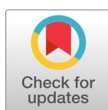
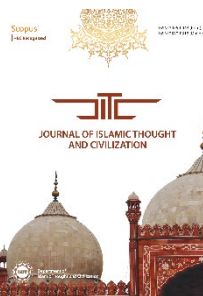


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# Reconceptualizing Poor Leadership Through Islamic Lens: Conceptual Analysis, Pathogenesis and Systemic Consequences in the Qur'ān

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## Abstract

Academic discourse on leadership has traditionally focused on good leadership, while insufficient attention has been paid to poor leadership, particularly within Islamic academic frameworks. This neglect is problematic given the correlation between poor leadership and systemic governance failures, societal fragmentation, and institutional corruption. The present study addresses this gap by developing a theologically grounded Islamic conceptualization of bad leadership, employing qualitative, literature-based analysis. It integrates thematic analysis of Qur'ānic verses on leadership failures (e.g., *zulm* [oppression], *kibr* [arrogance], *khiyānah* [betrayal of trust]) and classical exegeses (*Tafsīr Mustafa Khattab, Ibn Kathīr, Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*). Additionally, it situates itself within contemporary Islamic scholarship and Western leadership theories (e.g., Lipman-Blumen, Kellerman) for comparative critique. The findings demonstrate that poor leadership in the Qur'ān is characterized by *zulm* (oppression), *kibr* (arrogance), and *khiyānat al-amānah* (betrayal of trust), as well as a rejection of *shūrā* (consultation) and divine accountability. The origins of bad leadership according to the Qur'ān include theological factors, psychological aspects, and moral-systemic issues. Poor leadership from an Islamic perspective affects individuals socially, spiritually, and institutionally. This study offers a systematic Islamic model to diagnose and mitigate bad leadership, bridging theological ethics with organizational practice. It provides faith-based tools for identifying and addressing bad leadership origins while proposing an integrative model that connects Islamic ethical theology with contemporary organizational leadership practice. The framework offers potential applications in leadership development, organizational ethics, and institutional reform within Muslim communities and beyond.

**Keywords:** bad leadership, conceptual analysis, Islamic lens, origins, systemic consequences

## Introduction

Bad leadership is widespread and requires careful examination<sup>1</sup> and understanding this issue is crucial, as it can have devastating effects on societies and institutions. By exploring the concepts, origins, and consequences of bad leadership, we can develop strategies to mitigate its negative

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Kellerman, *Bad Leadership: What It Is, How It Happens, Why It Matters* (Brighton: Harvard Business Press, 2004), 20.

impacts.<sup>2</sup> Bad leadership, characterized by political corruption and corporate scandals,<sup>3</sup> undermines confidence, lowers morale, and reduces productivity.<sup>4</sup> Such leadership has been linked to high turnover rates, unethical behavior, and employee disengagement<sup>5</sup> as well as detrimental traits such as narcissism, unchecked power, and poor judgment.<sup>6</sup> In many Muslim nations, ineffective leaders often exploit Islamic identity for personal gain, leading to moral and economic instability that damages the reputation of Islam.<sup>7</sup> These issues highlight the urgent need to examine bad leadership through an Islamic lens.<sup>8</sup>

Kellerman's bad leadership theory<sup>9</sup> and Lipman-Blumen's toxic leadership theory<sup>10</sup> were widely used in previous research on poor leadership. According to Kellerman, poor leadership can take seven forms: incompetent, rigid, intemperate, callous, corrupt, insular, and evil. According to Lipman-Blumen, toxic leaders are those that depress morale, instill fear, and control followers. They are known as the "Dark Triad" and their traits include narcissism, Machiavellianism, and sadism.

Previous studies identify important gaps in understanding bad leadership in general and from an Islamic perspective in particular. 1. Existing research on bad leadership frequently relies on Western secular frameworks, ignoring crucial Islamic vantage points that are necessary to comprehend Muslim contexts.<sup>11</sup> 2. Despite their importance in Muslim communities, existing poor leadership theories frequently overlook the moral and spiritual underpinnings of leadership.<sup>12</sup> 3. There are no validated

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<sup>2</sup>Jan Deckers, "The Value of Autoethnography in Leadership Studies, and its Pitfalls," *Philosophy of Management* 20, no. 1 (2020): 75–91, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40926-020-00146-w>.

<sup>3</sup>Mohamed Bile Hashi, and Tiberius Barasa, "Understanding What Lies Behind Public Bad Leadership in the Federal Government Somalia," *International Journal of Recent Research in Social Sciences and Humanities* 9, no. 2 (2022): 142–155.

<sup>4</sup>Quatavia McLester, Darrell N. Burrell, and Sharon L. Burton, "Exploring the Impacts and Implications of Destructive Leadership in Organizations," in *Transformational Leadership Styles for Global Leaders: Management and Communication Strategies*, ed. Darcia Ann Marie Roache (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2023), 149–158.

<sup>5</sup>Hashi and Barasa, "Understanding What Lies Behind Public Bad Leadership."

<sup>6</sup>Juliet Kaarbo, "New Directions for Leader Personality Research," *International Affairs* 97, no. 2 (2021): 423–441, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa221>; Fauzia Syed, Saima Naseer, and Fatima Shamim. "Dealing with the Devil: Combined Effects of Destructive Leadership and Dark Triad Personality on Revenge, Happiness and Psychological Detachment," *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences* 39, no. 2 (2022): 213–230, <https://doi.org/10.1002/cjas.1660>.

<sup>7</sup>Dedy Eko, and Heri Riyadi, "Portrait of Leadership in Islam," *Numadura* 2, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.58790/numadura.2.1-2023.8>.

<sup>8</sup>Rina Amalia Hayani et al., "Leadership Effectiveness in Islamic Education Management," *Educational Scientific Journal* 10, no. 2 (2024): 136–148, <https://doi.org/10.37567/jie.v10i2.3272>.

<sup>9</sup>Kellerman, *Bad Leadership*.

<sup>10</sup>Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders: Why We Follow Destructive Bosses and Corrupt Politicians—And How We Can Survive Them* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup>Shamma Al Naqbi, "The Islamic Perspective on Qualities Required for Effective Leadership," *Journal of the Contemporary Study of Islam* 4, no. 2 (2024): 195–218, <https://doi.org/10.37264/jcsi.v4i2.04>; Dirk De Clercq et al., "When Is an Islamic Work Ethic More Likely to Spur Helping Behavior?," *Personnel Review* 47, no. 3 (2018): 630–650, <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-06-2017-0192>.

