Ethics of Leadership and Political Crisis in the Caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Thalib: A Socio-Civilizational Perspective

Faisal Amir Toedien¹, Syamruddin Nasution²
¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia
² Universitas Islam Negeri Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: **22490114357@students.uin-suska.ac.id**

Abstract. This study examines the ethical dimensions of leadership and the political crises that occurred during the caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Thalib (656–661 CE) within the framework of early Islamic social history and civilization. The governance of Ali unfolded amid a profound crisis of legitimacy and communal disintegration following the assassination of Caliph Utsman bin Affan. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, integrating historical and sociological analysis of classical sources alongside contemporary studies, using a library-based research design. The findings indicate that Ali's leadership was rooted in principles of justice, knowledge, and high moral integrity. However, this political idealism frequently confronted a power landscape shaped by intrigue and competing interests. The Battles of Jamal and Shiffin, as well as the arbitration *(taḥkim)*, illustrate how political conflict transformed into theological and social crises that contributed to the emergence of early Islamic sects such as the *Khawarij*, the *Shi'a*, and the *Murjiʾah*. These findings affirm that the leadership ethics of Ali ibn Abi Thalib represent an Islamic political vision grounded in justice, consultation, and the public welfare, while also offering moral insights for the development of contemporary Islamic leadership.

Introduction

Leadership in Islamic history constitutes a fundamental aspect that determines the trajectory of the Muslim civilization. Since the death of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, the question of who is eligible to succeed him as the leader of the Muslim community becomes a central topic that shapes social, political, and religious dynamics. The era of the *Khulafāʾal-Rāshidīn* represents a significant period that exemplifies both the ideal and the complex dimensions of Islamic leadership. The four caliphs, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, and Ali ibn Abi Ṭalhib demonstrate distinct leadership characteristics, yet all of them rest on the core values of justice, trustworthiness, and consultation *(syura)*.

Within the broader context of Islamic civilization, the period of the Khulafāʾ al-Rāshidīn is often regarded as an ideal phase (the golden age) because it contains elevated moral principles and robust social justice (Misnahwati dkk., 2024). Nevertheless, the political dynamics that accompany this period are not always stable. Differences in the methods of succession, patterns of legitimacy, and internal conflicts provide valuable lessons on how Islamic idealism interacts with the realities of human politics. Abū Bakr is chosen directly by the Companions through a

consultative mechanism, ʿUmar is appointed directly by Abū Bakr, ʿUthmān is selected through a *shūrā* council, while Ali receives the pledge of allegiance *(bayʿah)* directly from the community ((Muhammad & Tengku, 2025). These differences form the root of various interpretations and political thought within Islam.

Previous studies, such as Tanjung dkk., (2023) and, Misnahwati dkk., (2024) discuss the succession systems and leadership characteristics during the era of the *Khulafāʾ al-Rāshidīn*. However, most of these studies remain descriptive and focus merely on historical or biographical aspects. Research that specifically examines the relationship between succession methods, political legitimacy, and the socio-religious implications of the four caliphs in a comparative framework remains highly limited. In particular, the caliphate of Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib deserves deeper examination because it presents leadership dynamics marked by internal conflicts, ideological differences, and the emergence of early theological groups such as the *Khawārij* and *Shīʿah*.

Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib is one of the most significant figures in Islamic history who plays a major role in the development of Islamic teachings. He is widely recognized for his exceptional courage and his frequent participation in battles fought in defense of Islam. He is also known as a legal expert of his time and consistently succeeds in resolving complex issues. Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib embodies noble character traits such as responsibility, honesty, justice, asceticism *(zuhd)*, and respect for parents. The values of character education reflected in his personality serve as exemplary foundations for character formation in the contemporary era (Muhammad & Serta, 2023: Apriyani, 2021).

Examining his historical legacy provides a deeper understanding of his life and the Islamic teachings he conveys. Moreover, understanding the life journey of Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib offers inspiration and valuable lessons for Muslims in navigating everyday life. Therefore, research on the history of Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib is essential.

Based on these considerations, this study seeks to fill the gap in previous scholarship by analyzing, from both historical and sociological perspectives, the process of appointment of the four caliphs and its implications for leadership legitimacy and the unity of the Muslim community. This study aims to examine the ethics of leadership practiced by Caliph Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib in confronting the political crises during his caliphate. It addresses questions concerning the forms and principles of leadership ethics that Caliph Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib applies in navigating the political turmoil of his era. This study is expected to contribute to the development of classical Islamic leadership studies and to offer moral reflection for the advancement of contemporary Islamic political ethics.

