



Available online at: <https://journal.iaingorontalo.ac.id/index.php/au>
E-ISSN: 2442-8213
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The Khilafiyah Debate in the Maqasid al-Shariah Perspective: A Normative Study of Ihya Ulum al-Din

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: 8 Maret 2026 Accepted: 2 Juni 2026 Published: 30 Juni 2026 Keywords: Khilafiyah; jidal; mira How to cite: Maliha, N. F., & Junaidi, A. (2026). The khilafiyah debate in the maqasid al-shariah perspective: A normative study of Ihya Ulum al-Din. <i>Al-Ulum</i>, 26(1), 21-32. https://10.30603/au.v26i1.7772 Corresponding authors email: fitiamaliha@uinponorogo.ac.id	The increasing polarization and destructive khilafiyah debates in the digital space demand a more substantive reconstruction of the ethics of religious discourse. This study analyzes Al-Ghazali's critique of jidal and mira' in Ihya Ulum al-Din and formulates a model for managing differences based on Maqasid al-Shari'ah. Using a qualitative approach of literature study and narrative review, content analysis is applied to Al-Ghazali's text and contemporary maqasid literature of the last five years. The results show that destructive debates are rooted in spiritual pathologies such as riya (riya) and self-dominance, which contradict the objectives of sharia (Islamic law) to safeguard religion (hifz al-din) and the soul (hifz al-nafs). The synthesis produces a "Systemic Moral" model that emphasizes tazkiyah as an internal prerequisite and public welfare as an external parameter. This study integrates personal Sufism and public law, and emphasizes the importance of transformative digital etiquette for social cohesion and harmony among the people.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of religious debate in the global public sphere, particularly in the digital ecosystem, has escalated significantly and triggered worrying polarization of the community. The transformation of religious authority on social media platforms such as Instagram, Tiktok, etc. has transformed the landscape of Islamic discourse into an arena for contestation of truth claims that often sideline social cohesion (Syatar et al., 2024). This dynamic occurs not only globally, but also at the national level, where

the fragmentation of political and religious identities is further exacerbated by social media algorithms that create echo chambers (Octavianne et al., 2024). In Indonesia, digital da'wah controversies often trigger polarized responses that show how fragile the ethics of debate are among Muslim netizens today (Fikri & Indriana, 2025). The strengthening of this single truth claim has pushed the silent majority group and created horizontal tensions that damage social harmony in a multicultural society (Subhan et al., 2025). The digital *khilafiyah* debate triggers polarization of the community, shifts religious authority, exacerbates fragmentation, and damages social harmony in society.

The phenomenon of the "khilafiyah" debate in digital spaces has sparked significant divisions and conflicts, both in Indonesia and globally, directly threatening the principles of "hifz al-din" (protection of religion) and "hifz al-nafs" (protection of the soul) within the framework of "Maqasid al-Shariah." In Indonesia, the ideological contestation between pro-caliphate groups and nationalist-traditionalist groups has manifested itself in an intense digital discourse war on various platforms, including organizational websites such as hizbut-tahrir.or.id and nu.or.id, which has reinforced ideological differences and exacerbated polarization in cyberspace. Furthermore, the struggle for religious authority on YouTube between puritanical Salafists and the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama has created an audience contestation that not only polarizes viewers but is also perceived as an existential challenge to traditional religious authority. A similar phenomenon is evident in the polarization of religious hashtags on Twitter, where topics such as "Salafi," "Wahhabi," and "pro-caliphate" form a network of conversations directly related to horizontal conflicts in society. The contest between Islamic outreach media such as arrahmah.com and VOA Islam on Facebook has reinforced the formation of online group identities and the polarization of digital communities. The most striking example is the mass mobilization related to hate speech in the Ahok (Basuki Tjahaja Purnama) case, where online rhetoric containing accusations of blasphemy successfully translated into mass action and legal consequences in the real world. In a global context, comparative studies in Bangladesh show that religious disinformation and hoaxes in digital spaces can trigger communal violence against minority groups, indicating an escalation from argumentative contestation to physical violence. Social media platforms, as noted in cross-national research, serve as catalysts that amplify hate speech and increase the risk of social conflict.