<sup>12</sup>Alief H. Sidiq et al., "Literature Study: The Concept of Leadership in Islamic Perspective," *Oikonomia: Journal of Economics and Management Science* 2, no. 3 (2024): 73–77, <https://doi.org/10.59165/oikonomia.v2i3.84>.

measures that take into account both behavioral and spiritual aspects of bad leadership in Islam.<sup>13</sup> 4. Even though bad leadership theory has been somewhat examined in Western research by many scholars like Kellerman and Lipman-Blumen, Islamic viewpoints on the subject are still noticeably under-represented.<sup>14</sup> 5. A substantial knowledge gap about the consequence of bad leadership on Muslim society's morale and institutional building has arisen as a result of this oversight.<sup>15</sup>

In light of the identified gaps, this study makes several significant contributions: 1. It presents a model based on the Qur'ān that considers behavioral transgressions such as breaking *amānah* (trust) and avoiding *shūrā* (consultation), along with moral and spiritual failings like *kibr* (arrogance) and *ghaflah* (negligence). 2. It creates an Islamic-based definition of bad leadership, emphasizing manifestations like *wāsiṭah* (nepotism), *'aṣabiyyah* (tribalism), *niḥāq* (hypocrisy), and spiritual corruption (*riyā'*), or showing off, and *'uqdat al-kibr*, or pride). 3. It utilizes specific case studies from the Qur'ān to examine bad leadership. 4. The study extracts lessons and strategies from the Qur'ān, addressing the overlooked examples of bad leadership. Therefore, this study aims to:

1. Conduct a conceptual analysis of bad leadership in the Qur'ān by examining key concepts in Qur'ānic narratives to derive a framework for identifying and addressing bad leadership in contemporary contexts.
2. Analyze the origins of bad leadership from a Qur'ānic perspective by investigating the theological and moral foundations of bad leadership and identifying key violations.
3. Explore the systemic consequences of bad leadership as described in the Qur'ān by examining narratives and principles that highlight the societal, spiritual, and institutional impacts of bad leadership.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Bad Leadership in the Qur'ān: A Conceptual Analysis

According to Kellerman, there are seven types of poor leadership:<sup>16</sup> incompetent, rigid, intemperate, callous, corrupt, insular, and evil. Toxic leaders, according to Lipman-Blumen, are egocentric, manipulative, and fear-based, prioritizing their personal interests over those of the group.<sup>17</sup> Einarsen et al. define destructive leadership as harmful to workers and organizations; it includes unethical behavior such as fraud and exploitation, abuse of power, and a lack of accountability.<sup>18</sup> Integrity and moral character are highly valued in Eastern leadership traditions; in Taoism, terrible leaders disrupt social harmony (*wu-wei*), and in Confucianism, they lack *ren* (benevolence).<sup>19</sup> Bad leadership in Eastern collectivist societies undermines face (*mianzi*) and group trust, employs an authoritarian style ("I command, you obey"), disregards consensus and humility,

<sup>13</sup>Sajjad N. Khan et al., "Influence of Personality Traits," *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 23, no. 9 (2021): 13707–13730, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-021-01235-0>.

<sup>14</sup>Hayani et al., "Leadership Effectiveness," 136–48.

<sup>15</sup>Mohamed Branine and David Pollard, "Human Resource Management with Islamic Management Principles," *Personnel Review* 39, no. 6 (2010): 712–727, <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483481011075576>.

<sup>16</sup>Kellerman, *Bad Leadership*.

<sup>17</sup>Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*.

<sup>18</sup>Ståle Einarsen, Merethe S. Aasland, and Anders Skogstad, "Destructive Leadership Behaviour," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (2007): 207–216, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leafqua.2007.03.002>.

<sup>19</sup>Guang Chen, and Yong Lee, "Leadership in Confucian Asia," *Asian Journal of Management* 12, no. 3 (2008): 45–59.

and is unable to provide a moral example.<sup>20</sup> According to Islamic belief, bad leaders engage in *ẓulm* (oppression), transgress *amānah* (trust), and lack *taqwa* (God-consciousness).<sup>21</sup>

## 2.2. Key Concepts of Bad Leadership in the Qur'ān

- **Oppression (*Ẓulm*):** Allah says in the Holy Qur'ān, “And incline not toward those who do wrong (*ẓālimīn*), lest the Fire should touch you.”<sup>22</sup> The Qur'ān frequently denounces *ẓulm* (injustice/oppression), and it criticizes those who abuse their position of authority for their own benefit or who repress the rights of others.
- **Arrogance (*Kibr*):** Allah said in the Holy Qur'ān, “Surely, Allah does not love anyone who is arrogant, boastful.”<sup>23</sup> Leaders that are arrogant disregard advice, behave in an autocratic manner, and believe they are better than others as demonstrated by Qarun's pleasure at his wealth.<sup>24</sup>
- **Betrayal of Trust (*Khiyānat al-Amānah*):** Allah says in the Qur'ān, “O you who believe! Do not betray Allah and the Messenger, nor betray your trusts knowingly.”<sup>25</sup>
- **Tyranny (*Istibdād*) and Neglect of Consultation (*Shūrā*):** Allah said in the Qur'ān, “And consult them (*shūrā*) in the matter.”<sup>26</sup> In contrast to the consultative style of the Prophet Muhammad, bad leaders disregard group decision-making, which results in poor administration.

## 2.3. The Origins of Poor Leadership: A Qur'ānic Perspective

### 2.3.1. Theological Foundations of Poor Leadership

- **Rejection of Divine Guidance (*Kufr*) and Blind Obedience to Bad Leadership and Tradition:** The main causes of bad leadership in the Qur'ān are rejection of moral responsibility and disobedience to Allah's directives. “And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed—then it is those who are the disbelievers (*Kāfirīn*).”<sup>27</sup> For example, Pharaoh's claim, “I am your supreme lord!”<sup>28</sup> epitomizes leadership rooted in denial of divine authority. “And when it is said to them, ‘Follow what Allah has revealed,’ they say, ‘Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing.’”<sup>29</sup> Bad leaders frequently arise when people follow customs or forebears mindlessly rather than seeking spiritual direction. “They said, ‘Have you come to us to turn us away from what we found our fathers following so that you two may have greatness in the land? And we are not believers in you.’”<sup>30</sup> Qur'ānic discourse also accommodates broader ethical criteria for societal survival and political legitimacy. Allah states, “And your Lord would not have destroyed the cities unjustly while their

<sup>20</sup>Geert Hofstede, *Cultures Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1984).

<sup>21</sup>Rafik Issa Beekun, and Jamal A. Badawi, *Leadership: An Islamic Perspective* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2005).

<sup>22</sup>Al-Qur'ān: Hūd 11:113, Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, trans. Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, 10 vols. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2000), 4:321.

<sup>23</sup>al-Nisā' 4:36, Sayyid Qutb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, trans. M. A. Salahi and A. A. Shamis (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2001), 2:255.

<sup>24</sup>al-Qaṣaṣ 28:76–82, Mustafa Khatṭab, trans., *The Clear Qur'ān* (Lombard, IL: Book of Signs Foundation, 2015), 384–385.

<sup>25</sup>al-Anfāl 8:27, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 7:209.

<sup>26</sup>Āl 'Imrān 3:159, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 2:170.

<sup>27</sup>al-Mā'idah 5:44, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 3:132.

<sup>28</sup>al-Nāzi'āt 79:24, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 18: 198.

<sup>29</sup>al-Baqarah 2:170, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 1:178.