Method

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive–historical method combined with sociological analysis. This approach was chosen because the research focused on gaining a contextual understanding of the historical events surrounding the appointment of the four *Khulafāʾ al-Rāshidīn* and their implications for the Islamic leadership system. This research was conducted as a library study, in which

all data were obtained from various written sources relevant to the topic. The historical approach was employed to trace the facts and chronology of the caliphal appointments, while the sociological approach was applied to understand the social and political impacts that occurred during that period.

The data of this study were obtained from credible secondary literature, including classical Islamic historical works and modern academic publications such as accredited journals that discuss the leadership period of the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidīn*. Several key references included the works of Harun Nasution and contemporary studies that examined governance structures and political conflicts during the caliphal era. These sources were selected because they provided clear insights into the process of caliphal appointment and the accompanying socio-political dynamics, particularly during the caliphate of Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib.

The data collection techniques were carried out through literature review and documentation by reading, taking notes, and examining the content of relevant works. The researcher served as the primary instrument responsible for selecting and interpreting the data to ensure alignment with the research focus. All collected data were then analyzed descriptively and analytically through several steps: categorizing the data based on thematic relevance, tracing the relationships among historical events, and drawing conclusions regarding leadership patterns and political implications during the era of the four *Khulafā' al-Rāshidīn*. Through this method, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of caliphal appointment and the values of Islamic leadership within the historical context of early Islamic civilization

Results and Discussion
A Brief Biography of Ali ibn Abi Thalib

His full name was Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hāshim ibn ʿAbd al-Manāf ibn Quṣayy ibn Kilāb ibn Murrah (Nasution, 2022). He was also known by other names such as Shaybah al-Ḥamd (the praiseworthy elder) ((Khalid, 2014), ʿAbd Manāf, and, in several other sources, he was mentioned to have had a childhood name, Asad, meaning "lion" (Taman et all., 2012). His mother was Fāṭimah bint Asad ibn Hāshim ibn ʿAbd al-Manāf, and his father was Abū Ṭālib ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. Ali was born in Mecca when the Prophet Muhammad was thirty years old; he was both the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law from the Banū Hāshim lineage. He was born in Mecca in 603 CE (Toedien et all., 2025).although some accounts suggest that he was born on 13 Rajab in the year 23 BH, or on 17 March 599 CE according to Gregorian calculations.

Alī was the son of Abū Ṭālib, who was known as a man with many children and someone who allowed his children to embrace Islam. Abū Ṭālib consistently protected the Prophet from childhood to adulthood, indicating that he accepted the Prophet's teachings (Tahir, 2021). When Mecca experienced a severe famine, the Prophet, together with his uncle al-ʿAbbās, initiated support to relieve Abū Ṭālib's economic burden by offering to care for some of his children. Their offer was

accepted with gratitude. Al-ʿAbbās took Jaʿfar under his care, while the Prophet took Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib into his household.

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If the question arises regarding who was older between the Prophet Muhammad and Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, the answer is unequivocal: The Prophet Muhammad was significantly older. The Prophet was born in 570 CE, known as the Year of the Elephant, while Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib was born around 600 CE—approximately thirty years after the Prophet. When the Prophet received the first revelation at the age of forty, Ali was around ten years old. At such a young age, Ali became the first child to accept Islam and one of the earliest individuals to believe in the Prophet's message.

In the third year of Hijrah, the Prophet married Ali to his daughter, Faṭimah bint Muḥammad, when Ali was approximately twenty-six years old (Rasyid, 2015). Their marriage was regarded by several groups as the symbol of "the perfect family unit" (Shanneik, 2023). From this union were born two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, who later became significant figures in Islamic history. Ali participated in every battle in which the Prophet took part, except for the Battle of *Tabuk,* during which he was entrusted with guarding Madinah. Known as an exceptional horseman, a courageous warrior, and one deeply knowledgeable in religious matters, Ali also stood out for his intelligence and sharp reasoning. It is therefore unsurprising that during the leadership of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, he was frequently involved in important consultations concerning communal affairs and matters of state legislation. Ali was also renowned as an eminent scholar, with contributions and roles recorded in Islamic tradition. One of the works attributed to him is *Kitab Ali*, a compilation of prophetic statements gathered by Ali. The book is believed to address issues of lawful and unlawful matters, including details of criminal law. Kitāb Ali is also often associated with al-Jafr, which is claimed to contain esoteric teachings of the Prophet intended for his family (Wikipedia, 2025).

