

SUFISM AND MORAL LEADERSHIP IN ISLAMIC POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT: The Ethical Infrastructure of Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution in North Sumatra

Saipul Bahri, Mohd Syakir Bin Mohd Rosdi

Universiti Sains Malaysia
11800 Minden, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
e-mail: saipulbahri@student.usm.my; mohdsyakir@usm.my

Heri Kusmanto

Universitas Sumatera Utara
Jl. Dr. T. Mansur No. 9, Kampus Padang Bulan, Medan 20155, Indonesia
e-mail: herikusmanto@usu.ac.id

Abstract: This article examines the sufistic thought of Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution and its significance for Islamic political development in North Sumatra. Existing studies on sufism often treat it as a personal spiritual tradition, leaving its role in shaping political ethics and leadership practices underexplored, particularly at the regional level. Employing a qualitative approach based on library research, historical analysis, and in-depth interviews with political and community leaders, this study analyzes how Nasution integrated sufistic values into leadership formation, governance practices, and political regeneration. The findings reveal that sufism in Nasution's thought functions as an ethical infrastructure that underpins Islamic political development through moral leadership formation, disciplined political conduct, service-oriented leadership, and long-term cadreization. By grounding political authority in *tazkiyah al-nafs*, spiritual accountability, and public welfare (*mashlahah*), Nasution's model challenges technocratic and transactional approaches to development. This study contributes to Islamic political studies by repositioning Sufism as a normative and analytical framework for value-based political development in plural Muslim societies.

Keywords: sufism, moral leadership, islamic political development, ethical infrastructure, Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution.

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Introduction

Political development in an Islamic perspective is not merely understood as an effort to improve material welfare, but as a comprehensive process of perfecting human life in all its dimensions spiritual, moral, social, and economic. Islamic development aims to create a just, prosperous, and noble society, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad in building the Madinan community, which emphasized justice, social integration, and collective responsibility in a plural society.¹ Conceptually, this vision of development is rooted in *tauḥîd*, which functions not only as a theological doctrine but also as a comprehensive worldview guiding social organization, governance, and ethical conduct.² In this regard, Islamic development is understood as a process of human transformation grounded in divine unity, aiming to balance worldly needs with spiritual and moral aspirations.³ Such a *tauḥîdî* orientation integrates material progress with moral responsibility, social justice, and sustainable development, ensuring that economic growth, governance, and environmental stewardship remain aligned with Islamic ethical principles.⁴ In the treasury of Islamic thought, Sufism occupies an important position as a discipline that emphasizes the inner dimension of Islam and the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*).⁵

Sufism is primarily concerned with inner transformation through spiritual discipline, moral refinement, and the internalization of divine values, aiming to cultivate individuals who embody ethical integrity and spiritual awareness.⁶ The process of *tazkiyatun nafs* is understood as a systematic effort to cleanse the heart from moral vices and to actualize virtuous character through practices such as *dzikr*, self-examination, and ascetic discipline, which are central to classical and contemporary Sufi traditions.⁷ In this regard, Sufism offers not merely mystical experience, but a comprehensive moral framework that integrates spirituality with ethical conduct and social responsibility.⁸ Al-Attas further emphasizes that true Sufism entails the internalization of divine values within the human soul, producing civilized and morally refined individuals capable of contributing positively to society.⁹ Therefore, Islamic development requires a strong value foundation that integrates external structures and policies with the spiritual and moral strengthening of individuals and communities, positioning sufism as a vital ethical resource in the pursuit of holistic and value-based development. *Tashawwuf* not only teaches personal closeness to God, but also functions as an ethical system that cultivates social awareness, moral responsibility, and leadership grounded in divine values. Through practices such as *dzikr*, spiritual discipline, and moral self-refinement, Sufism emphasizes *iḥsân* as a comprehensive ethical orientation shaping both individual character and social conduct.¹⁰ In contemporary contexts, Sufi teachings have been shown to promote human values, tolerance, and moral engagement with society, thereby fostering ethical leadership and social concern beyond ritual religiosity.¹¹ Historically and socially, Sufism has also played an important role in shaping political awareness and communal organization,

demonstrating its capacity to influence leadership and development processes within Muslim societies. Therefore, *tashauwuf* holds significant potential as a source of ethical and spiritual guidance for development, particularly in contemporary Muslim societies experiencing moral crises, value disorientation, and the erosion of ethical leadership.¹²