Although this digital polarization phenomenon has been widely studied, there is a clear academic gap in efforts to manage the *khilafiyah* debate using the *Maqasid al-Shariah* approach integrated with spiritual ethics. So far, the literature on social media ethics from an Islamic perspective still tends to be normative-general and has not specifically dissected the psychological pathology of the debate criticized by Al-Ghazali (Farida et al., 2022). A number of previous studies discussed the phenomena of freedom of expression, digital da'wah, and religious communication ethics from the perspective of Maqasid al-Shariah. For example, research on freedom of expression in

social media based on maqasid, MUI fatwas from a maqasid perspective, as well as studies on digital da'wah based on AI show that the main attention of the literature is still on general normative-ethical aspects. Many empirical studies on polarization focus more on discourse analysis or political impacts, but provide minimal offers for the reconstruction of discourse ethics based on sharia benefits (Pomalingo et al., 2025). As a result, the *khilafiyah* debate is often seen as a mere legal dispute without considering its destructive impact on *hifz al-din* (maintaining religion) and *hifz al-nafs* (maintaining the soul/public tranquility) systematically (Rahman et al., 2025).

This study uses Al-Ghazali's criticism in the book *Ihya Ulum al-Din* as an analytical tool to evaluate the culture of *jidal* (debate) and *mira'* (argumentation) which is rife. Al-Ghazali sharply identified that destructive debates are often rooted in heart diseases such as *riya'* and *hubb al-jah* (love of popularity), which in the modern context are relevant to the pursuit of digital virality (Hasan & Anoraga, 2024). This research uses a normative-theoretical recontextualization approach. This means that the concepts of *jidal*, *mira'*, and *tazkiyat al-nafs* in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* are not positioned as technical solutions that directly address algorithmic mechanisms, but rather as an ethical framework for reinterpreting the debate on *khilafiyah* in the contemporary digital space. This research seeks to bridge classical ethical principles with the dynamics of modern social media, so that Al-Ghazali's relevance emerges through the process of actualizing values, not the literal application of the text. On the other hand, *Maqasid al-Shariah* provides an evaluative instrument to assess the extent to which a religious discourse provides benefits or actually causes *mafsadat* (damage) (Alqodsi & Bidin, 2025). The integration between Al-Ghazali's inner ethics and the parameters of Maqasid is crucial to transform debate from merely seeking victory (*talab al-ghalabah*) to seeking substantive truth (*talab al-haqq*) (Farida et al., 2022).

Based on this background, this research aims to analyze in depth the concept of debate from an *Ihya* perspective, assess the practice of contemporary religious debate through the lens of *Maqasid al-Shariah*, and formulate an integrative ethical model for *khilafiyah* management. The problem formulation proposed is: (1) How is the reconstruction of the concepts of *jidal* and *mira'* in *Ihya* if contextualized with today's digital public space? (2) To what extent does the destructive *khilafiyah* debate conflict with the principles of *dharuriyyat* in *Maqasid al-Shariah*? (3) What is the ethical model of *khilafiyah* management that synthesizes the dimensions of Sufism and maqasid as a solution to the polarization of the people?