His reputation as a great scholar is also found in various literatures, exemplified by a well-known statement attributed to the Prophet, cited in some narratives:

"انا باب العلم و علي مفتاحه"

"I am the gate of knowledge, and Ali is its key."

It is reported that several individuals once tested Ali by asking questions comparing knowledge and wealth, and the variety of answers he provided each supported by different rationales that indicated a single conclusion: knowledge holds a superior status (Karim, 2017). However, upon deeper examination, a similar phrase appears in *Sunan al- Tirmidhi* (no. 3723) with the wording:

<div dir="rtl">

"أنا دار الحكمة وعلي بابها"

</div>

Which is classified as a *"hadits gharib munkar"* . **(إسلام سؤال وجواب, 2013)** Other literatures also note that the narration "*I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is its door*" appears in *Mustadrak al-Hakim* and other sources, and scholars differ in their assessment. Some consider it ṣaḥiḥ or ḥasan, while others reject it or classify it as weak (Meah, 2019). A more detailed assessment is provided in another report that classifies the narration as fabricated. It is related through the chain: Abu Shalt Abdussalam bin Shalih Al Harawi, who narrated from Abu Mu'awiyah, from A'masy, from Mujahdi, from Ibnu 'Abbas raised to the Prophet.

<div dir="rtl">

أنا مَدِينَةُ العِلمِ وعليٌّ بابُها فمَنْ أرادَ المدينةَ فَلْيَأْتِها من قِبَلِ البابِ

</div>

 "I am the city of knowledge and ʿAli is its gate; whoever seeks the city should approach it through its gate."

This narration is found in Tahdzibul Atsar, Ath Thabrani in Al Kabir 1/108, Al Hakim 3/126, Al Khothib in Tarikh Baghdad 11/48, Ibnu Asakir 2/159. Although the narration appears to elevate ʿAli's scholarly status, it is classified as fabricated. Al-Ḥākim stated that its chain is sound, but his claim was refuted by Adz Dzahabi who asserted that the narration is in fact fabricated. Elsewhere, Adz Dzahabi even criticized al-Ḥakim harshly, saying: "By Allah, this ḥadith is fabricated; Aḥmad (one of its transmitters) is a liar. How ignorant you are, despite your vast knowledge," due to al-Ḥakim's authentication of a fabricated narration (Sabiq, 2014).

The historical account of the death of Ali bin Abi Thalib began after he had won the Battle of *Nahrawan* and defeated nearly all members of the *Khawarij*, including their leader, Abdullah bin Wahab ar-Rasibi. However, a small group of surviving *Khawarij* continued to operate secretly and nurtured a deep resentment toward ʿAli, believing that he had deviated from the law of God and committed a major sin. This fanatical ideology led them to view ʿAli as a legitimate enemy of religion who deserved to be fought, despite his position as the rightful caliph of the Muslim community.

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With the remaining strength he possessed, Ali was determined to confront *Muawiyah* once again. He reportedly succeeded in mobilizing 65,000 people to join the campaign. However, internal divisions soon emerged, and many refused to fight under Ali's command for several reasons. First, Ali permitted the shedding of enemy blood but prohibited the taking of war spoils. Second, he was unable to provide sufficient financial support for his troops. As a result, Ali's military forces weakened, enabling v to seize control of Madinah and Yemen, although the people of Mecca refused to recognize *Muawiyah*'s authority.

Several years after the events of *Nahrawan*, the *Khawarij's* resentment reached its peak. On the 17th of Ramadhan in the year 40 H / 661 CE, in the city of Kufah, as Ali was on his way to the Kūfah Mosque for the dawn prayer, he was attacked and struck with a poisoned sword by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muljam al-Murādī, one of the surviving members of the *Khawarij* (Nadirin, 2022). According to accounts preserved in *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* and *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* by Ibn Kathīr, the assassination was part of a coordinated plan involving three *Khawari*j members: Abdurrahman bin Muljam, who targeted Ali in Kufah; Al-Burak bin Abdullah, who targeted *Muʿawiyah* in Damascus; and Amr bin Bakr at-Tamimi, who targeted Amr bin al-ʿAsh in Egypt. Among these coordinated attempts, only the assassination of Ali succeeded, marking the end of his leadership and closing the era of the *Khulafaur Rasyidin*. As for the other attempts, it is narrated that Barak bin Abdillah al-Tamimi managed to stab *Muʿawiyah*, but the injury was not life-threatening. Meanwhile, Amr bin Bakr al-Tamimi failed to kill Amr bin al-ʿAsh because the latter was ill and did not lead the dawn prayer that day; instead, the person who took his place was the one killed (Nasution, 2022).