One of the important figures who brought the idea of Sufism into the socio-political and developmental realms of Islam was Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution, a Sufi scholar and *tharîqah* leader from Mandailing Natal, North Sumatra. As a spiritual figure as well as a social figure, Sheikh Musthafa Husein saw that development would not be truly successful without moral development and purification of the soul. He emphasises the importance of trustworthy leadership, social justice, and service to the people as a form of worship and manifestation of love for Allah SWT. This is in line with the opinion of Sardar, who states that leaders in Islamic societies must have a strong spiritual dimension in order to be able to build a just and civilised society.¹³ Sheikh Musthafa Husein's thinking departs from the complex social reality of Muslims in North Sumatra, with diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. In the midst of this condition, he called for the importance of spiritualising politics and development as an effort to form a harmonious, just and pious society.¹⁴ According to Zuhdi, contemporary Sufism has the capacity to become a progressive social force if it is released from exclusivism and connected to the socio-political reality of the people.¹⁵

North Sumatra, as a region with high socio-political dynamics, is fertile ground for the development of value-based Islamic development thought and practice. Economic inequality, identity crisis, and weak moral orientation in contemporary politics are big challenges that require a more holistic approach. In this context, the Sufism thought of Sheikh Musthafa Husein becomes relevant to be studied further, not only as a spiritual heritage, but also as an ethical and philosophical offer for humane and transcendental development. This is reinforced by the thoughts of Chittick who states that Sufism has a set of values that are able to answer the challenges of the times, including in the aspects of governance and development.¹⁶

This research aims to dig deeper into the Sufism thought of Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution, and how his ideas can be applied in the context of Islamic development politics in North Sumatra. Using a qualitative approach and an in-depth literature study, this research seeks to answer fundamental questions about how the values of Sufism can be the foundation of development policies that are oriented towards social justice, the welfare of the people, and collective blessings. This research also wants to show that the integration between Sufism and politics is not contradictory, but rather mutually reinforcing in realising the ideals of Islamic development that is *rahmatan lil 'âlamîn*.

However, in the socio-political reality of North Sumatra, Islamic development still faces various complex problems. One of the main problems is the lack of integration between Islamic spiritual values and development policies implemented by the

government and local political actors. According to Fakiḥ, development policies that are not grounded in religious ethics and values tend to generate social inequality and alienate society from the state.¹⁷ Such policies are often trapped in materialistic and technocratic approaches that neglect moral, ethical, and social justice considerations, a critique that is consistent with development ethics literature emphasizing the centrality of values, dignity, and equity in sustainable development.¹⁸ The result is social inequality, a lack of sensitivity to the marginalised, and a crisis of public trust in leaders. In addition, political practices that tend to be transactional and opportunistic have further distanced development goals from noble Islamic values. The culture of corruption, abuse of power, and disregard for the principles of justice (*‘adl*) and trust (*amānah*) constitute major obstacles to the realization of true Islamic development. Corruption and power abuse undermine ethical governance, weaken public institutions, and erode social trust, all of which contradict core Islamic moral teachings.¹⁹ Moreover, persistent injustice and lack of transparency diminish public confidence in governance systems, thereby hindering the holistic development envisioned in Islam, which integrates moral integrity, social welfare, and accountable leadership.²⁰

It is in this context that Sufism thinking, particularly as initiated by Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution, becomes important to be revived and repositioned within contemporary Islamic development discourse. Historically, Sufism has played a significant role in shaping social ethics, religious institutions, and community development across various regions of the Muslim world, including South Asia, West Africa, and Southeast Asia, through its emphasis on moral exemplarity, social harmony, and public welfare.²¹ Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution’s teachings offer a development approach grounded in self-purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), sincerity (*ikhhlâsh*) in public service, and a strong alignment between spiritual values and the welfare of the people, principles that resonate with the ethical foundations of Sufism observed in diverse Islamic societies.²²

In the contemporary era, when Sufism has experienced revitalization and global adaptation particularly as a source of moral guidance, moderation, and social cohesion such values remain highly relevant for addressing modern development challenges.²³ However, despite the well-documented influence of Sufism in fostering moderate, inclusive, and socially engaged Islam in Indonesia and the wider Nusantara region, the intellectual contributions of local figures such as Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution have received limited scholarly attention within academic discussions on Islamic development at the regional level.²⁴ His intellectual and spiritual legacy is more often understood narrowly within the framework of *tharîqah* practices and personal piety, even though his body of thought contains philosophical foundations and forms of social praxis that are highly relevant for rethinking development as an ethical, people-centered, and spiritually grounded process. This gap underscores the need for a systematic academic examination of Nasution’s sufism-based development thinking to enrich contemporary Islamic development studies and regional policy discourse.

