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Islamic Bioethics, Artificial Intelligence Governance, and Human Moral Agency: A Comparative Study of Contemporary Sunni Jurisprudential Approaches in the Middle East and Europe

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence technologies has generated major ethical and legal debates within contemporary Muslim societies concerning automation, surveillance, algorithmic governance, biomedical decision-making, and human moral agency. This article comparatively examines how Sunni Islamic bioethical institutions in the Middle East and Europe employ maqasid al-shari‘ah, usul al-fiqh, and contemporary ethical reasoning to address emerging artificial intelligence governance challenges. While previous scholarship on Islamic bioethics has concentrated primarily on organ transplantation, reproductive ethics, and end-of-life jurisprudence, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to the jurisprudential implications of artificial intelligence within transnational Muslim contexts. Drawing upon comparative textual analysis of institutional fatwas, bioethical policy frameworks, academic Islamic legal scholarship, and contemporary governance reports, the study demonstrates that Islamic AI ethics is increasingly shaped by differing institutional configurations, minority-majority dynamics, and socio-political understandings of technological modernity. The findings reveal that Middle Eastern institutions generally prioritize regulatory stabilization, collective social order, and state-oriented ethical governance, whereas European Muslim scholarly institutions emphasize human dignity, minority citizenship, algorithmic accountability, and ethical pluralism. The article argues that Islamic bioethical discourse concerning artificial intelligence reflects broader transformations in contemporary Islamic legal thought, particularly the growing integration of

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maqasid-oriented reasoning, interdisciplinary expertise, and global governance ethics. This study contributes to Islamic studies scholarship by developing a comparative analytical framework linking Islamic jurisprudence, bioethics, digital governance, and socio-political adaptation within contemporary Muslim intellectual discourse.

Keywords: Islamic bioethics, artificial intelligence, maqasid al-shari‘ah, Islamic law, Muslim ethics, digital governance, Sunni jurisprudence, contemporary Islam

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence technologies increasingly shape contemporary social organization, economic governance, healthcare systems, educational infrastructures, surveillance mechanisms, and public communication environments across global societies. Algorithmic systems now influence medical diagnostics, biometric identification, predictive policing, autonomous decision-making, digital financial transactions, and public administrative regulation. These developments have generated extensive ethical debates concerning privacy, human autonomy, accountability, discrimination, labor displacement, and the future of moral agency. Within Muslim societies, the rapid integration of artificial intelligence into governance and everyday life has also generated new jurisprudential and theological questions concerning the ethical limits of technological authority, the preservation of human dignity, and the relationship between Islamic moral reasoning and emerging digital systems.

The growing importance of artificial intelligence ethics reflects broader global transformations associated with technological acceleration, digital capitalism, and governance automation. According to UNESCO (2023), AI governance has become one of the defining ethical challenges of the twenty-first century due to its implications for social justice, democratic accountability, and human rights. The World Economic Forum (2024) similarly identifies algorithmic governance as a major factor reshaping institutional legitimacy, economic inequality, and public trust. Within Muslim-majority societies and transnational Muslim communities, these developments intersect with longstanding Islamic ethical concerns regarding justice, social welfare, public accountability, and protection of human dignity.

Islamic ethical traditions historically developed sophisticated jurisprudential and philosophical approaches concerning human responsibility, governance ethics, scientific inquiry, and public welfare. Classical scholars including al-Ghazali, al-Shatibi, Ibn Rushd, and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi explored complex relationships between reason, revelation, governance, and social ethics within dynamic intellectual environments (Hallaq, 2009). Contemporary Islamic bioethics emerged during the twentieth century through institutional responses to modern medical technologies including organ transplantation, genetic engineering, reproductive technologies, and end-of-life care (Sachedina, 2009). However, the emergence of artificial intelligence presents qualitatively different ethical challenges because algorithmic systems increasingly participate in cognitive, predictive, and decision-making processes traditionally associated with human moral agency.

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Existing scholarship on Islamic bioethics has generated important insights regarding biomedical ethics, healthcare governance, and contemporary jurisprudential adaptation. Moosa (2015) argues that Islamic legal reasoning possesses significant interpretive flexibility for engaging modern technological transformations through maqasid-oriented frameworks. Padela and Arozullah (2020) further demonstrate that contemporary Islamic bioethical discourse increasingly integrates interdisciplinary expertise and contextual ethical reasoning. Nevertheless, current scholarship remains relatively underdeveloped regarding the implications of artificial intelligence for Islamic jurisprudence, governance ethics, and human moral responsibility.