The debate regarding the exact date of Ali bin Abi Thalib's death was resolved clearly, indicating that the event occurred on 15 Ramaḍān 40 H / 22 January 661 CE, after he had been struck by a poisoned sword (Attamimi et al., 2025). Imam Ali underwent medical treatment for three days, from Friday until Sunday. After receiving such treatment, he breathed his last on Sunday, 17 Ramaḍān 40 H / 24 January 661 CE (Nadirin, 2022). Ibn Muljam and Khawarij believed that the sources of discord and division within the Muslim community stemmed from three central figures: Ali bin Abi Thalib, Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan, and Amr bin al- Ash. They conspired to assassinate all three simultaneously; however, only the assassination attempt on Ali succeeded, while the other two survived (Munawira et al., 2024).

The Leadership Ethics of Caliph Ali ibn Abi Thalib in Confronting Political Crisis

The process of appointing Ali bin Abi Thalib as caliph differed fundamentally from that of the three preceding caliphs. Abu Bakar ash-Shiddiq was appointed through a limited consultation at Saqifah Bani Saʿidah and later received the general pledge of allegiance *(baiʿat umum)* from the Muslim community. Umar bin Khattab was directly appointed by Abu Bakar through the mechanism of *istikhlaf*, which was approved by the Companions. Utsman bin Affan, in turn, was selected through a *syura* council composed of six Companions appointed by Umar. In contrast, Ali was pledged allegiance spontaneously by the people following the assassination of

Utsman, in the midst of a chaotic political atmosphere and without a formal syura process, thus making his appointment an acclamation (Hamdi, 2021). This condition caused several prominent Companions to delay or refuse to give their pledge, resulting in Ali's political legitimacy being weaker than that of the previous three caliphs. His leadership was subsequently marked by political conflict and internal division within the Muslim community. His rule was further challenged by the increasing tendency toward *ḥubb al-dunya* (love of worldly life), which gradually eroded the spiritual integrity of the early Muslim society (Toedien et al., 2025).

Table 1. Presents a comparative summary of the appointment methods and leadership characteristics of four *Khulafaur Rasyidin*

Caliph	Method of Appointment	Characteristics and Legitimacy of Leadership
Abu Bakar al-Ṣiddīq (632–634 CE)	Appointed through consultation *at Saqīfah Banī Sā'idah* immediately after the Prophet's death	Received *baiʿat ʿāmmah* (public allegiance) from Muslims; considered legitimate by *ijmāʿ* (communal consensus)
Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (634–644 CE)	Directly appointed by Abu Bakr through *istikhlāf* before his death.	Accepted unanimously by the Companions; known for strong governance, firmness, and commitment to social justice.
Utsman ibn 'Affān (644–656 CE)	Elected through a *syura* council of six Companions formed by Umar bin al-Khattab.	Initially experienced stable leadership but later faced political turmoil and rebellions, culminating in his assassination.
Ali bin Abi Thalib (656–661 CE)	Pledged allegiance spontaneously by the people of Madinah after the death of Utsman, without a formal *syura*	His political legitimacy was questioned by some Companions and governors (particularly *Mu'awiyah*). His rule was marked by major conflicts: the Battle of Jamal, the Battle of ṣiffīn, and the arbitration (*taḥkīm*) episode

More detailed accounts indicate that after the death of the third caliph, Utsman, the rebels seized control of Madinah, and many members of the *Bani Umayyah* left the capital. Among them was Marwan bin Al-Hakam, who managed to smuggle Utsman's blood-soaked garment to Mecca. Following the assassination of Caliph Utsman bin Affan, the selection of a new caliph became a highly tense political and social event. Unlike the appointment of Abu Bakar and Utsman which ultimately received acceptance from the broader Muslim community, the selection of Ali bin Abi Thalib occurred amid widespread turmoil resulting from political and social fragmentation (Hasibuan et al., 2024). People gathered at Ali's residence to pledge allegiance to him, with support primarily coming from the residents of Madinah and its surroundings.