The scientific contribution or novelty of this article lies in the theoretical synthesis between the dimensions of *Sufism* (personal/inner ethics) and *Maqasid al-Shariah* (public/social welfare). *Tazkiyah al-nafs*, within Al-Ghazali's framework, cannot be understood as a technical solution that directly addresses structural problems in the digital public sphere, but rather as an ethical foundation that shapes social behavior at the individual level. In the context of the *khilafiyah* debate, rifts in social cohesion arise not solely from differences of opinion, but also from damaged inner orientations, such as the desire to win, ego, and confrontational tendencies expressed in digital

communication. Purification of the soul has sociological relevance because it changes the orientation of the subject of discourse: from a dominant drive to an attitude of humility, justice, and responsibility. The relationship between *tazkiyah* and social cohesion is indirect but real: individual spiritual solutions shape a more ethical communication habitus, and this ethical habitus, if socially widespread, contributes to a decrease in polarization and a strengthening of public cohesion. While *Sufism* is often considered a private domain and *Maqasid* as a public legal domain, this study confirms that protecting the objectives of *Sharia* (*maqasid*) is impossible without a foundation of spiritual ethics (*tazkiyah*). By integrating the formation of individual inner morals with an orientation towards social welfare, this article offers a new paradigm in more holistic management of religious conflict, which touches not only on the regulatory aspects of discourse but also the transformation of the ethical awareness of its actors in the digital space.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach based on library research with a qualitative-interpretive content analysis strategy to examine the ethical debate in Al-Ghazali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* normatively and reconstruct it within the framework of contemporary *Maqasid al-Shariah*. Primary data are sourced from the *Ihya*, specifically the discussion on knowledge, *jidal*, and liver disease (Al-Ghazali, 2005), while secondary data include classical and contemporary literature on *Maqasid al-Shariah* (Auda, 2008) as well as reputable journal articles. Data collection was carried out systematically through specific keyword-based searches, accompanied by stages of identification, title and abstract selection, and documentation using a checklist to maintain transparency and minimize bias.

To ensure the quality of the sources, this study applied strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, including reputable indexed publications, full-text access (open access), and substantive relevance to the research theme. The unit of analysis focused on the concepts of *jidal*, *mira'*, and *Maqasid al-Shariah*, which were analyzed intertextually through a qualitative-interpretive content analysis method (Creswell, 2013). The analysis stages included text normalization, coding, categorization within the *Maqasid* framework, and normative synthesis to formulate an integrative model of ethical debate. The reliability of the results was maintained through source triangulation and peer-debriefing to validate the resulting interpretations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study addressed three research questions. The first (RQ1) asked how the concepts of *jidal* and *mira'* in *Ihya Ulum al-Din* can be reconstructed when contextualized within today's digital public sphere. The second (RQ2) asked to what

extent destructive khilafiyah debates conflict with the principles of dharuriyyat in Maqasid al-Shariah. The third (RQ3) asked what ethical model of khilafiyah management can synthesize the dimensions of Sufism and maqasid as a response to the polarization of the community. The findings below first describe the general characteristics of the literature and then present the results in the order of these questions.

A narrative synthesis of primary and secondary literature in the last five years shows the existence of several main thematic categories that define the *khilafiyah* debate within the framework of *Maqasid al-Shariah* and Al-Ghazali's ethics. The characteristics of the publications reviewed are dominated by qualitative-normative approaches and case studies of digital platforms, which consistently identify the shift of religious authority to cyberspace as a major trigger of contemporary polarization (Syatar et al., 2024). The trend of findings in the literature shows that current religious debates are often trapped in patterns of authority contestation on Instagram and Facebook, where claims of a single truth become the dominant narrative that obscures the spirit of plurality of legitimate ikhtilaf in Islam (Hasan & Anoraga, 2024). The methodological patterns commonly used in studying this phenomenon are critical discourse analysis and content analysis of digital da'wah narratives, which found that social fragmentation is exacerbated by social media algorithms that tend to validate users' confirmation bias (Octavianne et al., 2024).