<sup>30</sup>Yūnus 10:78, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 5:153.

people were reformers.<sup>31</sup> Some scholars equate *ẓulm* here with *shirk*—the gravest theological violation—while others understand it more expansively as systemic injustice, corruption, and moral transgression in social and political life. This latter interpretation emphasizes that societal collapse is not triggered solely by theological deviation, but by the institutionalization of injustice and the erosion of moral responsibility. Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) famously encapsulated this principle by asserting that God upholds a just state even if it is non-Muslim, and does not uphold an unjust state even if it is Muslim. Contemporary realities further corroborate this Qur’ānic logic: many Muslim-majority societies struggle with corruption, weak institutions, and leadership failure, while several non-Muslim polities demonstrate higher levels of accountability, institutional restraint, and public trust. Thus, leadership failure in the Qur’ānic worldview is best understood not merely as doctrinal disbelief, but as the convergence of moral corruption, injustice, and abandonment of ethical governance.

- **Arrogance (*Kibr*):** Pride causes leaders to mistreat people and disregard advice. “Indeed, Allah does not like those who are arrogant and boastful.”<sup>32</sup> For instance, Qarūn was destroyed because of his conceit stemming from his wealth<sup>33</sup>. In *Sura Yunus* Allah says, “Then after them We sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and his establishment with Our signs, but they were arrogant and were a criminal people.”<sup>34</sup> In another verse, Allah points out that “Indeed, Pharaoh was haughty within the land, and indeed, he was of the transgressors.”<sup>35</sup>
- **Betrayal of Trust (*Khiyānat al-Amānah*):** Bad leaders take use of *amānah*, or trust, which is the foundation of leadership, for their own benefit. Allah said, “O you who believe! Do not betray Allah and the Messenger, nor betray your trusts knowingly.”<sup>36</sup> “Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due.”<sup>37</sup> This applies to rulers (justice), judges (fairness), and individuals (keeping promises). “O you who have believed, fulfill [your] contracts.”<sup>38</sup> This includes business contracts, treaties, and marriage vows. “Indeed, We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it and feared it; but man undertook it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.”<sup>39</sup>

### 2.3.2. Psychological and Moral Decay Foundations

- **Love of Power, Status & Worldly Gains (*Hubb al-Jāh*):** Obsession with authority corrupts judgement. Allah said, “Beautified for people is the love of that which they desire—women, sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, branded horses, cattle, and tilled land. That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return.”<sup>40</sup> Abu Lahab, the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, was against Islam because it endangered his social standing more than because he disagreed with its doctrine: The Qur’ān condemns him: “May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined, and ruined is he. His wealth will not avail him, or that which he gained.”<sup>41</sup>
- **Fear of Losing Authority:** The Qur’ān offers deep insights about the strategies of evil leaders who stifle criticism in order to maintain their power. The story of the Pharaoh is a timeless

<sup>31</sup>Hūd 11:117, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, 4:321.

<sup>32</sup>al-Nisā’ 4:36, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, 2:255.

<sup>33</sup>al-Qasas 28:76–82, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 384–5.

<sup>34</sup>Yūnis 10:75, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, 5:150.

<sup>35</sup>Yūnis 10:83, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, 5:154.

<sup>36</sup>Anfal 8:27, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, 7:209.

<sup>37</sup>al-Nisā 4:58, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, 2:267.

<sup>38</sup>Ma’ida 5:1, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, 3:121.

<sup>39</sup>Ahzab 33:72, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, 6:540.

<sup>40</sup>al-Imran 3:14, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 57.

<sup>41</sup>al-Masad 111:1–5, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 604.

example of tyranny, showing how corrupt regimes silence truth-tellers, twist narratives, and cling to power at all costs. “Pharaoh said, ‘Let me kill Moses—let him call upon his Lord! Indeed, I fear that he will change your religion or cause corruption in the land.’”<sup>42</sup> Bad leaders stigmatize dissent by calling reformers “corruptors,” and Pharaoh portrays Moses as a danger to national stability, justifying his murder to keep power. Pharaoh’s denial was motivated by fear rather than ignorance.

- Moral Hypocrisy (*Nifāq*): Known as *munāfiqūn* (hypocrites), hypocritical leaders are shunned for their deceit, manipulation, and misuse of authority. “Indeed, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the Fire—and never will you find for them any helper.”<sup>43</sup> According to the Qur’ān, hypocrites like Abdullahi Ibnu Salul manipulate public trust by deceiving Muslims while secretly opposing them. “When they meet the believers, they say, ‘We believe,’ but when alone with their allies, they say, ‘We were only mocking.’”<sup>44</sup>

### 2.3.3. Societal and Systemic Foundations

- Injustice Through Nepotism (*‘Aṣabiyyah*): Regarding justice and government, the Qur’ān categorically opposes nepotism (favoring family members) and tribal-based favoritism. “O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul.”<sup>45</sup> Islam eliminates pre-Islamic Arab tribalism (*al-‘aṣabiyyah al-jahiliyyah*), in which leaders prioritized their clans over justice, and this verse challenges racial and tribal dominance by confirming that all people have a common ancestor. “And do not incline toward those who do wrong, lest you be touched by the Fire.”<sup>46</sup> “Indeed, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and made its people into factions, oppressing a sector among them.”<sup>47</sup>
- Economic Exploitation (*Akl al-Suht*): The Islamic ban on economic injustice, the example of Qarun as a representation of avarice and divine retribution, and the connection between moral decline in society and leadership corruption are all made abundantly evident in the Qur’ān.<sup>48</sup> “We had given him such treasures that their keys would burden a band of strong men.”<sup>49</sup> “So We caused the earth to swallow him and his home.”<sup>50</sup>
- Neglect of Consultation (Tark al-Shūrā): *Shūrā* (consultation) is emphasized in the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* as a fundamental principle of leadership, justice, and collective decision-making. In Islam, leaders who disregard *Shūrā* and rule autocratically are referred to as bad leaders and are condemned for their actions, which result in societal decay, corruption, and oppression. “And consult them in the matter. Then, when you have taken a decision, place your trust in Allah.”<sup>51</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Ghafir 40:26, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 479.

<sup>43</sup>al-Nisa 4:145, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 121.

<sup>44</sup>al-Baqara 2:14, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 8.

<sup>45</sup>Ibn Kathīr, 4:1, 2:158.

<sup>46</sup>Ibn Kathīr, 11:113, 4:321.

<sup>47</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 28:4, 604.

<sup>48</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 30:41, 648.

<sup>49</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 28:76, 384.

<sup>50</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 28:81, 612.

<sup>51</sup> al-Imran 3:159, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, 2:170.