Initially, Ali bin Abi Thalib refused to accept the *baiʿah* and emphasized that the matter should not be decided by the general population but by the veterans of the Battle of Badr (Nasution, 2022). After Ali declined, the people then approached Sa'ad bin Abi Waqqash and Abdurrahman bin Auf, both of whom also refused. As the Companions continued to insist, arguing that the state *(daulah)* could not survive without a leader *(amir)*. Finally, Ali agreed to accept the *baiʿah* (Nadirin, 2022). He established an agreement that he would govern in accordance with the Book of God and the Sunnah of the Prophet. He assumed the caliphate on 24 June 656 CE, or in the year 35 H, at the age of fifty-eight. Other sources mention that the event took

place on Saturday, 19 *Dzulhijjah* 35 H, and indicate that sa'ad bin Abi Waqqash, Abdullah bin Umar, Zaid bin Tsabit, and Abu Sa'id al-Khudri did not oppose ʿAli's caliphate, but they refrained from active participation in either the *baiʿah* or the political conflicts that followed. Their stance was one of neutrality, motivated by a desire to avoid discord.

These facts demonstrate that Ali did not receive full recognition from several key Companions in Madinah, in addition to lacking support from the people of the Syamn region *(Syam)*. It is therefore unsurprising that his administration is considered the least stable among the Khulafā' al-Rāshidīn. He faced continuous conflict from the beginning to the end of his rule conflict with Aisyah, with Muawiyah, and with his former followers, the *Khawarij*. Multiple sectors, including politics, economics, and education, experienced severe disruption (Toedien et al., 2025).

According to al-Khudri Bek as cited in Nasution, the instability of Ali bin Abi Thalib's administration was influenced by his strong confidence in his own judgment and his limited engagement of prominent Quraysh figures in major political deliberations. His firmness was often perceived as severity, which eventually reduced political support for his leadership. Al-Khudri Bek, quoted by Syamruddin, compared Ali with ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭab, who, despite being equally firm, continued to receive broad support because he consistently prioritized consultative decision-making in all governmental affairs (Nasution, 2022, p. 79).

Criticism of Ali's leadership style also emerged from distinguished Companions such as Thalhah and Zubair. When they reproached Ali for rarely conducting deliberation, he responded with confidence: "What is it that I do not know, that I should consult others about it?" This statement reflected a high level of self-assurance but also highlighted an increasing distance between Ali and the Quraysh elite. It is widely acknowledged that the *khulafaurrasyidin* generally emphasized collective deliberation *(syura)* in their governance to ensure that their policies remained aligned with communal interests. Ali, however, adopted a different approach (Sulistio et al., 2023). As a result, several Companions and followers began to withdraw their support, and the *Khawarij* eventually seceded as a distinct group. This situation exacerbated political instability, culminating in armed conflict with Aisyah, wife of the Prophet, alongside Thalhah and Zubair, followed by further confrontation with Muawiyah bin Abu Sufyan, the governor of Syam at that time.

Throughout his caliphate, Ali bin Abi Thalib was known as a leader of profound wisdom and uncompromising integrity. He demonstrated visionary thinking, decisiveness tempered by justice, and a consistent commitment to basing his rulings on equity and piety. His ascetic lifestyle reflected his sincerity in leadership and deep concern for the welfare of the Muslim community. Ali was also recognized for his strong spiritual devotion, often weeping out of fear of God (Siregar & Amril M, 2025). In terms of scholarship, he was widely acknowledged by both Companions and later scholars as a foremost authority in jurisprudence. His steadfast adherence to the Qurʾan and the Sunnah made him a central reference in legal matters, and his intellectual and moral stature earned him widespread trust as the community negotiated the crises that followed the death of Utsman bin Affan (Hasibuan et al., 2024).

The wisdom of Ali bin Abi Thalib as caliph was most evident in two of his major policies: dismissing the governors appointed during the administration of Utsman bin Affan including Muawiyah bin Abi Sufya in Syam and restoring state lands that had been transferred or sold by individuals close to the previous government. These measures demonstrated his commitment to justice and reform, yet they also provoked strong political resistance. Although his advisors and relatives recommended that he

postpone such reforms until conditions had stabilized, Ali remained steadfast in his decision (Nasution, 2022). As a result of these policies, Ali bin Abi Thalib lost support from several close Companions and influential figures. Individuals such as Mughirah bin Syu'bah and Abdullah bin Abbas withdrew from active political engagement, and the governors appointed by Ali were unable to carry out their duties due to local opposition, ultimately forcing them to return to Madinah. Consequently, Ali's political position grew increasingly vulnerable, especially in facing Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan, who had opposed him from the outset.

In administrative matters, the leadership and wisdom of Ali bin Abi Thalib also stood out. He emphasized human values, the importance of experience and knowledge, and the cultivation of harmonious relations between leaders and citizens. He rejected rigid bureaucracy, upheld fair supervision, and appointed officials based on objective criteria rather than personal proximity. Ali further promoted effective management, participatory decision-making, protection for state officials, and leadership characterized by wisdom, compassion, and a paternalistic ethic (Sallabi, 2010).

The caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Thalib did not proceed peacefully; instead, it was marked by intense internal conflicts. Following the death of Utsman bin Affan, various tensions emerged among the Muslim community particularly regarding leadership disputes and the demand for justice for Utsman's killing. Ali was confronted with a profound dilemma: maintaining stability within the caliphate while suppressing opposition from factions that challenged his authority, including prominent Companions and regional governors. The two most defining events that illustrated the scale of these challenges were the Battle of Jamal and the Battle of *Shiffin*.

When the house of Utsman was besieged by rebels, ʿAisyah left Madinah and travelled to Mecca. After hearing the news of Utsman's assassination, she returned to Madinah. However, upon learning that Alī had been given the *baiʿah* as caliph, she became extremely angry and declared, "By Allah! This must not happen. Utsman has been killed unjustly, and I will seek retribution for his death" (Nasution, 2022).

The conflict between Ali and the leading members of Quraysh emerged partly because he rarely included them in political consultations and did not always accept their advice. Meanwhile, his dispute with Aisyah had a different background. The first factor relates to the incident of Ḥadīth al-Ifk as the great slander that befell Aiysah after the Battle of *Banī al-Muṣṭaliq* (Junaidin, 2020). At that time, the hypocrites accused her of improper conduct with the Companion Shafwan bin al-Muʿaththal. During the crisis, the Prophet consulted several Companions, and Ali bin Abi Thalib advised him not to distress himself and suggested asking a servant girl to seek direct information from Aisyah. This advice was interpreted by some as lacking support for Aisyah, leaving emotional wounds that lingered later. The second factor relates to Ali's delayed pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakar, ʿAisyah's father. For this reason, it is difficult to determine whether ʿAisyah's demand for justice after Utsman's death stemmed purely from sincere grief, or whether it was also influenced by these earlier issues (Nasution, 2022).

According to Ahmad Syalabi and several historians, the conflict between Aisyah and Ali was not a war fought for truth, but rather a political confrontation propelled by the ambition and influence of Abdullah bin Zubeir, Thalhah, and Zubeir, as well as ʿAisyah's longstanding resentment toward Ali. Evidence suggests that there had been tension between the two for a long time. Ibn al-Zubeir is believed to have intensified Aisyah's anger to ignite war, hoping to secure the caliphal position for himself. Thus, the responsibility for the outbreak of the Battle of Jamal is attributed primarily to these figures. Additionally, Ali was unable to maintain full control over his

troops; had he been able to restrain them, the battle might not have occurred (Nasution, 2022).

After Ali bn Abi Thalilb received the *baiʿah* as caliph, he was approached by Thalhah, Zubair, and several other Companions who demanded the immediate prosecution of those responsible for the assassination of Utsman bin Affan. Alī refused to act hastily, arguing that the perpetrators had numerous supporters and that any premature action would likely trigger widespread turmoil. Dissatisfied with his stance, Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr travelled to Mecca, met with Aisyah, and subsequently proceeded with her to Basra to demand justice. Upon learning of this development, Alī moved toward Iraq, sending Ammar bin Yasir and Hasan bin Ali to Kufah to gather support, and later confronted them in Basra during the Battle of Jamal (36 AH/656 CE). According to Tabarī, Ali sent Abdullah bin Abbas to negotiate before the fighting began, but the proposal was rejected. Other sources state that Zubairlah forces initiated the attack, compelling Ali to fight in order to protect justice and preserve the stability of the Muslim community (Nadwi, 1991).

The extent of Abdullah bin Zubeir's ambition for the caliphate became evident through his persistent efforts to seize authority. Although he failed after the Battle of Jamal, he did not abandon his aspirations. Following the death of al-Ḥusayn during the reign of Yazid bin Muawiyah, Abdullah bin Zubeir reaffirmed his ambition by proclaiming himself caliph. Meanwhile, although ʿAisyah desired justice for Utsman and supported the possibility of Ibn al-Zubayr's leadership, she did not personally favor war as a means of resolving the crisis. However, the strong political influence and personal motivations of Ibn al-Zubayr left her unable to resist his insistence (Lestari et al., 2023). She was ultimately placed upon a camel and departed for Basra with a large entourage. Her departure was accompanied by the tears of thousands, yet their sorrow could not dissuade her from continuing the journeys.