The study of political Sufism in Islamic growth and the necessity for spirituality in political reform and community development have grown in the recent decade. Zainuddin's paper compares Imam al-Ghazali's political philosophy to Sufism.²⁵ He stresses that wise leaders must be spiritual to manage power justly and ethically. This notion is important in Islamic moral growth. Syamsuddin says political sufism is a midway ground between secularization of power and religious formality.²⁶ Sufism ideals like honesty, integrity, and *zuhd* protect pro-people, non-corrupt public policies in growth.²⁷

In his national symposium, Anshari explained that sufism is a socio-political ethic as well as a personal mystical experience.²⁸ Spiritual ethics help communities adapt to change and maintain social stability. Habibullah's research inspired Ibn 'Arabi to consider *insân kâmil* as a spiritual leader. He emphasized that ideal Islamic leaders combine spirituality and development strategies.²⁹ This method empowers moral and spiritual society as well as physical infrastructure.³⁰

Fauzan severely explored modern leadership's post-truth failure in another study.³¹ Political sufism raises awareness and strengthens public integrity, thus he proposes it.³² Islamic development believes this strategy may overcome moral and bureaucratic decline. Classically, Harun Nasution in *Islam Rasional* stresses political rationality and ethics.³³ He believes spiritual values in Islam should underpin a decent and progressive civilization, but he does not debate political sufism.³⁴

In the Journal of Islamic Thought, Muslich examines the function of *tharîqah* in grassroots socio-political development from a novel perspective.³⁵ He observed that *tharîqah* organizations in numerous Indonesian regions provide social resilience and economic empowerment.³⁶ Sufi leaders in classical Islamic history built a just, independent, and public good-oriented realm, Idris said.³⁷ These studies suggest that sufi ideals like *ihsân*, *ikhâlâs*, and *adab* are important in developing a development system that value both material and spiritual dimensions.³⁸ Islamic expansion depends on political Sufism. The sufi ideals of justice, honesty, integrity, and modesty support moral leadership and clean government. Studies show that political sufism generates faithful people and a just, ethical, and public-good society. The ethical and spiritual framework of political Sufism can support comprehensive and sustained Islamic development.

Islamic political thought has explored spirituality and development through normative or theological lenses, but local empirical and analytical research are rare. Many Islamic development studies focus on institutional transformation, legal frameworks, or economic redistribution, but disregard the ethical and spiritual basis of leadership and political decision-making. This distinction is most evident in spiritually and socially related North Sumatra. Rituals, mystical ideas, and individual piety characterize Sufism as a spiritual journey rather than a socio-political framework in literature. Recent political Sufism and spiritually grounded leadership literature has focused on classical personalities or national movements, ignoring local *'ulamâ's* intellectual contributions. Sufism's ethical role in regional political development is understudied.

Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution represents a significant yet understudied figure in this regard. His intellectual legacy demonstrates how sufistic values such as *tazkiyah al-nafs*, sincerity (*ikhhlâsh*), trust (*amânah*), and service to the people (*khidmah al-ummah*) can be translated into concrete practices of leadership, cadre formation, and community development. Nasution proposes a spiritual discipline and moral responsibility-based model of Islamic political growth that opposes technocratic and formalistic interpretations of Islamic politics.

