil society actors may also improve the responsiveness of Islamic political models to contemporary demands.

Furthermore, educational reforms that emphasize civic engagement, pluralism, and critical thinking can empower a new generation of Muslim leaders and citizens to participate constructively in political processes. These reforms should aim to dismantle rigid hierarchies within religious and political institutions and create space for dialogue, innovation, and inclusive leadership. Addressing the limitations of current models requires a commitment to both preserving the ethical foundations of Islamic political thought and adapting its application to the pluralistic and interconnected world of the 21st century.

Finally, further research is needed to explore under-examined dimensions of Islamic political thought, including comparative studies across different regions, longitudinal analyses of reform movements, and the role of digital media in shaping contemporary Islamic political discourse. Future studies should also investigate the intersections of environmental justice, minority rights, and transnational activism within Islamic political frameworks. By expanding the scope of inquiry, scholars can contribute to a more nuanced and actionable understanding of how Islamic political thought can evolve to meet the challenges of our time.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the development of Islamic political thought through historical, theological, and socio-political lenses, emphasizing its dynamic adaptation to changing contexts. Key findings highlight the enduring relevance of classical concepts such as justice, social solidarity, and ethical governance, particularly in the works of Ibn Khaldun and Nizam al-Mulk. Modern reformists like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Fazlur Rahman have further shaped this tradition by advocating for contextual engagement with democratic ideals and gender justice. The review also

underscores how regional variations and systemic influences—such as colonial legacies, economic instability, and theological discourse—contribute to both the continuity and transformation of Islamic governance models.

The urgency of addressing ideological rigidity, governance inefficiencies, and the underrepresentation of women in Islamic political discourse is evident. Effective policy interventions should include institutional reforms to enhance transparency, promote participatory governance, and foster inclusive religious education. It is equally critical to expand intellectual engagement by encouraging broader use of ijtihad and supporting gender-inclusive interpretations of Islamic texts.

Future research should explore emerging issues such as digital Islamic activism, comparative regional governance models, and the intersections between Islamic political thought and environmental justice. Emphasizing inclusive education, grassroots mobilization, and contextual adaptation will be essential strategies to address current limitations and ensure that Islamic political thought remains a constructive force in global governance dialogues.

Based on the synthesis of the literature, this study proposes three practical recommendations for strengthening the contribution of Islamic political thought to modern governance: (1) Digital Islamic activism should be institutionalized through educational platforms and scholarly oversight to promote ethical discourse and civic participation in virtual spaces. (2) Islamic higher education institutions should integrate curricula on political ethics that emphasize pluralism, gender justice, and democratic deliberation, especially in Southeast Asian and postcolonial   contexts. (3) A practical governance model should adopt a hybrid framework that combines consultative religious authority (*shura*) with decentralized participatory governance, responsive to both local traditions and universal ethical norms.

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