## 2.4. Societal, Spiritual, and Institutional Consequences of Bad Leadership in the Qur'ān

### 2.4.1. Societal Consequences of Poor Leadership

- Oppression and Inequality (*Zulm*): According to the Qur'ān, social fairness, community trust, and stability all suffer when there is bad leadership. Allah pointed out this in the Qur'ān: "And do not incline toward those who do wrong (zālimīn), or the Fire will seize you."<sup>52</sup>
- Erosion of Trust (*Khiyānah*) is another issue of bad leadership consequence. "Do not betray Allah and the Messenger, nor betray your trusts knowingly."<sup>53</sup> Social fragmentation is the result of this, as societies break apart when terrible leaders violate their commitments.
- Violence and Chaos (*Fitnah*) follow as the Qur'ān illustrates, "And fight them until there is no fitnah."<sup>54</sup> This chaos leads to civil wars, as bad leadership incites conflict (e.g., the corruption of the people of Lot).

### 2.4.2. Spiritual Consequences of Poor Leadership

- Decline in Morality (*Fasād*): "Corruption (fasād) has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of people have earned."<sup>55</sup> This corruption leads to the loss of *Taqwā* (God-consciousness) because corrupt leaders who publicly sin promote immorality in the public and the spread of hypocrisy (*Nifāq*), where corrupt leaders act unjustly while claiming piety.
- Misguidance and False Authority: "And who is more unjust than one who invents lies about Allah or denies His signs?"<sup>56</sup> Pharaoh's claims of divinity and rejection of prophets as corrupt leaders stifle truth-tellers forced societies into religious manipulation (e.g., the rejection of Noah, Hud, and Salih). "And Pharaoh called out among his people; he said, 'O my people, does not the kingdom of Egypt belong to me, and these rivers flowing beneath me? Then do you not see?'"<sup>57</sup> "Or am I [not] better than this one who is insignificant and hardly makes himself clear?"<sup>58</sup>

Divine Punishment and Downfall (*Nakbah*) in the World and Hereafter: "So, we seized him and his armies and threw them into the sea."<sup>59</sup> The Qur'ān portrays historical examples like 'Ād and Thamūd, who were destroyed for arrogance,<sup>60</sup> and the People of Lot, who were annihilated for moral decay.<sup>61</sup> "So We punished each [nation] for their sins: some were struck by a violent storm, some were overcome by a sudden blast."<sup>62</sup> Historical examples (Pharaoh, Nimrod, Qarun) show Allah destroys bad leaders. "He will precede his people on the Day of Resurrection and lead them into the Fire; and wretched is the place to which they are led." In the second verse of the same chapter, Allah says, "And they were followed in this [world] with a curse and on the Day of Resurrection. Evil is the gift which will be given [to them]."<sup>63</sup>

<sup>52</sup>Ibn Kathīr, 11:113, 4:321.

<sup>53</sup>al-Anfal 8:27, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 7:209.

<sup>54</sup>Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 1:193, 212.

<sup>55</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur'ān*, 30:41, 648.

<sup>56</sup>Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 6:21, 104.

<sup>57</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur'ān*, 43:51, 824.

<sup>58</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur'ān*, 43:52, 824.

<sup>59</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur'ān*, 429.

<sup>60</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur'ān*, 170–171.

<sup>61</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur'ān*, 416.

<sup>62</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur'ān*, 439.

<sup>63</sup>Qutb, *Fi Zilāl*, 7:208.

### 2.4.3. Institutional Consequences of Poor Leadership

- Autocracy and Tyranny (*Istibdād*): “Indeed, Pharaoh was arrogant in the land and divided its people.”<sup>64</sup> Because of the arbitrary killings of the Pharaoh and other examples of leaders acting above accountability, there will be no rule of law and poor leadership will replace group decision-making, which results in the suppression of *Shūrā* (consultation).
- Institutional Collapse: “And if the truth had followed their desires, the heavens and earth would have been corrupted.”<sup>65</sup> This results in military takeovers since Saul (Talut) loses heavenly support for disobedience, and judicial corruption because bribes take the place of justice. “Allah presents an example of a city that was secure and content, its provision coming abundantly, but it denied Allah’s favors, so Allah made it taste extreme hunger and fear.”<sup>66</sup> Bad leadership leads to economic crises, fear, and insecurity.

### 3. Methodology

In order to reframe bad leadership from an Islamic perspective, this study uses a qualitative, literature-based methodology. It integrates a textual analysis of the Qur’ān, classical exegesis (tafsīr), and contemporary Islamic scholarship with discourse analysis of non-Islamic literature on bad leadership to investigate the concept, origins, and systemic implications of bad leadership. Among the main sources of data are: 1. Qur’ānic verses that are thematically analyzed to pinpoint important sections on leadership failings. 2. Traditional exegeses (tafsīr), such as Mustafa Khattab’s *The Clear Quran: A Thematic English Translation*, Sayyid Qutb’s *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, and *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*. The secondary data sources are: 1. the literature on Islamic leadership, such as works by Abdirahman et al.,<sup>67</sup> Hayani et al.,<sup>68</sup> Eko & Riyadi,<sup>69</sup> Abdirahman & Saeed,<sup>70</sup> Sidiq et al.<sup>71</sup>, and Naqbi.<sup>72</sup> 2. Studies of Western leadership that offer comparative perspectives by critically analyzing notions of bad leadership, such as Lipman-Blumen’s *The Allure of Toxic Leaders* and Kellerman’s *Bad Leadership*.

Key themes related to leadership and illicit behaviors, such as tyranny (*istibdād*), nepotism (*wāsiṭah*), and corruption (*fasād*), were identified through thematic analysis of Qur’ānic texts. A contextual analysis examined these verses in light of historical events. Triangulation compared Qur’ānic interpretations with classical and contemporary tafsīr to ensure theological coherence and data validity. Peer review involved consultations with Islamic scholars and leadership experts to verify interpretations. The authors addressed ethical concerns by analyzing Qur’ānic passages within their historical and linguistic contexts to prevent misunderstandings.

<sup>64</sup>Khattab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 28:4, 604.

<sup>65</sup>Qutb, *Fī Zilāl*, 12:218

<sup>66</sup>Khattab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 300.

<sup>67</sup>Mahfuzur Rahman, Arphan Ali, and Hasanul Banna, “Analysis of Quality Leadership,” *Business and Economic Research* 4, no. 1 (2014): 135–148, <https://doi.org/10.5296/ber.v4i1.4899>.

<sup>68</sup>Hayani et al., “Leadership Effectiveness,” 136–148.

<sup>69</sup>Eko and Riyadi, “Portrait of Leadership in Islam,” 2023.

<sup>70</sup>Mohd Rosmizi Bin Abd Rahman, and Diar Mahmood Saeed, “Bad Leadership: An Examination of Skill, Desire, and Adaptability in the Qur’ān,” *Al-‘Abqari* 8, no. 1 (2016): 95–119.

<sup>71</sup>Sidiq et al., “Literature Study,” 73–77.

<sup>72</sup>Naqbi Shamma, “The Islamic Perspective on Qualities Required for Effective Leadership,” 195–218.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Conceptual Analysis of Poor Leadership in Contrast: Western Behavioral Models vs. Islamic Ethical Frameworks

The study discovered that Western conceptions of bad leadership emphasize harm to the organization and behavior. Researchers such as Lipman-Blumen and Kellerman define bad leadership as having dysfunctional characteristics and producing negative results. Bad leadership can be classified as incompetent, rigid, intemperate, callous, corrupt, insular, and evil, according to Kellerman. Lipman-Blumen characterizes toxic leadership as a process in which leaders control and destroy followers and institutions.