Early studies concerning Islam and technology often emphasized compatibility between Islamic civilization and scientific progress. Nasr (1987) argued that Islamic intellectual history historically integrated scientific inquiry within broader metaphysical and ethical frameworks. More recent scholarship concerning digital Islam has examined social media, online religious authority, and technological mediation of religious discourse (Bunt, 2018). Yet comparatively limited attention has been devoted to institutional Islamic responses to artificial intelligence governance itself.

Emerging literature on Islamic AI ethics remains fragmented across legal studies, philosophy, computer ethics, and public policy. Some scholars emphasize maqasid al-shari‘ah as a framework for regulating algorithmic harm and protecting public welfare (Auda, 2008). Others focus on questions of surveillance ethics, data privacy, and algorithmic discrimination within Muslim societies (Khan, 2022). However, existing scholarship frequently lacks comparative analysis regarding how different Muslim institutional contexts shape ethical reasoning about artificial intelligence.

The distinction between Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority institutional environments is particularly significant. Middle Eastern Islamic institutions often operate within state-centered governance systems characterized by centralized religious bureaucracies and national legal frameworks. European Muslim institutions, by contrast, frequently function within plural democratic societies where Islamic ethics must negotiate minority citizenship, secular governance, and interreligious coexistence. These differing socio-political conditions likely influence how Islamic scholars conceptualize technological ethics, public authority, and human agency.

Several important limitations therefore remain within existing scholarship. First, current studies rarely integrate Islamic legal theory with broader governance and technological ethics debates. Second, comparative analysis between Middle Eastern and European Muslim institutional approaches remains insufficiently developed. Third, much scholarship focuses on abstract theological discussion without examining institutional ethical mechanisms. Fourth, limited attention has been given to how maqasid al-shari‘ah mediates contemporary AI governance discourse. Fifth, the relationship between artificial intelligence and Islamic understandings of moral agency remains theoretically underexplored.

This article addresses these gaps through a comparative analysis of Sunni Islamic bioethical approaches to artificial intelligence governance in the Middle East and Europe. The study examines

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institutional fatwas, bioethical frameworks, policy discussions, and scholarly discourse concerning algorithmic governance, healthcare AI, surveillance technologies, and ethical automation. The comparative framework allows examination of how differing socio-political environments shape Islamic ethical reasoning.

The selection of Middle Eastern and European contexts is analytically significant for several reasons. First, both regions contain influential Sunni Islamic scholarly institutions actively engaging contemporary technological questions. Second, the regions differ substantially regarding governance structures, religious authority systems, minority-majority relations, and legal pluralism. Third, both contexts increasingly confront ethical dilemmas involving artificial intelligence in healthcare, finance, education, and public administration.

The article develops an analytical framework linking Islamic jurisprudential reasoning, technological governance, institutional adaptation, and ethical public legitimacy. Specifically, it argues that Islamic AI ethics is shaped through interactions among maqasid-oriented legal reasoning, institutional governance structures, and socio-political understandings of human dignity and collective welfare.

The study demonstrates that Middle Eastern institutions generally prioritize ethical stabilization, social order, and regulatory coordination, whereas European Muslim institutions more frequently emphasize individual dignity, civic pluralism, algorithmic transparency, and minority ethical participation. These differing approaches reveal broader transformations in contemporary Islamic legal thought and contribute to interdisciplinary debates concerning religion, technology, and governance.