Method

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach chosen for its ability to understand social phenomena in depth, especially those related to the values of political sufism in Islamic development in North Sumatra. According to Moleong, a descriptive qualitative approach is very appropriate to describe the conditions and meaning of a phenomenon as a whole based on field data,³⁹ while Creswell asserts that qualitative research focuses on exploring the meaning and experience that is difficult to measure quantitatively, especially in cultural and spiritual contexts.⁴⁰

In collecting data, this study utilised primary data obtained through in-depth interviews with tarekat leaders, scholars, academics, and local officials who understand the relationship between Sufism, politics, and community development. Participatory observation was also conducted in tarekat activities and *dzikir* assemblies as part of the triangulation technique to ensure data validity. Secondary data in the form of documentation studies, books, scientific articles, and regional policies are also important sources to enrich understanding. According to Sugiyono, the triangulation technique by combining interviews, observation, and documentation is an effective strategy to maintain data validity in qualitative research.⁴¹

Results and Discussion

This section analyzes the empirical findings and situates them within contemporary debates on Islamic leadership, political Sufism, and value-based development. Rather than merely describing Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution's role as a religious leader, the discussion highlights how his sufistic thought operates as a practical ethical framework that shapes leadership behavior, political engagement, and development practices in North Sumatra.

Sufism and Moral Leadership Formation

Empirical evidence from in-depth interviews with regional leaders and community figures in North Sumatra strongly supports this conceptualization. One key informant, Gus Irawan, Regent of South Tapanuli Regency, emphasized that leadership without spiritual purification is inherently fragile and prone to moral failure: "*He strongly believed that true leadership must begin with self-purification, or tazkiyah al-nafs. Without cleansing the heart and disciplining the soul, a leader would easily fall into the traps of ego, power, and greed. For him, spirituality wasn't optional; it was foundational.*" (Sipirok, March 2025).

Further interview data reveal a consistent pattern among leaders influenced by Nasution's sufistic teachings. Informants described such leaders as more cautious in exercising authority, more responsive to social justice concerns, and more inclined toward deliberative and inclusive decision-making. This moral orientation contrasts sharply with transactional leadership models that prioritize short-term political gains over ethical consistency. The findings suggest that spiritual discipline within the Naqsyabandiyah tradition cultivates a form of moral self-regulation that shapes leadership behavior across political and social contexts.

From an analytical perspective, these findings reinforce recent studies on spiritually grounded and qalb-centered leadership, which argue that the inner moral state of leaders plays a decisive role in determining public trust, social harmony, and ethical governance.⁴² Nasution's emphasis on humility, sincerity (*ikhhlâsh*), and God-consciousness (*taqwâ*) situates leadership within a dual framework of accountability: vertical accountability to God and horizontal responsibility to society. This dual accountability distinguishes sufistic leadership from secular or purely technocratic leadership models that rely predominantly on institutional control and legal sanctions.

Moreover, the findings demonstrate that moral leadership formation grounded in Sufism offers a normative response to the moral crisis often associated with contemporary political practice. In political environments characterized by pragmatism, opportunism, and transactional competition, Nasution's model underscores the necessity of cultivating leaders whose authority is ethically restrained by spiritual awareness. The empirical evidence suggests that such leaders are better positioned to maintain integrity, foster public trust, and promote social cohesion. Consequently, Sufism-based moral leadership formation emerges as a central pillar of Islamic political development, positioning spiritual discipline not as an accessory to governance, but as its ethical foundation.

Sufistic Practice as Political and Social Discipline

As explained by Gus Irawan, Regent of South Tapanuli Regency: "...*Spiritual training in the tarekat taught us to slow down before making decisions. Dhikr and muraqabah create inner calm, so leaders do not react emotionally or politically for short-term interests.*" (Sipirok, March 2025).

This statement illustrates that sufistic practice directly influences political behavior by fostering emotional stability and reflective decision-making. Analytically, this finding indicates that spiritual discipline operates as a preventive mechanism against impulsive and opportunistic political action, reinforcing ethical restraint in governance.

Further interviews conducted in Deli Serdang and Padangsidempuan reveal a consistent pattern among leaders who actively participate in dhikr assemblies and tarekat coaching. One community leader noted: "*Leaders who regularly attend dhikr gatherings are usually more patient in handling disputes. They prefer dialogue and deliberation rather than using authority or pressure.*" (Padangsidempuan, Oktober 2025).