The teachings of the Qur'ān, on the other hand, evaluate leadership using divine principles. Bad leadership is characterized by betrayals of trust (*Amānah*), oppression (*Zulm*), and a lack of awareness of God (*Taqwā*).<sup>73</sup> From the perspective of the Qur'ān, the following are key characteristics of poor leadership: hypocrisy (*Nifāq*), arrogance (*Kibr*), betrayal of trust (*Khiyānah*), rejection of consultation (*Shūrā*), and neglect of justice (*'Adl*). Tyranny, corruption, and injustice are condemned in the Qur'ān as departures from divine guidance. In Islam, leadership is based on accountability to God, making bad leadership a moral and spiritual crime with serious societal repercussions.<sup>74</sup>

The Qur'ān identifies five moral and theological principles that underpin bad leadership. The first is *oppression (Zulm)*, which is the ultimate failure of leadership. The Qur'ān denounces oppression (*Zulm*) as a defining characteristic of bad leadership because it disrupts social harmony and invites divine retribution, making it a moral transgression and a contributing factor to the decline of civilization. The second is *arrogance (Kibr)*, which is repeatedly denounced in the Qur'ān as a trait that corrupts leadership. Allah states, "Indeed, Allah does not like those who are arrogant and boastful."<sup>75</sup> Leaders like Qarun, whose wealth fueled his disdain for others exemplify this vice. The third is *betrayal of trust (khiyānat al-amānah)*: the ethical breach. The foundation of Islamic leadership is trust, and it is a grave sin to betray that trust. Whereas secular theories may regard these behaviors as misconduct, Islam sees them as spiritual failures with long-lasting repercussions.

The fourth is *tyranny (istibdād) and rejection of consultation (shūrā)*. The Qur'ān emphasizes collective decision-making (*shūrā*) as a safeguard against tyranny. Allah instructs, "And consult them in the matter,"<sup>76</sup> contrasting non-consultative governance with despotic rule and unilateral power. The fifth is *divine accountability*: the core differentiator from Western theories. While the Qur'ān portrays poor leadership as a moral failure, Western studies emphasize psychological flaws like incompetence and toxicity. The Qur'ān views concepts like oppression (*zulm*), arrogance (*kibr*), betrayal (*khiyānah*), and tyranny (*istibdād*) as sins that will result in divine punishment.

### 4.2. Definition

Through a comprehensive analysis of the Qur'ānic perspective on bad leadership, we conclude that bad leadership is an exercise of power that is morally bankrupt, characterized by the violation of sacred trust (*Amānah*) through oppression (*Zulm*), egotistical governance (*Kibr*), betrayal of public confidence (*Khiyānah*), disregard for divine commandments, duplicity (*Nifāq*), lack of spiritual awareness (*Taqwā*), and failure to uphold justice (*'Adl*) and consult stakeholders (*Shūrā*), that causes societal decay (*Fasād*) and incurs divine wrath, with eternal consequences.

<sup>73</sup>Beekun and Badawi, *Leadership: An Islamic Perspective*.

<sup>74</sup>Abd Rahman and Saeed, "Bad Leadership: An Examination of Skill, Desire, and Adaptability in the Qur'ān."

<sup>75</sup>al-Nisa 4:36, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 2:255.

<sup>76</sup>al-e-Imran 3:159, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 2:170.

#### 4.3. A Qur'ānic-based Model of Bad Leadership: An Integrative Spiritual-Moral Framework

- Divine Covenant Violation (Breaking *Amānah*/trust)
- Moral Corruption (Oppression, hypocrisy, injustice)
- Spiritual Bankruptcy (Lack of *Taqwā*/God-consciousness)
- Societal Destruction (*Fasād* as a direct consequence)

Table 1 summarizes the Qur'ānic holistic model of bad leadership.

**Table 1.** The Qur'ānic Holistic Model of Poor Leadership

Dimension	Core Concept	Manifestation	Consequence	Case Example
		Moral Failures		
Betrayal of Trust	<i>Khiyānat al-Amānah</i>	Corruption, nepotism, and embezzlement	Loss of public confidence	Qarun's wealth-hoarding
Oppression	<i>Zulm</i>	Tyranny, exploitation, and human rights abuse	Social fragmentation	Pharaoh's regime
Arrogance	<i>Kibr</i>	Autocracy, dismissal of consultation	Poor decision-making	Iblis' refusal
Hypocrisy	<i>Nifāq</i>	Deceptive rhetoric, false promises	Institutional distrust	<i>Munāfiqūn</i> of Medina
Injustice	Neglect of <i>'Adl</i>	Bias, unfair policies, legal inequality	Societal unrest	Wealth-hoarders
		Spiritual Roots		
Godlessness	Lack of <i>Taqwā</i>	Prioritizing power over divine commands	Moral bankruptcy	
Impurity	Rejecting <i>Tazkiyah</i>	Hardened heart, no self-accountability	Incorrigible behavior	
		Societal Impact		
Chaos	<i>Fasād</i>	Institutional collapse, economic crisis		
Divine Justice	Uprooting	Historical downfall of corrupt nations		

#### 4.4 Qur'ānic Diagnosis of the Origins of Poor Leadership

##### 4.4.1. Theological Foundations of Poor Leadership in the Qur'ān: A Tripartite Framework

- Rejection of Divine Guidance (*Kufr*) as Primary Leadership Failure: According to the research, the underlying theological basis of poor leadership is the blind devotion to human traditions and the rejection of divine authority. This manifests in two destructive patterns: 1. Usurpation of Divine Authority exemplified by Pharaoh's declaration "I am your supreme lord!"<sup>77</sup> showcasing leadership that replaces divine sovereignty with personal despotism, and 2. Traditionalist obstinacy as demonstrated when communities reject prophets because "We have not heard of this among our forefathers,"<sup>78</sup> prioritizing ancestral customs over revealed truth.

<sup>77</sup>al-Nasi'ad 79:24, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 18:198.

<sup>78</sup>Qutb, *Fī Zilāl*, 13:178.

- Arrogance (*Kibr*) as Leadership Pathology: The study finds that pride is a catalyst that corrupts leadership by causing moral blindness; the Qur'ānic indictment that "Allah does not like those who are arrogant"<sup>79</sup> highlights how arrogance (*kibr*) skews moral judgement.
- Betrayal of Trust (*Khiyānat al-Amānah*) as Ethical Violation: Since leadership is a divine trust that humans have uniquely undertaken, its betrayal is especially heinous. The study emphasizes trust violation as a theological leadership crisis; and the prohibitions against betrayal and the explicit commandment to "render trusts to whom they are due"<sup>80</sup> make *Amānah* a non-negotiable leadership requirement.