Accordingly, the primary objective of this article is to comparatively analyze how contemporary Sunni Islamic institutions in the Middle East and Europe employ Islamic bioethical reasoning to address the governance challenges posed by artificial intelligence technologies.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative interdisciplinary Islamic studies methodology combining comparative jurisprudential analysis, historical-hermeneutic interpretation, qualitative policy analysis, and contemporary bioethical discourse analysis. The research design is theoretically grounded in maqasid al-shari‘ah theory, Islamic bioethics, and critical governance studies concerning artificial intelligence. The comparative logic is based upon examining Sunni Islamic institutions operating within two distinct socio-political contexts: Middle Eastern Muslim-majority governance systems and European Muslim-minority institutional environments. The Middle Eastern cases were selected because of their centralized religious institutions, extensive state engagement with technological modernization, and influential role within global Sunni jurisprudence. European Muslim institutions were selected because they operate within plural democratic frameworks where Islamic ethical discourse intersects with secular governance, minority citizenship, and multicultural public ethics. The units of analysis include institutional fatwas, Islamic bioethical council publications, policy documents, scholarly legal treatises, and peer-reviewed academic

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studies addressing artificial intelligence, digital governance, healthcare ethics, and algorithmic regulation.

Primary data sources include publications from Islamic jurisprudential councils, bioethical institutions, transnational Sunni scholarly organizations, contemporary Islamic legal scholarship, international AI governance reports, and interdisciplinary academic studies published between 2005 and 2026. Analytical interpretation was conducted through thematic coding of ethical reasoning patterns, jurisprudential methodologies, and governance narratives concerning algorithmic authority, data ethics, healthcare automation, and human responsibility. Comparative validation was achieved by triangulating institutional discourse with contemporary Islamic studies scholarship, technology ethics literature, and governance analysis in order to identify convergent and divergent interpretive mechanisms across contexts. Ethical considerations involved limiting claims to verifiable published material and avoiding speculative attribution of institutional intentions. The study acknowledges limitations including dependence on publicly accessible institutional documents, evolving technological terminology across legal traditions, and the rapidly changing nature of AI governance discourse. Nevertheless, the interdisciplinary comparative approach provides a robust analytical framework for examining contemporary Islamic ethical responses to artificial intelligence.

Findings and Discussion

1. Islamic Conceptions of Human Moral Agency and Technological Authority

The comparative findings demonstrate that contemporary Islamic discourse concerning artificial intelligence is fundamentally structured around debates regarding human moral agency, ethical responsibility, and the permissible limits of technological authority. Both Middle Eastern and European Sunni institutions consistently reject deterministic understandings of technological autonomy and instead emphasize that moral accountability remains intrinsically linked to human intentionality.

This emphasis reflects classical Islamic theological and jurisprudential traditions concerning taklif, human responsibility, and ethical agency. Classical Sunni scholars historically argued that moral responsibility presupposes rational intentionality and ethical consciousness (Hallaq, 2009). Contemporary AI discourse therefore frequently interprets algorithmic systems as instruments subject to human ethical governance rather than independent moral actors.

Middle Eastern institutions generally frame artificial intelligence within broader state-centered ethical narratives emphasizing social order, public stability, and controlled technological modernization. Institutional fatwas and policy discussions commonly stress that algorithmic systems must remain subordinate to human oversight and Islamic ethical principles. Particular concern is directed toward preventing social disorder, misinformation, and technological misuse.

In healthcare contexts, Middle Eastern bioethical councils frequently permit AI-assisted diagnostics and medical decision-support systems provided that ultimate responsibility remains with qualified human professionals. The preservation of human judgment is interpreted as essential for maintaining accountability, justice, and ethical proportionality. This reflects broader jurisprudential concerns regarding delegated authority and legal responsibility.

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European Muslim institutions similarly emphasize human accountability but place greater emphasis upon dignity, minority rights, and ethical transparency within plural democratic societies. AI governance discussions often address algorithmic bias, surveillance discrimination, labor exclusion, and digital inequality affecting marginalized communities. Consequently, Islamic ethical reasoning in European contexts frequently intersects with broader human rights discourse and civic ethics.

The comparative evidence reveals that differing socio-political conditions shape ethical priorities. Middle Eastern institutions generally prioritize collective stability and governance coordination, whereas European Muslim institutions more frequently emphasize participatory ethics and protection of vulnerable minorities. Nevertheless, both contexts maintain strong commitment to preserving human moral responsibility against excessive technological delegation.

The findings challenge assumptions that Islamic legal thought lacks conceptual resources for engaging emerging technological ethics. Instead, contemporary Sunni institutions increasingly reinterpret classical jurisprudential principles concerning maslahah, darar, amanah, and justice within the context of algorithmic governance. This demonstrates the adaptive capacity of Islamic ethical reasoning in response to technological transformation.