This empirical pattern suggests that sufistic practice cultivates deliberative dispositions essential for managing political tension and social conflict in plural societies. The internalization of patience (*shabr*) and humility (*tawâdhu'*) through spiritual exercises enables leaders to engage in inclusive decision-making processes rather than coercive governance. Qualitative data from the Naqsyabandiyah tarekat community in Medan further demonstrate that *murâqabah* functions as a continuous ethical reminder in leadership practice. As one *tharîqah* elder explained: "... *We are taught to always be aware that God sees our intentions. This awareness makes leaders careful with public funds, policies, and promises to the people...*" (Medan, Oktober 2025).

Analytically, *murâqabah* embeds accountability within the conscience of leaders, reducing dependence on external monitoring and legal enforcement. This internalized form of discipline is particularly significant in political environments where institutional oversight is weak or inconsistently applied. In addition to shaping individual conduct, sufistic discipline also influences collective governance practices. Interviews indicate that leaders shaped by Nasution's teachings tend to integrate ethical considerations into community development programs. For instance, empowerment initiatives initiated by tarekat-affiliated leaders often combine economic assistance with moral education and character development. This reflects a shared belief that material development without ethical grounding risks producing social imbalance and moral decline.

From an analytical perspective, these findings support the argument that Sufism functions as an ethical infrastructure within Islamic political development. Unlike formal regulatory systems that rely primarily on sanctions, sufistic practice embeds discipline within the moral consciousness of leaders through sustained spiritual awareness (*taqwâ*). This internal governance mechanism mitigates corruption, abuse of power, and short-term political pragmatism, while fostering trust, legitimacy, and social cohesion. In sum, the integration of sufistic practice into leadership formation demonstrates how spirituality can be transformed into a practical mechanism of ethical self-governance. Nasution's model shows that Islamic political development grounded in sufistic discipline is not limited to institutional effectiveness, but is deeply concerned with cultivating moral resilience, public trust, and long-term political stability.

Leadership as Service and Conflict Mediation

As explained by Harun Mustofa, a community figure from Mandailing Natal: "*In conflicts, tharîqah leaders do not come as politicians or power holders. They come as servants of the people. Their task is to cool down emotions, listen to all sides, and guide the community toward justice and peace.*" (Mandailing Natal, November 2025).

This statement illustrates how leadership grounded in sufistic ethics reframes political authority as mediation and service. Analytically, this approach allows leaders to function as trusted intermediaries whose legitimacy is rooted in moral credibility rather

than formal office. Field data further confirm the effectiveness of this model in resolving concrete conflicts. In land disputes involving Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Medan and surrounding areas in 2018, tarekat leaders influenced by Nasution's teachings played an active role in facilitating dialogue and preventing escalation. As recalled by one informant: "...They didn't act as politicians. They invited all parties to sit together, emphasized patience and justice, and reminded everyone that peace benefits the whole community." (Medan, Oktober 2025).

Analytically, this pattern demonstrates that sufistic leadership provides a form of moral authority capable of transcending ethnic, religious, and political boundaries. The emphasis on patience (*shabr*), deliberation (*syârâ*), and justice enables tarekat leaders to address conflicts in a way that formal political actors often cannot, particularly in plural societies where political legitimacy is contested. Further interviews conducted in Langkat and Deli Serdang districts reveal similar dynamics in inter-community and socio-economic disputes. Tarekat leaders are frequently invited to mediate conflicts arising from economic inequality, land ownership, and social tension. One community leader from Langkat noted: "...People trust tarekat leaders because they are seen as neutral and morally consistent. They are not suspected of having political or economic interests." (Langkat, Oktober 2025).

This trust is a crucial analytical finding. It indicates that sufistic leadership generates what can be described as moral legitimacy, a form of authority derived from ethical consistency and spiritual credibility. Such legitimacy allows leaders to facilitate dialogue and reconciliation in situations where state institutions or political actors may be viewed with suspicion. Beyond conflict mediation, service-oriented leadership is also evident in community development initiatives promoted by tarekat-affiliated leaders. Interviews indicate that these leaders prioritize education, social assistance, and empowerment programs oriented toward public welfare (*mashlahah*). Rather than focusing solely on material outcomes, these initiatives emphasize social justice, compassion, and collective responsibility. This reinforces the notion that leadership as service extends beyond crisis management to long-term social development.