#### 4.4.2. Psychological and Moral Foundations of Poor Leadership in the Qur'ān

- Obsession with Power, Status, and Worldly Gains (*Hubb al-Jāh*): The Qur'ān emphasizes how a relentless thirst for power and material prosperity corrupts leadership, substituting self-interest for moral discernment. Qur'ān condemns this behavior: "Beautified for people is the love of desires—wealth, power, and status—but with Allah is the best return."<sup>81</sup>
- Fear of Losing Control and Authority: Pharaoh is an example of a bad leader that uses fear mongering, narrative manipulation, and silencing opposition to hold onto power. Pharaoh attempted to assassinate Moses in the name of stability: "I fear he will change your religion or spread corruption!"<sup>82</sup> The fact that his elite made fun of Musa and Harun for coming from humble backgrounds demonstrated how class bias upholds tyranny; and leadership based on a fear of losing power encourages autocracy, stifles the truth, and opposes change.
- Moral Hypocrisy (Nifāq) and Defiant Disobedience (Fisq): The Qur'ān calls out leaders who pretend to be morally upright but are actually oppressing people as *munāfiqūn*, or hypocrites. Characteristics of hypocritical leaders include: Deceptive Rhetoric: "When with believers, they claim faith, but with allies, they mock."<sup>83</sup>
- Manipulation of Ignorance: "Pharaoh deceived his people (*istakhafahum*) to maintain control,"<sup>84</sup> and Defiance Against Truth: Despite witnessing Musa's miracles, Pharaoh's people remained *fusūq* (disobedient). This is one of the most awful behaviors of bad leadership as it causes divine retribution: "The hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of Hell."<sup>85</sup> Manipulative leaders erode trust, exploit followers, and perpetuate systemic corruption.
- Ghurūr (*Delusion*): Ghurūr refers to self-deception and false confidence rooted in worldly power, status, or material success. Allah states: "And what is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion."<sup>86</sup> When leaders succumb to *ghurūr*, they become detached from justice and humility, governing under the illusion of permanence and invulnerability rather than moral responsibility.
- Ittibā' al-Hawā' (*Following Desires/Whims*): This denotes the subordination of reason, revelation, and justice to personal desires, interests, or impulses. The Qur'ān treats this tendency as a fundamental cause of leadership failure, as it replaces principled governance with impulsive decision-making. Allah warns against leaders who prioritize desire over truth: "who follows his

<sup>79</sup>al-Nisa 4:36, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 2:255.

<sup>80</sup>al-Nisa 4:58, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 2:267.

<sup>81</sup>al-Imran 3:14, *The Clear Qur'ān*, 57.

<sup>82</sup>Ghafir 40:26, *The Clear Qur'ān*, 479.

<sup>83</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur'ān*, 2:14, 8.

<sup>84</sup>al-Qasas 28:32–3, Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 176–7.

<sup>85</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur'ān*, 4:145, 121.

<sup>86</sup>Al-e-Imrān 3:185, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*.

desire and whose affair is [ever] in neglect,”<sup>87</sup> and further commands: “do not follow the inclinations of those who do not know.”<sup>88</sup>

#### 4.4.3. Societal and Systemic Foundations of Poor Leadership in the Qur’ān

- Oppression (*Zulm*) and Injustice through Nepotism (*‘aṣabiyyah*): Favoritism based on family, tribe, or social standing is unequivocally rejected by the Qur’ān, which demands fair justice for everyone and upholds human equality: “O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul,”<sup>89</sup> dismantling pre-Islamic Arab tribalism (*al-‘aṣabiyyah al-jahiliyyah*). As seen by the tyranny of the Pharaohs, leaders who engage in nepotism or discrimination based on clans transgress divine law: “Indeed, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and made its people into factions, oppressing a sector among them.”<sup>90</sup> The Qur’ān warns against supporting such rulers: “And do not incline toward those who do wrong, lest you be touched by the Fire.”<sup>91</sup>
- Economic Exploitation (*Akl al-Suht*): Wealth hoarding, corruption, and exploitative economics are all denounced in the Qur’ān as faults that undermine social morality. “And do not consume one another’s wealth unjustly.”<sup>92</sup> The parable of Qarun illustrates this forbidden hoarding and he hoarded riches as the Qur’ān shows, “Allah had given him such treasures that their keys would burden a band of strong men,”<sup>93</sup> oppressed his people, and attributed success to himself—leading to divine punishment. “So, Allah caused the earth to swallow him.”<sup>94</sup>
- Neglect of Consultation (*Tark al-Shūrā*): Autocratic rule—rejecting *Shūrā* (consultation)—is a hallmark of bad leadership in the Qur’ān. The Qur’ān commands: “And consult them in the matter,”<sup>95</sup> a principle the Prophet Muhammad upheld despite receiving divine revelation. *Shūrā* prevents dictatorship, ensuring decisions benefit society: “Those who respond to their Lord conduct their affairs by mutual consultation.”<sup>96</sup> Leaders who reject the communal wisdom encourage institutional failure and tyranny.

#### 4.5. Consequences of Poor Leadership

##### 4.5.1. Societal Consequences: The Tripartite Collapse of Civil Order

- Systemic Oppression (*Zulm*) and Economic Inequality: The main social effect of poor leadership, according to the Qur’ān, is oppression, which can take the form of social exclusion as well as economic exploitation. This is exemplified by Qarun’s hoarding of wealth and Pharaoh’s enslavement of the Israelites, demonstrating how bad leaders pervert divinely-ordained social justice. The warning against inclining toward “those who do wrong (*ẓālimīn*)”<sup>97</sup> establishes oppression as both a moral crime and societal poison.
- Institutional Distrust (*Khiyānah*) and Social Fragmentation: The Qur’ān is a moral precept and a sociological cautionary tale on the significance of leadership in preserving social unity. Its ban on betraying trusts illustrates how poor leadership undermines the social contract. Institutional

<sup>87</sup>al-Kahf 18:28, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*.

<sup>88</sup>al-Jāthiyah 45:18, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*.

<sup>89</sup>Ibn Kathīr, 4:1, 2: 158.

<sup>90</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 28:4, 604.

<sup>91</sup>Ibn Kathīr, 11:113, 4:321.

<sup>92</sup>Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, 2:188, 2:199.

<sup>93</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 28:76, 384.

<sup>94</sup>Khatab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 28:81, 612.

<sup>95</sup>Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, 3:159, 2:170.

<sup>96</sup>Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, 14:288.

<sup>97</sup>Ibn Kathīr, 11:113, 4:321.

legitimacy collapses, communal collaboration breaks down, and harmful sectarianism (tribalism & *'ashabiyah*) resurfaces as a result of this betrayal of *Amānah* (trust).

- *Normalized Violence (Fitnah) and Social Chaos*: The Qur'ānic mandate to eradicate *fitnah* illustrates how dysfunctional leadership institutionalizes chaos; This manifests through leadership-incited conflicts, such as the corruption of the people of Lot, the acceptance of injustice by society, and divine intervention as the ultimate form of justice. Sayyid Qutub's explanation of Pharaoh's intended expulsion versus his actual destruction illustrates the Qur'ānic principle of inverse punishment for bad leaders. The Qur'ān frames these consequences not only as political failures but also as violations of divine covenants, manifestations of spiritual disease, and civilizational tests. These outcomes are shown in the Qur'ān as being connected: Oppression (*Zulm*) → Distrust → (*Khiyānah*) → Chaos (*Fitnah*) → Civilizational Collapse: This framework provides predictive principles for preserving society as well as diagnostic methods for evaluating leadership failure.