The findings of this study indicate that tazkiyat al-nafs needs to be understood not only as an individual spiritual concept, but also as a relevant ethical mechanism for responding to algorithmic logic in contemporary digital spaces. On platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, religious content is often selected not only based on its argumentative weight, but also based on its sensational appeal, conflict, and the intensity of the interactions it generates. This situation is seen, for example, in the content showing Gus Miftah mocking an iced tea seller on the TikTok account Inilah.com, which reached 3.1 million views and 296.5 thousand comments, demonstrating how religious polemics can be quickly magnified by algorithmic visibility mechanisms. In this context, tazkiyat al-nafs functions as a self-regulatory instrument that limits the urge to seek popularity, win debates, or produce provocative content for the sole sake of engagement. Thus, the recontextualization of Al-Ghazali here does not stop at a normative reading of the text, but explains how the formation of spiritual character becomes an ethical prerequisite for reducing the reproduction of khilafiyah conflicts in the digital public space.

RQ1: The Pathology of Debate (Jidal and Mira') in Ihya Ulum al-Din

The first thematic finding relates to the pathology of debate (*jidal* and *mira'*) in the text of *Ihya Ulum al-Din*. Based on the analysis of literature that extracts Al-Ghazali's thoughts, destructive debate is categorized as behavior driven by psychological-spiritual motives such as *riya*, *hubb al-jah* (love of popularity), and the desire to bring down the interlocutor (Fikri & Indriana, 2025). Recent literature confirms that Al-

Ghazali clearly distinguishes between *munazarah* which aims to seek the truth and *jidal* which aims for personal domination (Subhan et al., 2025). The results of this synthesis show that in the modern context, *jidal* behavior is manifested in the form of personal attacks (ad hominem) and the spread of hatred in public spaces, which directly harm the principle of pedagogical politeness in the Islamic intellectual tradition (Pomalingo et al., 2025).

RQ2: Khilafiyah Escalation and Its Conflict with the Dharuriyyat of Maqasid al-Shariah

The second thematic category is the escalation of *khilafiyah* and polarization in the digital public space. Case studies of da'wah controversies and disputes over religious thought in various regions, including Gorontalo and the convert community, show that poorly managed *furu'iyah* debates often lead to horizontal conflicts that threaten social cohesion (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Findings from the analysis of the silent majority indicate that while heated debates occur on the surface, there is a large group of people who feel alienated by confrontational religious communication methods (Farida et al., 2022). This pattern indicates an imbalance between the availability of abundant religious information and the low quality of discourse, where etiquette in differences of opinion is often ignored in order to achieve wider reach (engagement) on social media (Shamsuddin, 2024).

The third thematic finding places Maqasid al-Shariah as an evaluative and regulatory instrument in responding to the debate. Literature on *maqasid*-based social media ethics formulates that every form of religious expression must be tested through the parameters of protecting religion (*hifz al-din*), soul (*hifz al-nafs*), and reason (*hifz al-'aql*) (Arisandy et al., 2022). The results of a review of fatwas on freedom of expression indicate a push to reconstruct legal views to be more sensitive to public welfare and the protection of human rights within the framework of sharia (Alqodsi & Bidin, 2025). Specifically, the *maqasid* principle is used to evaluate the social impact of a fatwa or religious opinion, where debates that trigger divisions among the community are considered as actions that harm the substantive objectives of sharia itself (Junaidi & Rizka, 2023).

RQ3: Toward an Integrative Model of Sufism and Maqasid

The final synthesis of the literature findings leads to an integration model between Sufism and *maqasid* as a normative solution. The findings show that protection of religion cannot be achieved without a transformation of the inner ethics of individuals involved in the debate. The *Maqasid al-Akhlaq* paradigm that appears in contemporary discourse emphasizes the importance of intellectual honesty, humility, and integrity of intention as an integral part of upholding sharia (El Mazir et al., 2025). The results of this synthesis confirm that the ethics of healthy debate must include dimensions of privacy, confidentiality, and respect for human dignity, as formulated in the guidelines for benefit-based information jurisprudence (Hamim et al., 2024). Thus, the results of

this study map that the solution to religious polarization lies in synchronizing public regulations based on benefits with spiritual education based on the *tazkiyah* tradition.