From an analytical perspective, these findings highlight the contribution of political Sufism to social cohesion and political stability. Leadership grounded in service and moral authority complements formal governance structures by addressing the ethical and relational dimensions of political life. In plural and dynamic contexts such as North Sumatra, this form of leadership plays a critical role in maintaining harmony and preventing the escalation of conflict. In sum, Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution's conception of leadership as service demonstrates how sufistic ethics can be translated into practical mechanisms of conflict mediation and community governance. By prioritizing humility, dialogue, and public welfare, sufistic leadership functions as a stabilizing force within Islamic political development, reinforcing justice, trust, and social harmony as foundational elements of sustainable governance.

Political Cadreization and Ethical Regeneration

Empirical evidence highlights the establishment of the Musthafawiyah Islamic Boarding School in Purba Baru as a key institutional site for this ethical regeneration process. Through integrated education combining religious knowledge, spiritual discipline, and community engagement, Nasution cultivated cadres who later played influential roles in major Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama, Al-Washliyah, and Muhammadiyah in North Sumatra. This institutional framework demonstrates how political cadreization was embedded within a broader civilizational project aimed at sustaining Islamic values across generations. Interview data from younger figures and community leaders further illuminate the ethical orientation of this cadreization model. As stated by Dadang Pasaribu, a young political and community figure in North Sumatra:

“He believed political cadre formation must begin with deep religious education and a strong moral foundation. At Musthafawiyah, students were not only trained intellectually, but also spiritually through *dzikr*, *murâqabah*, and close mentorship. Leadership was taught as a trust from Allah that demands sincerity and self-awareness.” (Medan, October 2025).

This testimony illustrates that spiritual discipline was systematically integrated into leadership training, shaping cadres who internalized humility, discipline, and social responsibility. Analytically, this finding suggests that Nasution’s cadreization model prioritizes ethical maturity over short-term political effectiveness, distinguishing it from pragmatic recruitment practices common in contemporary political systems. Further interviews reveal that long-term mentoring and moral supervision played a crucial role in sustaining ethical consistency among cadres. Unlike formal leadership training programs that focus primarily on technical skills, Nasution’s approach emphasized continuous character formation through daily spiritual routines and close interaction with senior scholars. This process enabled cadres to develop resilience against political pressure, opportunism, and ideological compromise.

From an analytical perspective, this model aligns with contemporary Islamic-oriented leadership frameworks that emphasize holistic education, moral integrity, and visionary governance as prerequisites for sustainable political development.⁴³ Political regeneration, in this context, is conceived not as a linear transfer of power but as a socio-cultural process that embeds Islamic ethics within institutional and communal structures. However, the findings also reveal significant challenges to ethical political regeneration in modern contexts. Interviews and secondary data indicate that secular political hegemony and pragmatic competition often marginalize value-based leadership formation. Islamic political actors are frequently compelled to adopt transactional strategies to survive within competitive political arenas, resulting in ethical dilution and weakened ideological consistency.⁴⁴ In addition, the absence of structured and institutionalized cadreization mechanisms within many Islamic political organizations has led to fragmented leadership pipelines and inconsistent regeneration outcomes.

Analytically, these challenges underscore the relevance of Nasution's model as a normative alternative to contemporary political pragmatism. By emphasizing ethical regeneration rooted in spiritual discipline and institutional continuity, his approach offers a framework for sustaining Islamic political development in the face of modern political pressures. The findings suggest that successful political regeneration requires not only organizational capacity but also a deeply internalized ethical foundation capable of guiding leaders through complex and competitive political environments. In sum, political cadreization in Syech Musthafa Husein Nasution's thought represents a distinctive model of Islamic political development that prioritizes ethical regeneration, social justice, and people-centered empowerment. By integrating spiritual discipline, moral education, and long-term mentoring, this model contributes to the formation of resilient and integrity-driven leadership, reinforcing the ethical foundations necessary for sustainable Islamic governance.

Sufism as Ethical Infrastructure of Islamic Political Development

Leaders are trained to perceive power as a trust (*amânah*) rather than a means of domination, embedding vertical accountability to God and horizontal responsibility to society within their political actions. This moral orientation directly addresses the ethical deficits often associated with contemporary political practice.