#### 4.5.2. Spiritual Consequences of Poor Leadership: A Qur'ānic Eschatological Framework

According to the Qur'ān, poor leadership causes a spiritual crisis that shows up as institutionalized misdirection, moral decay (*Fasād*), and inevitable divine punishment (*Nakbah*), all of which have eternal repercussions. This makes leadership essentially a test of divine accountability rather than merely political governance.

- *Systemic Moral Decay (Fasād) as Spiritual Contagion*: The Qur'ānic declaration that "corruption has appeared on land and sea"<sup>98</sup> establishes a causal relationship between leadership misconduct and civilizational decay. This is demonstrated by: 1. The *Taqwā* Erosion Effect, which states that when leaders normalize wrongdoing, they cause a general desensitization to spirituality; the example of hypocritical leaders illustrates how public piety separates from privacy. 2. The Pandemic of Hypocrisy, or *Nifāq*, which is a social sickness that arises when leaders set up unfair standards. The Qur'ānic condemnation of those "who say what they do not do"<sup>99</sup> reveals this as a metastasizing spiritual cancer. The theological ramifications of systemic moral decay are evident in the intergenerational impact as spiritual harm endures beyond political regimes, the horizontal spread as moral corruption transcends geographic bounds, and the vertical contamination as the misdeeds of leaders penetrate social layers.
- *Misguidance and False Authority*: Historical tyrants who suppressed truth-tellers and disregarded divine signals are prime examples of how misdirection and the imposition of fake authority resulted in societal manipulation. The Qur'ān condemns those who spread falsehoods about Allah or reject His signs, framing such actions as grave injustices.<sup>100</sup> In order to maintain control, despotic rulers like Pharaoh frequently use theological and political manipulation to conceal their deceit. They repress dissent and reject prophets and truth-tellers, echoing the experiences of Noah, Hud, and Salih. When Pharaoh boasts of his control over Egypt and its wealth and claims to be better than the subjugated, it emphasizes his conceit.
- *Divine Punishment and Downfall (Nakbah) in the World and Hereafter*: The Qur'ān highlights that oppressive leaders and their supporters will face divine punishment (*Nakbah*) both here on Earth and in the hereafter. This serves as a warning against tyranny and moral decay. The Qur'ān also provides historical examples of nations that were destroyed because of their conceit, corruption, and disobedience of divine guidance. The devastation of the People of Lot, the drowning of Pharaoh, and the destruction of 'Ād and Thamūd show how Allah's vengeance

<sup>98</sup>Khattab, *The Clear Qur'ān*, 30:41, 648.

<sup>99</sup>Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 61:3, 17:249.

<sup>100</sup>Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 6:21, 5:199.

takes many forms, including explosions, storms, and overpowering disasters. “So We punished each [nation] for their sins: some were struck by a violent storm, some were overcome by a sudden blast.”<sup>101</sup> These stories show that even though oppressive leaders are seen as powerful, they will eventually fail; Pharaoh’s phoney last-minute confession of faith emphasizes that repentance under duress is pointless—true belief must come before divine punishment; and the Qur’ān warns that the consequences of poor leadership continue into the afterlife, where despots like Pharaoh will drag their subjects into Hell. “He will precede his people on the Day of Resurrection and lead them into the Fire; and wretched is the place to which they are led.”<sup>102</sup> “And they were followed in this [world] with a curse and on the Day of Resurrection. Evil is the gift which will be given [to them].”<sup>103</sup>

#### 4.5.3. Institutional Consequences of Poor Leadership

- Autocracy and Tyranny (*Istibdād*): Bad leadership breeds autocracy and tyranny (*istibdād*), undermines just governance through repression of consultation (*shūrā*), and erodes the rule of law. The Qur’ān emphasizes how despotic rulers like Pharaoh use division and conceit to consolidate their power: “Indeed, Pharaoh was arrogant in the land and divided its people.”<sup>104</sup> Such rulers reject participatory governance, undermining the Islamic principle of *shūrā* (collective decision-making) emphasized in “And those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves.”<sup>105</sup> Autocratic leadership erodes the rule of law by permitting arbitrary governance, as demonstrated by the unjust executions of the Pharaoh; it also fosters institutional corruption, where leaders act without accountability, resulting in widespread oppression, and societies under such leadership devolve into lawlessness, with rulers functioning as unopposed oppressors.
- Societal and Institutional Collapse: Examples of tyrannical leadership destroying institutions are found in the Qur’ān. The Pharaoh’s regime, which was marked by forced divisions, infanticide, and persecution of believers, is an example of institutional oppression; his conceit resulted in his army drowning, showing how divine justice can end oppression. Similar to this, the Thamūd elite disregarded Prophet Salih’s warnings, which led to their demise—demonstrating the connection between obstinate leadership and communal ruin. The winds that decimated the ‘Ād tribe were a result of their elites’ disobedience, underscoring the costs to society of defying moral standards. These patterns culminate in the Qur’ānic axiom: “When We intend to destroy a city, We command its affluent but they defiantly disobey therein,”<sup>106</sup> establishing that institutions perish when their leadership structures normalize corruption.

#### 4.6. Conclusion

This study set out to address three interrelated research aims: (1) to develop a Qur’ānic conceptual framework of bad leadership, (2) to identify the theological and moral origins of bad leadership, and (3) to examine the societal, spiritual, and institutional consequences of bad leadership as articulated in the Qur’ān. In response to the first aim, the study demonstrates that while Western leadership theories conceptualize bad leadership primarily in behavioral and organizational terms—such as incompetence, toxicity, and harm to followers—the Qur’ānic framework defines bad leadership as a fundamentally moral, spiritual, and theological failure. Leadership in the Qur’ān is a divine trust (*Amānah*), and its corruption is evaluated not merely by outcomes, but by violations of

<sup>101</sup>Khattab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 29:40, 439.

<sup>102</sup>Khattab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 11:98, 232.

<sup>103</sup>Khattab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 11:99, 232

<sup>104</sup>Khattab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 28:4, 604.

<sup>105</sup>Khattab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 42:38, 497.

<sup>106</sup>Khattab, *The Clear Qur’ān*, 17:16, 293.

justice (*'Adl*), humility, accountability, and God-consciousness (*Taqwā*). The analysis identifies five core Qur'ānic characteristics of bad leadership: oppression (*Zulm*), arrogance (*Kibr*), betrayal of trust (*Khiyānah*), rejection of consultation (*Tark al-Shūrā*), and hypocrisy (*Nifāq*). These findings culminate in a Qur'ānic holistic model of bad leadership consisting of four interrelated stages: violation of divine trust, moral corruption, spiritual bankruptcy, and societal destruction (*Fasād*). This framework offers a clear diagnostic tool for identifying bad leadership in contemporary contexts.