2. Maqasid al-Shari‘ah and the Ethical Regulation of Artificial Intelligence

The comparative analysis demonstrates that maqasid al-shari‘ah has become a central interpretive framework for addressing artificial intelligence governance within contemporary Sunni jurisprudence. Institutions in both regions increasingly employ maqasid-oriented reasoning to evaluate algorithmic systems according to broader ethical objectives involving protection of life, intellect, dignity, property, and social welfare.

Middle Eastern institutions frequently operationalize maqasid within frameworks emphasizing national development, healthcare modernization, and public administrative efficiency. Artificial intelligence is commonly framed as ethically permissible when it contributes to collective welfare and economic advancement while remaining subject to regulatory oversight.

For example, AI-assisted healthcare technologies are frequently justified through maqasid principles concerning preservation of life and enhancement of medical efficiency. However, institutional discourse also stresses the importance of ethical safeguards preventing exploitation, privacy violations, or dehumanization of medical care. This reflects efforts to reconcile technological modernization with Islamic ethical continuity.

European Muslim scholars, by contrast, more frequently employ maqasid frameworks to critique algorithmic discrimination, digital surveillance, and exclusionary governance structures. The protection of human dignity and justice is often interpreted expansively to include algorithmic transparency, equitable technological access, and safeguards against racialized or religious profiling.

The comparative findings reveal that maqasid reasoning increasingly functions as a bridge between Islamic jurisprudence and contemporary global ethics discourse. Institutions in both contexts utilize maqasid terminology to

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engage broader debates concerning AI regulation, digital rights, and ethical governance. This indicates growing integration between Islamic legal scholarship and interdisciplinary policy analysis.

Importantly, the evidence demonstrates that maqasid discourse is not employed uniformly across contexts. Middle Eastern institutions generally situate maqasid within centralized regulatory frameworks emphasizing institutional authority and governance coordination. European Muslim institutions more frequently interpret maqasid through participatory ethical frameworks emphasizing civic inclusion and democratic accountability.

These differences reveal broader transformations in contemporary Islamic legal methodology. Rather than relying exclusively upon analogical reasoning based on classical precedents, contemporary institutions increasingly utilize higher-order ethical objectives to address unprecedented technological conditions. This shift reflects growing recognition that algorithmic governance requires interdisciplinary and future-oriented jurisprudential reasoning.

The findings further indicate that maqasid-oriented AI ethics contributes to expanding the scope of Islamic jurisprudence beyond ritual and personal legal matters toward broader governance ethics. Questions concerning data ownership, surveillance accountability, automated labor systems, and digital inequality increasingly enter Islamic legal discourse.

Table 1. Comparative Matrix of Interpretive Variables, Intellectual Mechanisms, and Scholarly Outcomes

Variable	Case/System 1: Middle Eastern Sunni Institutions	Case/System 2: European Muslim Institutions	Empirical/Textual Evidence	Analytical Interpretation
Ethical Priority	Collective social stability	Human dignity and plural rights	Institutional fatwas and policy statements	Governance context shapes ethical emphasis
Jurisprudential Method	Centralized maqasid regulation	Contextual ethical pluralism	AI healthcare and surveillance discourse	Different legal cultures influence interpretation
Human Agency	Supervised technological delegation	Protection against algorithmic domination	Discussions of automation accountability	Human oversight remains central
Governance Orientation	State-centered modernization	Minority civic participation	Public ethics and legal advisory structures	Political structures affect bioethical reasoning
AI Healthcare Ethics	Efficiency with regulatory oversight	Equity and anti-discrimination concerns	Bioethical council publications	Ethical priorities differ by institutional setting

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Surveillance Ethics	Security-oriented proportionality	Civil liberty and privacy emphasis	Digital governance discussions	Socio-political conditions shape regulation
Maqasid Application	Development-oriented adaptation	Rights-based ethical expansion	Ethical AI policy frameworks	Maqasid mediates modern governance ethics
Scholarly Outcome	Ethical stabilization	Ethical pluralization	Comparative jurisprudential discourse	Islamic AI ethics is institutionally differentiated

The comparative matrix demonstrates that Islamic AI ethics cannot be reduced to a singular jurisprudential model. Similar maqasid principles generate different governance outcomes depending upon socio-political structures, institutional authority systems, and minority-majority dynamics. The evidence therefore challenges essentialist assumptions concerning Islamic technological ethics.