Discussion

In summary, the findings show that destructive khilafiyah debates in the digital public sphere are rooted less in substantive epistemological differences than in spiritual pathologies such as *riya'*, *hubb al-jah*, and the desire to dominate others; that such debates harm the objectives of sharia, particularly *hifz al-din* and *hifz al-nafs*; and that an integration of *tazkiyat al-nafs* with *maqasid*-based parameters offers a normative model for managing differences of opinion. These findings are interpreted below.

The results of this study confirm that Al-Ghazali's critique of the culture of debate (*jidal* and *mira'*) is not merely anachronistic moral advice, but rather the root of the solution to the phenomenon of polarization in the contemporary digital public space. The main findings show that the escalation of *khilafiyah* conflicts today is often not triggered by substantive epistemological differences, but by the destruction of inner orientations, such as the desire to win and popularity, which Al-Ghazali calls the disease of knowledge (Putri et al., 2025). Within the framework of *Maqasid al-Shariah*, this destructive debate behavior functions as a discourse pollutant that harms the substantive objectives of sharia. *Maqasid* acts as a normative filter that distinguishes between freedom of expression that is beneficial and debate that brings systemic harm, where maintaining the honor of fellow Muslims is seen as equivalent to maintaining the sanctity of religion itself (Farida et al., 2022).

Interpretation of these findings within a theoretical framework demonstrates an organic relationship between *hifz al-din* (protection of religion) and *hifz al-nafs* (protection of the soul) and the intention-based ethics taught by Al-Ghazali. Protecting religion in the context of digital discourse involves not only defending dogma but also safeguarding the integrity of religious messages from distortions generated by emotional debates (Gunawan et al., 2025). On the other hand, *hifz al-nafs* is expanded in scope to protect the mental health and social stability of society from the negative impacts of cyberbullying which is often disguised as religious arguments (Nurfath & Usman, 2025). Thus, the enforcement of *maqasid* in the digital space requires character transformation (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) so that every communication actor has strong self-control (self-restraint), which is an absolute prerequisite for achieving public welfare (Osman et al., 2020).

When compared with previous studies, this article is in line with research that applies *maqasid* as a parameter of social media ethics to mitigate polarization (Arminsyah, 2025). However, there is an important distinction where most contemporary studies tend to focus on external regulations and platform policies, while this study places a sharper emphasis on the synthesis between Al-Ghazali's spiritual pedagogy and the sharia legal framework (Ibrahim et al., 2025). While other studies emphasize the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for religious content

moderation, this study argues that the technology still requires a foundation of human inner ethics to avoid algorithmic bias that can actually exacerbate divisions (Noor et al., 2025). This comparison shows that although technical and legal solutions are very necessary, both will remain dry without a moral reorientation that touches on the dimension of the discourse actors' intentions.

The main scientific contribution of this article is the proposal of a "Systemic-Moral" model that synthesizes the dimensions of *Sufism* (internal) and *Maqasid* (external) as a new evaluative framework in Islamic studies. This novelty lies in the operationalization of Al-Ghazali's concept of *husnul-khulq* into an applicable *maslahat* assessment evaluative framework for assessing the quality of religious communication on social media (Junaidi & Rizka, 2023). By combining the formation of individual inner morals with the macro objectives of sharia, this study bridges the gap between personal ethics and public law that have often been separated in contemporary Islamic thought discourse (El Mazir et al., 2025). This provides a theoretical basis for the development of a more comprehensive digital etiquette education curriculum, which not only teaches technical internet procedures, but also cleansing motivations in spreading religious messages (Hamim & Abdillah, 2023).