Upon arriving in Basra, Aisyah gained the support of approximately 20,000 followers, bolstered especially by the allegiance of Ali bin Abi Thalib, the former governor of Basra whom Ali had previously dismissed. Meanwhile, Ali marched toward Kufah with a force that included groups of rebels involved in Ustman's assassination, and there he assembled an army of about 10,000 soldiers. The two forces confronted one another at Huzaibah, where Ali made significant efforts to resolve the conflict peacefully. He advised ʿAisyah and her supporters to abandon their intention to wage war. His counsel was initially accepted, and both sides agreed to hold negotiations that, if successful, could have prevented bloodshed among fellow Muslims. However, concealed within Ali's ranks was a faction of hypocrites associated with Abdullah bin Saba' who opposed reconciliation. Without Ali's knowledge, they instigated violence by launching the first attack. This unexpected assault provoked retaliation from Aisyah's forces, resulting in a major battle between the two Muslim groups.

This event became known as the Battle of the Camel, or Maʿrakat al-Jamal in classical literature, which in English is rendered as the Battle of the Camel. Historical records indicate that it occurred around 11 Jumādā al-Ākhirah 36 AH, corresponding to December 657 CE, and lasted less than a full day (Selviana et al., 2018). The name refers to the role of Aisyah bin Abu Bakr, who rode a camel throughout the confrontation. This conflict constituted the first armed clash among Muslims themselves and resulted in approximately 10,000 casualties, including Thalhah and Zubair.

In brief, during the battle, Zubair fled from the battlefield but was pursued and killed by individuals who harbored resentment toward him; he was slain by a member of the *Bani Tamim* at the instruction of al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays. Likewise, Thalhah was killed

at the onset of the battle by an arrow shot by Marwan ibn Al-Hakam (Hamzah & Hamriana, 2022). Consequently, Aisyah remained as the sole leader of the opposing faction (Junaidin, 2020). After the camel upon which she rode was brought down, the battle ended in victory for Ali bin Abi Thalib. Despite the circumstances, Ali treated Aisyah with dignity and ensured her safe return to Mecca under the escort of her brother, Muhammad bin Abu Bakar, who had fought on Ali's side. Historical accounts also note that all Muslim casualties in the battle were regarded as martyrs (Sumari & Alias, 2025).

Following the victory, Ali bin Abi Thalib demonstrated exemplary leadership characterized by restraint and moral integrity. He prohibited his troops from pursuing those who fled, killing wounded soldiers, or engaging in the plundering of enemy property or territory (Nadwi, 1991). Although the Battle of Jamal involved a prominent female figure and resulted in significant bloodshed in Basra, the event subsequently shaped public perceptions negatively regarding women's participation in political affairs. Nevertheless, Ali's adherence to justice, humanity, and ethical conduct in warfare serves as a model of principled leadership amid the political crises confronting the Muslim community at the time (Rayaan & Setayesh, 2023).

The longest conflict faced by Caliph Ali bin Abi Thalib, one that ultimately contributed to his death was his confrontation with Mu'awiyah bin Abu Sufyan. When Ali assumed the caliphate, Mu'awiyah had already served as governor of Syam for approximately twenty-two years, beginning in the era of Caliph Umar bin Khattab and continuing under Utsman bin Affan. Genealogically, Mu'awiyah belonged to the Bani Umayyah and was a close relative of Ustman which made him feel most entitled to demand retribution for Utsman's death rather than Aiysah, as suggested in some reports. Historically, Mu'awiyah and his father, Abu Sufyan, had been among the most prominent opponents of the Prophet Muhammad's mission, while his mother, Hindun binti Utbah, gained infamy for mutilating and attempting to consume the liver of Hamzah bin Abdul Muthalib during the Battle of *Uḥud*. His sister, Ummu Habibah, became one of the Prophet's wives after being ostracized by her family for embracing Islam. Mu'awiyah himself converted to Islam at the age of twenty-three, during the conquest of Mecca in 8 AH, and was later appointed by the Prophet as one of the scribes of revelation alongside Zaid bin Tsabit (Nasution, 2022, p. 83).

Mu'awiyah and the people of Syam accused Ali bin Abi Thalib of complicity in the assassination of Caliph Utsman bin Affan. They demanded that Ali be held accountable or, at the very least, bring the perpetrators to justice. Because Ali was unable to meet these demands, they refused to pledge allegiance to him as caliph. Their refusal was further reinforced by political apprehension that the caliphate under Ali would place long-term authority in the hands of the Bani Hasyim.