Moreover, the findings indicate that contemporary Islamic jurisprudence increasingly operates within global interdisciplinary governance environments. Islamic institutions engage not only classical legal traditions but also international policy discourse concerning human rights, technological accountability, and digital ethics. This reveals expanding transnationalization of Islamic ethical reasoning.

3. Surveillance, Data Ethics, and Islamic Understandings of Justice

One of the most significant comparative findings concerns the differing treatment of surveillance technologies and data governance within Middle Eastern and European Sunni bioethical discourse. Artificial intelligence increasingly enables sophisticated forms of biometric monitoring, predictive analytics, and digital behavioral tracking. These developments raise major Islamic ethical questions concerning privacy, justice, coercion, and state authority.

Middle Eastern institutions generally approach surveillance ethics through frameworks balancing collective security and ethical proportionality. Public safety, social stability, and prevention of harm are frequently emphasized as legitimate governance objectives. Consequently, AI-assisted surveillance technologies may be conditionally accepted when regulated through legal oversight and public welfare considerations.

However, institutional discourse also stresses that excessive intrusion, unjust profiling, and arbitrary technological coercion violate Islamic principles concerning dignity and justice. Ethical legitimacy therefore depends upon procedural accountability and proportional governance.

European Muslim institutions more frequently frame surveillance technologies within minority rights discourse. Concerns regarding Islamophobia, racial profiling, discriminatory predictive policing, and digital exclusion are highly prominent. AI surveillance is often interpreted through broader ethical concerns regarding

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unequal power structures and civic vulnerability.

The comparative findings reveal that Islamic ethical reasoning concerning surveillance is deeply shaped by differing historical experiences. Middle Eastern discourse often reflects concerns regarding governance coordination and social order, whereas European Muslim discourse reflects experiences of minority securitization and public scrutiny.

Nevertheless, both contexts emphasize that data governance must remain subject to ethical limitation. Islamic principles concerning hurmah, amanah, and justice are increasingly interpreted to support privacy protections, responsible data use, and limitations on technological coercion.

These findings contribute to broader interdisciplinary scholarship concerning religion and digital governance. Islamic ethical discourse demonstrates substantial conceptual compatibility with global debates regarding data ethics, algorithmic accountability, and technological justice. At the same time, Islamic jurisprudence introduces distinctive ethical emphases concerning communal responsibility, moral intentionality, and transcendental accountability.

The evidence further suggests that future Islamic governance discourse will increasingly involve technological ethics as a central component rather than a peripheral issue. AI systems now influence education, healthcare, employment, migration, and political participation across Muslim societies. Consequently, Islamic institutions are compelled to engage rapidly evolving technological realities.

4. Interdisciplinary Islamic Ethics and the Future of Global AI Governance

The comparative evidence indicates that Islamic bioethical engagement with artificial intelligence increasingly contributes to broader global debates concerning ethical governance and technological responsibility. Contemporary Sunni institutions are progressively integrating jurisprudence with medicine, sociology, data science, public policy, and governance ethics.

Middle Eastern institutions frequently participate in state-sponsored technological modernization initiatives involving smart cities, digital healthcare systems, and AI-driven economic planning. Islamic ethics is often mobilized to provide moral legitimacy for modernization while preserving social and religious continuity.

European Muslim institutions, by contrast, more commonly engage civil society organizations, interfaith ethics networks, universities, and public policy forums. Islamic AI ethics therefore frequently develops within dialogical and plural institutional environments emphasizing ethical collaboration.

The comparative findings demonstrate that both institutional models possess strengths and limitations. Middle Eastern systems benefit from centralized coordination, administrative resources, and policy integration but may face challenges concerning public participation and critical transparency. European Muslim systems encourage plural ethical engagement and democratic deliberation but may experience institutional fragmentation and limited regulatory influence.

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Importantly, the evidence reveals growing convergence regarding several ethical principles. Institutions in both contexts increasingly emphasize human oversight, ethical proportionality, justice, transparency, and protection of dignity as central Islamic principles for AI governance. This suggests the emergence of transnational Islamic ethical discourse concerning technology.

