

# Comparative Analysis of Political Thoughts of Al-Kindi and Imam Ghazali

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## Abstract

Politically, Al-Kindi advocated the notion of socialism and Imam-Ghazali backed Theo-democracy. Both scholars endorse the rights of the people. According to them, no government can flourish solely either based on people or God. A successful state is nourished when people and religion are prioritized equally. Al-Kindi proposed extreme socialism by proposing that no man should have a monopoly on things perceived by the senses, lest he becomes covetous when others have the same right as them. Covetousness is bad. God reserves the right to distribute these things. Only the mind's possessions last. None can steal them. Al-Ghazali believed that influential people represent the community's support, not God's power. Al-Ghazali stressed that public support determines success or failure. Al-Ghazali rejected theocracy and authoritarianism. The emphasis on implementing governance based on religion, law, and morals shows the paradox. He stressed that rulers must prioritize justice and prevent injustice. The authors acknowledge the Rays and Ahmad al-'Arafat al-Qadi that democratic procedures represented by the ahl al-Shawkah gave rulers authority. Democracy is desirable, however. Al-Ghazali's Theo-democracy is a participatory government that respects religious authority.

**Keywords:** Al-Kindi, Imam Ghazali, Political thoughts, Religion, Socialism, Theo-democracy.

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## *Al-Kindi*

Ab Yusuf Yaqub ibn Isq a-abb al-Kindi (c. 801–873 AD) was an Arab scholar. Thinker, mathematician, doctor, and theorist of music. Some consider Al-Kindi to be the “founder of Arab philosophy” because he was the first itinerant Muslim philosopher<sup>1</sup>. Recent research has helped to fill in the political, social, and cultural context of al-Kindi's life allowing us to examine him in the correct context and appreciate the spectacle inherent in even such a summary of his life as that provided here<sup>2</sup>. We can therefore locate al-Kindi at or around the start of a philosophical stream that remained important in the Islamic world for some centuries later, based on our understanding of the transfer of intellectual research from the realm of archaic Greek

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<sup>1</sup> Klein-Franhe, F. (2013). Al-Kindi. History of Islamic philosophy, 1, 165.

<sup>2</sup> Atiyeh, G.N. (1966). Al-Kindi the Philosopher of the Arabs.

philosophy to the principal intellectual strongholds of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries in Iraq (primarily through a Syrian Christian intermediate)<sup>3</sup>. The audience of Al-Kindi would have included representatives of the caliph's families and other nobility, as well as other intellectuals, learners, and theologians of all faiths. Most of these, notably the Muslims, might have encountered difficulty following him, as evidenced by the assertion that the Arabic manuscripts on which he builds his thoughts and opinions were advanced - in some cases very advanced - translations;" and institutionally, by the oddness of highly developed rebuttals with basic interpretations and discourse through most of his scriptures<sup>4</sup>. Of course, Al-Kindi was not functioning in a philosophical environment, and most of his views were likely been accessible to Christian theologians particularly. Nonetheless, it is clear from the tributes to many of his treatises, as well as the introductory remarks to certain treatises like *On First Philosophy* and paraphrase of *Almagest* by Ptolemy, that al-Kindi was mainly attempting to address himself to his compatriotic Muslims, for whom his doctrines offered an intellectual emergence<sup>5</sup>.

### ***Imam Ghazali***

Zain Dīn Abū Hamīd Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al-Ghazali al-Thūsī al-Shāfi'ī is the full name of Al-Ghazali. He was born in 450 AH (1058 CE) in Ghazalan, Thūs Khorasan, near Masyhad, and died in 505 AH (1111CE). His popularity is his titles such as the Kalam (theologian), Faqih, philosopher, and Sufi. Al-Ghazali lived when various religious and political organizations opposed the Islamic Realm. The Būyiyah Empire (Buwaihiyyah) Shi'a ruled Baghdad's Sunni Caliphate for three years before his birth. The Seljuk Turks under Thugrul Beg occupied the city and overthrew Būyiyah. Sultan Nishapur, Thugrul Beg, governed almost all of the Abbasid Caliphate. Politics changed from Shiite to Sunni. Al-Ghazali merely imagined a central government. The Prophet's Medina city-state was one of several self-governing states (the then-state capital in Greece). Tribute helped the caliph befriend lesser nations. The tribute payments from individual provinces satisfied Abbasid Caliph<sup>6</sup>. The caliphate failed to persuade the Sultans in charge to submit to the central government. Al-Ghazali lived during the Seljuk dynasty's decline after Malik Shah's murder. Al-Ghazali was idealistic in most areas of life, as shown above. He was a political scientist with a strong state influence who mastered numerous fields. He drafted several other books, including *al-Musta al-Zahiriyya* (Rebuttal to the flow of illegal political Bathiniyyah) or *Fadhā'ih al-Bathiniyya* (Vices of Bathiniyya doctrine), *Sulūk al-Sulthānah* (How to Govern), and *al-Tibr al-*