The second aim is addressed through an in-depth analysis of the theological, moral, and psychological roots of bad leadership in the Qur'ān. The study finds that the primary theological origin of poor leadership is the rejection of divine guidance (*Kufr*), manifested through the usurpation of divine authority and the privileging of human desires or traditions over revelation. This foundational failure is compounded by arrogance (*Kibr*) and betrayal of trust (*Khiyānat al-Amānah*), *Injustice/Shirk* (*Zulm*), which together erode moral judgement and ethical responsibility. Psychologically, the Qur'ān identifies obsession with power and status (*hubb al-jāh*), fear of losing authority, self-delusion (*ghurūr*), and moral hypocrisy (*nifāq*) as pathologies that reinforce oppressive leadership behavior. These findings demonstrate that leadership failure, in the Qur'ānic worldview, originates not in technical incompetence alone, but in interconnected theological disobedience, moral decay, and distorted self-perception. The third aim is fulfilled by examining the systemic consequences of bad leadership as depicted in Qur'ānic narratives and principles. The study shows that bad leadership leads to a tripartite collapse: societal, spiritual, and institutional. Socially, oppression (*Zulm*), economic exploitation, and nepotism result in injustice, inequality, and social fragmentation. Institutionally, the betrayal of trust (*Khiyānah*) and neglect of consultation (*Shūrā*) undermine governance structures, erode public confidence, and normalize autocracy (*Istibdād*), ultimately leading to institutional collapse. Spiritually, bad leadership produces widespread moral decay (*Fasād*), misguidance, and divine punishment (*Nakbah*) in both this world and the hereafter. The Qur'ān thus presents leadership failure as a civilizational threat with enduring temporal and eschatological consequences.

The study makes three key theoretical contributions: (1) it provides an integrated Qur'ānic framework for diagnosing the origins and features of bad leadership; (2) it bridges Islamic ethical theory with contemporary leadership and organizational studies; and (3) it articulates preventive mechanisms rooted in divine accountability, justice, and consultative governance. Practically, this model offers Muslim institutions—public administrations, corporations, and civil society organizations—a normative tool for ethical leadership training, institutional reform, and accountability systems. The preventive mechanisms derived from the Qur'ānic framework operate at multiple, mutually reinforcing levels. At the individual level, they inform ethical leadership formation through *Taqwā*-centered training, cultivating humility, trustworthiness (*Amānah*), and self-accountability. At the governance level, the institutionalization of *Shūrā* functions as a structural safeguard against autocracy by embedding consultative and participatory decision-making. At the organizational level, Qur'ānic accountability translates into formal integrity and oversight frameworks that deter corruption (*Khiyānah*) and injustice (*Zulm*). Finally, at the cultural level, these mechanisms shape organizational norms that prioritize justice (*'Adl*), transparency, and moral responsibility over personal power or status.

The theoretical contributions of this study intervene in several unresolved debates within bad leadership and organizational ethics scholarship. First, the proposed Qur'ānic diagnostic framework addresses a prevailing limitation in bad leadership studies that privilege behavioral typologies and outcome-based assessments while under-theorizing the normative and moral foundations of authority. Second, by integrating Islamic ethical concepts with organizational behavior, the study challenges the implicit secular assumption that leadership accountability is exhausted by institutional or legal oversight, reintroducing transcendent moral accountability as an analytically relevant variable. Third, the framework responds to the tendency in governance and ethics literature to treat

moral failure and structural constraints as analytically separate by demonstrating how ethical breakdown and institutional dysfunction are mutually reinforcing.

The Qur'ānic understanding of leadership as a divine covenant is grounded in the concept of *Amānah*, whereby authority is entrusted by Allah and must be exercised in accordance with justice, accountability, and moral restraint. This trust is inseparable from *Khilāfah* and *Istikhhlāf*, which frame human authority as delegated stewardship rather than absolute sovereignty, obligating leaders to govern as moral agents answerable to God. Within this framework, leadership failure occurs when the *Amānah* is betrayed through oppression (*Zulm*), arrogance (*Kibr*), and the rejection of consultative governance (*Shūrā*), thereby violating the ethical purpose of *Istikhhlāf*.

The divergence between the Qur'ānic framework and secular leadership theories operates at three interrelated levels. Ontologically, authority in the Qur'ānic worldview originates from God through *Amānah* and *Istikhhlāf*, whereas secular theories typically ground leadership legitimacy in human institutions, legal mandates, or individual capacities. Ethically, the Qur'ānic model frames leadership obligations as divinely mandated moral duties—violations of which constitute sin—while secular approaches largely interpret ethical failure as professional misconduct or normative deviation. Teleologically, Qur'ānic leadership is oriented toward fulfilling divine justice and securing accountability in both worldly governance and the Hereafter, whereas secular theories prioritize organizational effectiveness, stability, or follower satisfaction as ultimate ends. This multilevel divergence explains why the Qur'ān treats bad leadership as a moral–theological rupture with enduring consequences, rather than solely as a failure of competence or behavior.

While the Qur'ānic framework foregrounds moral and theological failure as the core pathology of bad leadership, this study recognizes that such failures do not operate in isolation. Moral breakdown interacts dynamically with structural, institutional, and socio-political conditions—including weak accountability mechanisms, centralized power structures, economic inequality, and historical legacies—that can amplify or constrain leadership behavior. The Qur'ānic emphasis on *Shūrā*, justice (*ʿAdl*), and public trust (*Amānah*) implicitly acknowledges these structural dimensions by requiring the institutional design of governance systems that restrain moral excess and distribute authority. Accordingly, the analysis avoids moral reductionism by situating ethical failure within broader systemic contexts, while maintaining that moral responsibility remains the decisive criterion for leadership legitimacy.

#### 4.7. Limitations and Future Research Directions

By focusing exclusively on doctrinal sources, like the Qur'ān and tafsīr, this study presents an Islamic framework for analyzing bad leadership while also acknowledging its limitations and pinpointing future research opportunities. The qualitative analysis relies solely on doctrinal sources without empirical validation from case studies or fieldwork, which could lead to interpretive biases by favoring some exegetical traditions over others. These limitations show areas for improving the study's rigor and applicability. While Western theories, like Kellerman's typologies of bad leadership, are mentioned, a more thorough comparison with other religious traditions, such as Christian and Buddhist ethics of leadership, is required.

#### 4.8. Future Research Directions

*Empirical Validation:* Quantitative studies could be used to develop more scales to measure Qur'ānic bad leadership origins (e.g., *kibr*, *zulm*) in Muslim organizations.

*Case studies:* The proposed framework could be applied to analyze historical/contemporary Muslim leaders (e.g., Umayyads, Abbasids and Ottoman governance).

### Authors' Contributions

**Mohamed Bile Hashi:** conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis. **Ahmed-Nor Mohamed Abdi:** writing original draft, writing review & editing, supervision.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

### Data Availability Statement

Data availability statement is not applicable as new data has been collected.

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