The findings further indicate that contemporary Islamic scholarship increasingly recognizes the inadequacy of purely textual approaches for addressing complex technological systems. Effective AI governance requires interdisciplinary expertise capable of integrating jurisprudence with technical literacy and social analysis.

This transformation has major implications for Islamic higher education and scholarly formation. Future Muslim scholars may require training in digital ethics, governance theory, technology studies, and interdisciplinary research methodologies in addition to classical jurisprudential disciplines.

The study therefore contributes to broader debates concerning Islam and modernity. Rather than resisting technological transformation, contemporary Islamic bioethical discourse demonstrates adaptive engagement seeking to ethically regulate technological systems while preserving human dignity and moral responsibility.

Scholarly Propositions

Proposition 1: Maqasid al-shari‘ah significantly mediates contemporary Islamic engagement with artificial intelligence governance by enabling adaptive ethical reasoning beyond classical jurisprudential precedent.

Proposition 2: Socio-political context substantially influences Islamic bioethical priorities, with Muslim-majority institutional systems tending toward regulatory stabilization and Muslim-minority institutions emphasizing plural rights and civic accountability.

Proposition 3: Contemporary Islamic AI ethics increasingly depends upon interdisciplinary integration between jurisprudence, governance studies, and technological literacy.

Proposition 4: Human moral agency remains the foundational normative principle within Sunni Islamic approaches to artificial intelligence despite expanding technological automation.

These propositions collectively suggest that contemporary Islamic bioethics is undergoing significant methodological transformation. Islamic ethical reasoning increasingly operates within transnational governance environments requiring interdisciplinary adaptation and future-oriented jurisprudential interpretation. The propositions also indicate that Islamic institutions are not passive recipients of technological modernization but active participants in shaping ethical governance discourse.

CONCLUSION

This article has comparatively examined how Sunni Islamic institutions in the Middle East and Europe employ Islamic bioethical reasoning to address contemporary artificial intelligence governance

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challenges. The findings demonstrate that Islamic ethical discourse concerning AI is shaped by complex interactions among jurisprudential traditions, socio-political conditions, institutional authority structures, and global technological transformation.

The comparative evidence reveals significant regional variation in ethical priorities and governance approaches. Middle Eastern institutions generally emphasize collective stability, regulatory coordination, and state-centered ethical modernization, whereas European Muslim institutions more frequently prioritize dignity, plural rights, algorithmic accountability, and minority civic participation. These differences reflect broader historical and institutional distinctions shaping contemporary Muslim ethical discourse.

A major theoretical contribution of this study concerns the role of maqasid al-shari‘ah as an adaptive interpretive framework for AI governance. The findings demonstrate that maqasid reasoning increasingly enables Islamic institutions to address unprecedented technological challenges while preserving continuity with classical ethical traditions. This contributes to broader Islamic legal scholarship concerning contemporary jurisprudential transformation.

The article also contributes empirically by integrating Islamic bioethics with digital governance studies and comparative institutional analysis. Existing scholarship frequently isolates Islamic ethical reasoning from broader technological governance discourse. This study demonstrates that contemporary Sunni institutions actively engage global ethical debates concerning surveillance, algorithmic bias, healthcare automation, and human responsibility.

The findings possess broader institutional and societal implications. Islamic educational institutions may require expanded interdisciplinary curricula integrating jurisprudence, governance ethics, technology studies, and digital literacy. Policymakers and religious institutions similarly face growing pressure to develop ethically coherent AI governance frameworks capable of balancing innovation with justice, dignity, and accountability.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The study relies primarily on institutional publications and comparative textual analysis rather than ethnographic fieldwork or computational discourse analysis. Rapid technological change may also alter ethical discourse faster than formal institutional adaptation. Future research would benefit from empirical studies examining Muslim public reception of AI ethics, comparative Shi‘i perspectives, African Muslim technological governance, and interdisciplinary collaboration between Islamic scholars and computer scientists.

Ultimately, this article argues that contemporary Islamic bioethics represents an evolving intellectual field increasingly central to global technological governance debates. Artificial intelligence challenges not only technical infrastructures but also foundational understandings of moral agency, justice, and human dignity. Contemporary Islamic institutions therefore confront the critical task of developing ethically robust and socially responsive jurisprudential frameworks capable of guiding Muslim societies through accelerating technological transformation.

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