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<sup>3</sup> Meyerhof, M. (1930). *From Alexandria to Baghdad: A Contribution to the History of Philosophical and Medical Instruction among the Arabs*. Publisher of the Academy of Sciences on commission with Walter de Gruyter and Company.

<sup>4</sup> Walzer, R. (1953). *New light on the Arabic translations of Aristotle*. *Oriens*, 6(1), 91-142.

<sup>5</sup> Gardet, LA (1948). *MM, Introduction to Muslim Theology*. *Essay in Comparative Theology*, Paris.

<sup>6</sup> Nasution, H. (1985). *Islam in terms of various aspects*.

Masbuk (Gem Already Carved), which is known in Europe as the "Ethical Political Handbook." These and other books emphasize that Islam's goal is the moral state<sup>7</sup>.

### **Research objective**

The objectives of this research are inclusive of:

- Brief insights into the lives of Al-Kindi and Imam Ghazali
- Overview of political perspectives of Al-Kindi and Imam Ghazali
- Outlining the comparison between the political ideologies of Al-Kindi and Imam

Ghazali

### **Research Methodology**

The comparative research is qualitative in nature. To address the research objectives an overview of the political mindsets of both scholars has been studied. Literature reviews are performed thoroughly to make certain that all the relevant books and papers are studied to make the study progressively comprehensive and pertinent.

### ***Comparative analysis of the political thoughts of Al-Kindi and Imam Ghazali***

We can assume that al-Kindi had to fight against suspicious and antagonistic views toward philosophy since it was seen as part of the new, secular, and "foreign" civilization that was repugnant to the more conventional circles<sup>8</sup>. This is evidenced by the special pleading with which he occasionally starts his treatises (e.g., On First Philosophy). Among these are not just radical traditionalists like Ahmed ibn Hanbal, but also the more rationally minded Mu'tazila. The politicization of faith and science that followed the founding of the Mihna in 218 A.H./833 A.D. complicates Al-Kindi's connection with this later group<sup>9</sup>. In the name of rational religion and with the approval of that institution, the Mu'tazila persecuted both holy jurists and common soldiers with varying degrees of severity, but often with considerable cruelty<sup>10</sup>. Likewise, this inquisition needs to be understood in the context of rival cultural and ethnic groups, among whom, though, it is tough to pinpoint al-Kindi<sup>11</sup>. There is no hard evidence that he was affiliated socially or politically with any single party or religious denomination, but he seems to be placed with the mostly non-Arab powers that infused secular

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<sup>7</sup> Abdul Karim, M. (2007). History of the Muslim Thought and Civilization, edisi bahasa Indonesia, Sejarah Pemikiran dan Peradaban, terj.

<sup>8</sup> Margoliouth, D.S. (1905). IV. The Discussion between Abu Bishr Matta and Abu Sa'id al-Sirafi on the Merits of Logic and Grammar. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 37(1), 79-129.

<sup>9</sup> Patton, W.M. (1897). Ahmed Ibn Hanbal and the Mihna: A Contribution to a Biography of the Imam Ahmad the History of the Mohammedan Inquisition Called the Mihna, 218-234 AH. Ruprecht-Karls-Universität of Heidelberg.

<sup>10</sup> Goldziher, I. (1925). Lectures on Islam (Vol. 1). Carl Winters.