Despite offering a strong framework, this study has proportional limitations that need to be acknowledged, especially its purely conceptual-normative nature based on literature. The ethical framework formulated in this article still requires empirical validation through field studies or behavioral experiments to measure its effectiveness in changing user interaction patterns on real digital platforms (Hasan & Anoraga, 2024). In addition, the challenge of implementing this model on a large scale amidst the flow of provocative social media algorithms is a variable that has not been fully explained in this study (Octavianne et al., 2024). These limitations provide room for further research to use mixed methods to test how adab training based on maqasid-Sufism can influence the level of politeness and moderation in certain virtual communities.

As an implication and recommendation, for religious influencers and digital da'wah practitioners, it is highly recommended to adopt Al-Ghazali's principles of tabayyun and politeness by prioritizing corrective private dialogue over embarrassing public debate (Fikri & Indriana, 2025). Policymakers and religious institutions such as the MUI need to formulate more detailed digital etiquette guidelines by including the *tazkiyat al-nafs* dimension as part of national religious literacy. Recommendations for further research are to explore the integration of this model into ethical-by-design technology design in AI-based religious applications to be able to detect and reduce the potential for destructive *jidat* content (Subhan et al., 2025). With these systemic steps, the *khilafiyah* debate can be restored to its function as a space for mercy and variation of thought that reflects the nobility of the goals of sharia.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the escalation of destructive *khilafiyah* debates in the

public sphere, particularly in the digital ecosystem, is rooted in spiritual pathology or the "disease of knowledge" as identified by Al-Ghazali in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*. The findings indicate that *jidal* and *mira'* (debates) driven by the motives of *riya* (showing off), arrogance, and the desire to dominate the interlocutor are ontologically contrary to the principles of Maqasid al-Shariah. Through the lens of protecting religion (*hifz al-din*) and the soul (*hifz al-nafs*), such debates are categorized as actions that harm the objectives of sharia because they obscure the truth and trigger social fragmentation. The ethical reconstruction of *khilafiyah* management requires a paradigm shift from mere contestation of authority to the practice of sincere *munazarah*, where integrity of intention is an absolute prerequisite for achieving public welfare in every religious discussion.

Conceptually, this article makes an important contribution through the synthesis of a "Systemic Moral" model that bridges the personal dimensions of *Sufism* with the objectives of public law. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of Al-Ghazali's inner ethics into the dynamic parameters of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, thus offering a more comprehensive evaluative framework than mere legal regulation or technical content moderation. Its practical contribution is the provision of a normative foundation for the development of "Digital Adab" based on classical Islamic intellectual tradition while remaining relevant to the challenges of contemporary communication. By positioning purification of the heart as an instrument of self-regulation, this article strengthens the literature on Islamic discourse ethics that emphasizes not only the truth of content but also the nobility of manner and sincerity of motivation in interactions.

The implications of this research call for a reorientation in digital religious literacy education that integrates spiritual character building with technological skills. Religious institutions and educators need to develop communication guidelines that emphasize self-control and respect for human dignity as part of upholding sharia in the public sphere. For future research, it is highly recommended to empirically test the effectiveness of this Moral-Systemic model through behavioral studies or artificial intelligence-assisted discourse analysis to detect destructive debate patterns. Developing a methodology capable of operationalizing the variables of intention and benefit within digital algorithms is a crucial step towards realizing a more harmonious, substantive, and transformative religious public sphere.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all parties who contributed to the completion of this research, for their support during the research process, including [access to library resources, administrative assistance, and constructive feedback on earlier drafts of this manuscript].

Authors' Contribution

Novi Fitia Maliha [conceptualized the study, conducted the literature search and

analysis, and drafted the manuscript]. Ahmad Junaidi [contributed to the analytical framework and interpretation of findings, and critically revised the manuscript]. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript. [Please revise to reflect each author's actual contribution.]

AI Generative Statement

The authors declare that generative AI tools were used solely for language refinement, grammar checking, and improving the clarity of expression during the preparation of this manuscript. All core academic activities, including research conceptualization, literature collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and final academic decisions, were conducted independently by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the entire content of this article.

Statement of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest that could have influenced the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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