Second, sufistic practice functions as a form of political and social discipline that regulates behavior at both individual and collective levels. Through *dzikr*, *muraqabah*, and continuous spiritual self-surveillance, leaders internalize ethical restraint that moderates ambition, emotional reactivity, and opportunistic decision-making. The empirical findings demonstrate that this internal governance mechanism complements, and in some cases compensates for, the limitations of formal institutional control, particularly in plural and politically competitive environments. Third, Nasution's approach institutionalizes ethical regeneration through long-term cadreization processes centered on education, mentorship, and spiritual discipline. The Musthafawiyah Islamic Boarding School serves not merely as an educational institution, but as a site of moral reproduction where Islamic values are transmitted across generations. Political regeneration, therefore, is understood not as a short-term succession of power, but as a sustained ethical project aimed at producing leaders capable of navigating modern political challenges without sacrificing moral integrity.

Analytically, this integrated model challenges dominant paradigms of political development that prioritize technocratic efficiency, legal formalism, or material growth while marginalizing ethical and spiritual dimensions. The findings suggest that development policies and governance structures lacking moral foundations are vulnerable to corruption, social fragmentation, and declining public trust. By contrast, Nasution's political Sufism demonstrates how ethical infrastructure rooted in local religious traditions can enhance legitimacy, social cohesion, and long-term political stability.

Furthermore, this synthesis highlights the relevance of political Sufism in plural societies such as North Sumatra. The moral authority generated through sufistic leadership enables leaders to function as mediators, facilitators, and servants of the people across ethnic and religious boundaries. This capacity is particularly significant in contexts where formal political authority alone is insufficient to manage diversity and social tension. Sufism, in this sense, provides not only ethical guidance but also relational resources essential for inclusive governance. In sum, Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution's political Sufism offers a context-sensitive model of Islamic political development grounded in ethical infrastructure rather than coercive power. By integrating spiritual discipline, moral leadership, and institutional continuity, this model positions sufism as a vital normative resource for addressing contemporary political challenges. The synthesis of these findings affirms that Islamic political development, when anchored in ethical infrastructure, is better equipped to realize justice, public welfare (*mashlahah*), and sustainable social harmony.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution's sufistic thought constitutes a coherent and context-sensitive framework for Islamic political development in North Sumatra. Rather than positioning Sufism as a purely spiritual or ritual tradition, the findings reveal that Nasution integrated tasawuf into the ethical foundations of leadership, governance, and social development. Central to this framework is the principle of *tazkiyah al-nafs*, which functions as the moral starting point of political authority, ensuring that leadership is exercised as a trust (*amânah*) grounded in spiritual accountability and social responsibility.

The analysis shows that Sufism operates through multiple, interconnected dimensions within Islamic political development. First, it shapes moral leadership formation by cultivating inner discipline, humility, and God-consciousness (*taqwâ*), enabling leaders to resist egoism, power abuse, and material ambition. Second, sufistic practices such as *dzikr* and *murâqabah* function as mechanisms of political and social discipline, embedding ethical self-regulation within everyday governance practices. Third, leadership is conceptualized as service (*khâdim al-ummah*), which allows sufistic leaders to act as mediators and facilitators of peace in plural and conflict-prone contexts. Finally, Nasution institutionalized ethical regeneration through long-term cadreization processes centered on education, mentorship, and spiritual formation, particularly through the Musthafawiyah Islamic Boarding School.

Practically, the findings carry important implications for contemporary Islamic governance and development policy. Leadership training, political education, and cadre regeneration programs in Muslim societies particularly at the regional and local levels should integrate moral and spiritual formation alongside technical competence. In plural

societies such as North Sumatra, Sufism-based ethical leadership offers a viable approach to strengthening legitimacy, managing diversity, and preventing socio-political conflict. Local governments, Islamic institutions, and educational organizations may draw upon Nasution's model to design development strategies that are culturally rooted, ethically grounded, and people-centered.

Finally, this study opens avenues for future research on the role of local 'ulamâ', Sufi traditions, and ethical leadership models in Islamic political development across different regions and historical contexts. Comparative studies examining various *tharîqah* traditions and their engagement with politics may further enrich understanding of how spirituality and governance intersect in Muslim societies. By highlighting the enduring relevance of Sheikh Musthafa Husein Nasution's political Sufism, this research affirms that Islamic political development grounded in ethical infrastructure is better equipped to realize a just, humane, and sustainable political order *rahmatan lil 'âlamîn*.

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