<sup>11</sup> Agius, D.A. (1980). The Shu'ubiyya Movement and its Literary Manifestations. Islamic Quarterly, 24(3), 76.

disciplines into the Islamic milieu despite being an Arabic aristocrat. It seems more likely that his troubles under al-Mutawakkil were attributable to personal rivalry or a general change in intellectual perspective at court than to any particular set of religious ideas. Even more, mystery surrounds al-Kindi's character<sup>12</sup>. Although al-Kindi had a reputation for greed, the recently uncovered materials from al-Sijistani's book *Siwan al-Hikmah* prove that he was indeed both virtuous and smart<sup>13</sup>. The definitive biography of al-Kindi has yet to be completed, and he is an intriguing individual about whom additional information is desirable.

Politically, al-Kindi leaned close to what could be called extreme socialism when he argued that no one should have a stronghold over goods perceived by the senses otherwise he becomes avaricious when they are acquired by someone else who possesses the same claim to those rights as well. He also said that avariciousness is a vice. God is fully entitled to bestow these blessings upon anyone He chooses. The only things that truly last are those of the spirit (the intellect). No one can take them away from us<sup>14</sup>. The Islamic world reveres al-Kindi as the "philosopher of the Arabs" for his contributions to the religion. He may be seen as a link between the Greek and Islamic schools of thought today. He was an instructor for the caliph's son and a member of the illustrious 'Abbasid court in Baghdad in the 9th century. Though he did not participate in the translation effort himself, he benefited from the work of others by correcting and incorporating their translations of the works of Greek thinkers, especially Aristotle, into his own. Although his theories were overtaken by Ibn Sina in the eleventh century, Al-Kindi is renowned for his contributions to philosophical nomenclature and for inventing a language for philosophical contemplation in Arabic. It was also with al-Kindi that the fight over whether or not philosophy is permissible in orthodox Islam began a war that is generally thought to have been conquered for Islam by Imam-Ghazali. While his ideas may seem conventional now, they were groundbreaking when he first proposed them<sup>15</sup>. He advocated for the primacy of reason and the study of a "foreign science," philosophy, over "Arab science," grammar, and Qur'anic studies. Unfortunately for al-Kindi, things turned around when Khalif al-Mutawwakil became ruler and attempted to revive traditionalism<sup>16</sup>.

Although Al-Kindi believed to have been apolitical in his society, he was reportedly persecuted by politically or personally motivated reforms at the court that were disguised as devout anti-Mu'tazila stance. Given the authenticity of the book's

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<sup>12</sup> Farrugia, M. (2005). *Avarice and the Avaricious (Kitāb Al-Bukhalā)*.

<sup>13</sup> Dunlop, D.M. (1979). *Muntakhab Siwan Al-Hikmah of Abu Sulaiman as-Sijistani*.

<sup>14</sup> Hamarneh, S. (1965). *Al-Kindī, A Ninth-Century Physician, Philosopher, and Scholar*. *Medical History*, 9(4), 328-342.

<sup>15</sup> Abboud, T. (2006). *Al Kindi: The Father of Arab Philosophy*. The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc.

<sup>16</sup> Ivry, A.L. (1974). *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics: A Translation of Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi's Treatise "On First Philosophy"*. SUNY Press.

opening remarks, "Based on a close examination of al-Kindi's perspectives on physics as well as the revelation in his major philosophical text, "On First Philosophy," it seems that al-Kindi has not been as keenly associated with the Mu'tazila as has previously been usually thought. Although he has certain commonalities, exegetical approaches, sources, and purposes with other rational theologians, he is not to be considered as, say, "the philosopher of the Mu'tazilite theology." But he sees things from a hugely different angle, with a dedication to the rational thought process as outlined by Aristotle influencing the way he formulates his religious conviction<sup>17</sup>. While he acknowledges in "First Philosophy" that everything comes about by chance and that everything depends on God as Creator, the "truly one" regarding whom everything else is just "metaphorically one," he nevertheless uses language concerning causality and substance that suggests he accepts the latter's practical if not theoretical independence. It is obvious from al-Kindi's extensive bibliography that he is concerned with the universe as it is, in all its diversity, and with man's varied scientific accomplishments. "According to this report, he isn't very interested in debating the finer points of people's political or religious beliefs. His rejection of the Christian theology of the Trinity, the only example we have of his approach to religious rhetoric, indicates that he took the high path of philosophical disputation<sup>18</sup>. The fact that he is so committed to a branch of study associated with foreign notions and pursued primarily by non-Arab mawali suggests that he is not concerned with the promotion of particularist, ethnic claims<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that al-Kindi was largely his own man, an individual of significant knowledge, with a rational and objective consideration for the reality within boundaries tolerable to the general public and, undoubtedly, to his religious convictions, through which, even so, he believed scientific understanding was interoperable. It's possible that the genuine al-Kindi 'was like the wise historical character about whose tales were recounted and, in whose name, pithy sayings were recited. This person would have likely been dissatisfied with the Mu'tazila-backed mihna that al-Ma'mun and several of his successors ushered in, further polarizing society and discouraging intellectual exploration<sup>20</sup>. It's easy to picture al-Kindi using his privileged position in the court to voice his displeasure with the Mu'tazilites' theoretical and political tenets and practices, and sure enough, he does just that in the first chapter of First Philosophy. The clause is better described as a barely disguised accusation of the Mu'tazila, given the circumstances of his insinuations and the terminology he uses. This section follows a paraphrasing of the first chapter of Metaphysics, wherein al-Kindi specifically mentions Aristotle's name and echoes the philosopher's sentiments on being grateful to those who came before in the pursuit of

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<sup>17</sup> Ivry, A. L. (1971). *Al-Kindi's First philosophy and cognate texts* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford).

<sup>18</sup> Périer, A. (1920). *A Treatise of Yahya ben Adi, Defense of the Dogma of the Trinity Against the Objections of al-Kindi*.

<sup>19</sup> Rosenthal, F. (1943). *Aḥmad b. aṭ-Ṭayyib as-Saraḥsī. Con.*, American Oriental Society.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid* iv.

truth<sup>21</sup>. To individuals who've been "in our time acknowledged for exploration" but are not part of the intellectual heritage, Al-Kindi launches an attack.

"Because of their limited knowledge of the truth's methods and their lack of understanding of what Majesty requires in terms of viewpoint and discernment in the commonly held ubiquitous utilization that is common among them, and because of the filthy envy that is a potential of their inhumane spirits, concealing their thoughts, observations, and belief through the light of reality by obscuring its veils, and (because of) their putting those with compassionate virtue in positions of authority, they may have been unjustly crowned. The true reason for their prominence is that they are in positions of authority and engage in religious trading, although they lack faith; after all, a trader must first purchase the commodity he wishes to sell. Thus, one who deals in spirituality is without faith, and one who opposes learning the truth about the world and labels such resistance "unbelief" must be stripped of the religious privileges that come with it<sup>22</sup>.

When al-Kindi disparages the "utilization" of "supposition," "point of view," and "conviction," he is identifying the modes of reasoning commonly associated with the Mu'tazila and arguing that they are inferior to the "utilization" of "logic," "reason," and "experience." "Methods of truth," which refers to logical arguments. Further evidence that the Mu'tazila are the target of al-Kindi comes from the fact that they were the only group to hold positions of power and authoritative disciplinary actions at the moment this treatise was written, and that they used this influence to enforce their religious views on the populace through coercion, threats, and accusations of unfaithfulness. Therefore, al-Kindi should not be unduly linked with the Ma'tazila, as he is willing to demand their removal from political office and government favor. However, this text should not be taken as the final word on al-Kindi's relationship with the Ma'tazila, since we have seen that he does have several points of communication with them, yet he refrained, to the extent that we know, of any genuine political participation. The fact that al-Kindi's library was finally restored suggests that al-Mutawakkil was not seen as a serious political or theological threat, but this neutral attitude did not assist him<sup>23</sup>. To the extent that his life can be pieced back together, Al-Kindi's story illustrates the internal struggles and external challenges that Muslim thinkers faced.

As indicated above, Al-Ghazali inhabited a period of intellectual conflict involving philosophy as well as kalam, political as well as religious conflicts involving Sunni and Shiite, and real political turmoil throughout the Abbasid monarchy. The Islamic world of politics was chaotic since the caliph was an emblem, or hostage, rather than controlling

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<sup>21</sup> Lindberg, D. C., & Lindberg, D. C. (1976). *Theories of Vision from al-Kindi to Kepler*. University of Chicago Press.

<sup>22</sup> Moosa, M. I. (1967). Al-Kindi's Role in the transmission of Greek Knowledge to the Arabs. *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, 15(1), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Meyerhof, M. (1926). New light on Hunain ibn Ishaq and his period. *Isis*, 8(4), 685-724.

a centralized Muslim state. The Bani Seljuk governs, and the caliph was simply a religious figure. The caliph was merely a religious figure; political authority and administration remained with the Bani Seljuk. Furthermore, the Abbasid Caliphate broke up into various minor republics governed by its rulers outside of the Islamic World in Bani Seljuk, while they still legally accepted the caliphate as head of government<sup>24</sup>. During Al-Ghazali's lifetime, Bani Seljuk Sultan, namely Sultan Barkiyaruq, exerted considerable influence on the Caliph of Bani Abbas. To become sultan, the Sultan had to depose his uncle, Sultan Tutusy bin 'Alb' Arslan<sup>25</sup>.

The political factors underlying Al-Ghazali's departure were endorsed by Munawir Sjadzali. As per him, two events—the assassination of Prime Minister Nizam al-Muluk and the killing of Tutusy Sultan bin 'Alb' Arsalan perhaps by his nephew Barkiyaruq—were both inspired by Al-Ghazali's decision to leave for Damascus. Al-Ghazali's return to Baghdad lends credence to this theory. Since Barkiyuruq Sultan had passed away, the Minister of Fakhr al-Muluk, Nizam al-Muluk's son, convinced him. For political reasons, including security concerns posed by Bthiniyyah, al-Ghazali left Baghdad. To destabilize the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad, the Fathimiyyah Caliphate received backing in Egypt, leading to a rise in terror. His academic struggles have caused him emotional distress, which is also a considerable influence. The philosopher abandoned philosophical pursuits in favor of jurisprudence (fiqh) and Sufism during his exile from Baghdad. Both the *al-Munqidzmin al-Dalal* and the *'Ihy' 'Ulm al-Din*, a work on Sufism and fiqh, were written by al-Ghazali during his time of isolation<sup>26</sup>.

Ideology clashes surrounded Al-Ghazali. Ash'arite, Mu'tazilite, and Shi'ite views clashed fiercely. Theology about God and human conduct drives the Ash'arite-Mu'tazilite conflict<sup>27</sup>. Al-Ghazali represented Ash'arite ('Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama'a'), but it was political because the Caliphate of Bani Abbas was weak at the time<sup>28</sup>. The Shiite organization reflects Bathiniyya's brutality against the Caliph in Baghdad. Ahmad Syafii says Sunni intellectuals, including Al-Ghazali, theorize about leadership and politics to disprove non-Sunni claims. Qamaruddin Khan wrote in "The Political Thought" of Ibn Taymiyyah that Al-Ghazali introduced the concept of ahl al-Shawka. The assertions were made in the context of describing the comparable notion presented by Ibn Taymiyyah, where numerous parties, including Qamaruddin Khan, explored a new perspective in establishing the source of the authority of a ruler (imam or Sultan). Ahl al-Shawka's views of Ibn Taymiyyah's authority were groundbreaking.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid vii

<sup>25</sup> Sahri, S. (2021). Political thought of Al-Ghazali on Imamah: Debate between theocracy and democracy. *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies*, 77(3).

<sup>26</sup> Tabar, H. F., & Siraki, G. K. Power, knowledge and legitimacy in the Political Thought of Imam Mohammad Ghazali.

<sup>27</sup> Nikzad Chaleshtari, M., Golshani, A., & Abazari, M. (2022). Ghazali's political thought. *Political Sociology of Iran*.

<sup>28</sup> Kumar, M. Y. (2017). *Islamic Political Thought: A Study of the Diverse Interpretations of Medieval Muslim Political Thinkers*. *Saudi J. Humanities Soc. Sci*, 2.

Thus, Ibn Taymiyyah's thoughts overshadowed Al-Ghazali<sup>29</sup>. Despite Al-Ghazali's political challenges, his theories about the ahl al-Shawkah give a different viewpoint on power's source: strong popular support. Thus, although he cites ahl al-hall wa al-'Aqd a few times, he disagrees with the forum of people who can select and remove rulers. Thus, if Al-Ghazali still believes in ahl al-hall wa al-'Aqd, he intended what he implied in the ahl al-Shawkah doctrine—a person or group of powerful people who support a monarch (caliph, Sultan, or king)<sup>30</sup>.

As per Syida Saiqa Zubeda, Al-Ghazali believed religion and leadership were inseparable. That is, a king should realize he is just a sacred responsibility. He added that a priest represents religion (din), religion defends the world (Dunya), the world is controlled by Sultan, Sultan represents man), and the priest legitimizes Sultan. The map shows the complexity of the Caliph and Sultan (Bani Seljuq) positions, although Al-Ghazali believed that religion should control the government. He also said that power and religion were inseparable, thus a king is always in Allah's eyes<sup>31</sup>. Syeda Saiqa Zubeda agrees with Al-Ghazali that faith is a doctrine, and the monarch is the protector. Something without a foundation or a shield would be lost. Al-Ghazali also believed that this world affects happiness in the afterlife. Thus, to achieve eternal bliss, a monarch must follow religious beliefs. Al-leadership Ghazali's or Imamah's stance was quite tolerant in his time<sup>32</sup>.

Thus, Al-Ghazali's political theory, as a result of the doctrine of "Aghlabiyah" (majority) and the need to heed religion, is more comparable to 'Abū al-'Alā al-Maudūdi<sup>33</sup>, that the Islamic administration is theodemocracy. To accommodate people's rights, religion cannot be separated (Islam).

## **Conclusion**

Politically, al-Kindi came close to what could be called extreme socialism when he argued that no one should have a monopoly over goods sensed by the senses lest he becomes covetous when other people hold them have the same right as him as well. [He] also said that covetousness is a vice. God is fully entitled to bestow these blessings upon anyone He chooses. The only things that truly last are those of the spirit (the intellect). No one can take them away from us. According to Al-Ghazali, the authority's source is not divine power (theocracy), but rather, the backing of the larger community, which is exemplified by important people (ahl al-Shawkah). Both success and failure, according to Al-Ghazali, are due to the support of the people. With his

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<sup>29</sup> Al-Ghazali, A. (1956). *Fadhaih al-Bathiniyah*. Kuwait: Mu'assasah Dār Al-Kutub Ats-Tsaqāfiyyah.

<sup>30</sup> Pulungan, J. S. (2016). *Fiqh Siyasah: Ajaran, Sejarah, dan Pemikiran*.

<sup>31</sup> Zubeda, S. S. (2000). *Islamic political sociology in the modern age: Theory and practice* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Karachi).

<sup>32</sup> Ghazali, I. (2000). *Ihya' Ulumuddin juz II*. Tt: Dar al-Ihya' Al-Kutub al-Arabiyah, t.th.

<sup>33</sup> Redaksi, T. (2000). *Fiqh Rakyat; Pertautan Fiqh dengan Kekuasaan*. LKIS PELANGI

rejection of theocracy as a concept, Al-Ghazali made it clear that he had never been a fan of absolute, authoritarian rule. The seeming contradiction arises from the insistence that governmental institutions be established by religious, legal (sharia), and moral precepts. One of the things he constantly stressed as a leader was the importance of doing what's right and staying away from what's wrong. Based on these two points, the author opposes the idea that Al-Ghazali was strongly attracted toward the theocracy and that he contended the power source (mandate) was a verdict predicated on texts by many verses which he took. The writers agree with the Rays and Ahmad al-'Arafat al-Qadi that the ahl al-Shawkah, who embodies democracy, is a ruler's legitimate source of power. Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that a democratic form of government is preferable. The government of Al-Ghazali is not an outright democracy but rather a theodemocracy, in which citizens have a voice but must nevertheless respect religious authority.

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