The support of the Syamn population for Mu'awiyah grew stronger due to the prosperity and stability they had experienced under his leadership, motivating them to remain loyal in hopes of maintaining that prosperity. Meanwhile, Ali regarded Mu'awiyah as a rebel (*bughāh*) who was religiously obligated to be confronted in order to preserve the unity of the Muslim community. Bringing approximately 50,000 troops, Ali marched north and encountered Mu'awiyah's army, numbering around 80,000 in the region of *Ṣhiffin*, located west of the Euphrates River (Brata, 2017). Despite this, Ali initially sought to avoid bloodshed. He sent a delegation urging Mu'awiyah to offer his allegiance, but this request was ignored. With no alternative remaining, Ali was compelled to proceed with military action against Mu'awiyah.

The battle eventually broke out and continued for several days, resulting in significant casualties approximately 35,000 soldiers from Ali's forces and about 45,000 from Mu'awiyah's side (Fazlurrahman, 2021). During the fighting, Ali bin Abi

Thalib successfully rallied his troops, and victory was nearly within his grasp. Observing the increasingly precarious situation, Mu'awiyah's became distressed and immediately summoned Amr bin al-'Ash for counsel. Following ʿAmr's suggestion, several of Mu'awiyah's soldiers raised copies of the Qur'an on the tips of their spears while proclaiming, "This is the Book of Allah, which shall decide between us". (Kazemi, 2019). Upon witnessing this scene, a portion of Ali's army urged that the fighting be halted at once. However, Ali firmly rejected the request and warned them, saying, "This is Mu'awiyah's deception, for I have known him and ʿAmr since childhood." He stressed that neither of them could be trusted. Despite his insistence that the battle be continued, his appeal was ignored. Instead, his troops pressured him to cease hostilities (Nasution, 2022).

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Ultimately, Ali was compelled to concede and declared the battle terminated. The dispute was then resolved through arbitration (taḥkim). The war claimed around 70,000 lives and came to be known as the Battle of *Shiffin* (36–37 AH / 657 CE). It was named *Shiffin* because the confrontation took place in a region of that name, located along the banks of the Euphrates River. Geographically, *Shiffin* sat on the border between ʿAli's territory (Iraq) and Muʿawiyah's domain (Syam), which made it a strategic flashpoint (Noor et al., 2022). This battle marked the beginning of the emergence of numerous sectarian divisions within Islam, such as *Al-Muhakkimah, Al-Azariqah, Al-Najdaat, Al-Ajaaridah, Al-Sufriyah, Al-Ibadhiyah, Al-Jahmiyah, Al-Shalihiyah, Al-Yunusiyah, Al-Syamariyah, Al-Shaubaniyyah, Al-Najjariyyah, Al-Ghailaniyah, Asy-Syabibiyah, Al-Hanafiyah, Al-Mu'aziyah, Al-Murisiyah,* and *Al-Karamiyah* (Anis, 2016). The sectarian split between *Sunni* and *Syiah* communities also became increasingly pronounced (Hagler, 2013).

From these two major historical conflicts, it becomes evident that Ali bin Abi Thalib twice encountered severe difficulties in controlling his own troops. This condition illustrates that not all individuals within his ranks sincerely supported his leadership. Among them were groups who outwardly claimed allegiance to Ali but in reality betrayed him and undermined his authority. This situation reflects one of Ali's vulnerabilities in terms of military leadership and political consolidation

Another equally significant event was the episode of *Tahkim* (arbitration). To resolve the open conflict between the forces of Ali bin Abi Thalib and those of Mu'awiyah bin Abu Sufyan, both parties agreed to pursue a protracted and difficult process of dialogue through negotiations known as *taḥkim*. During these negotiations, it was decided that each leader, Ali and Muʿawiyah was required to appoint a judge *(ḥakam)* as a representative to reach a mutually beneficial agreement for the Muslim community (Brata, 2017). The arbitration took place in Ramaḍān 37 AH / January 659 CE at a location called Dumat Al-Jandal, situated between Madinah and Damascus. The agenda of the negotiations comprised two primary issues: first, that Utsman had

been unjustly killed, and second, determining who was rightfully suited to assume the caliphate.

Muʿawiyah appointed Amru bin al-'Ash as his representative, while ʿAli initially proposed Abdullah bin Abbas. However, this nomination was rejected by the *qurra*', who firmly insisted, "We accept no one except *Abu Musa al-Asyʿari*." Their objection stemmed from the view that Abdullah bin Abbas was too closely related to Ali and possessed intellectual superiority that could easily outmaneuver Amru bin al-'Ash (Brata, 2017). During the deliberations, many Qur'anic scholars supported the cessation of warfare and urged that the dispute be resolved solely through the guidance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Nevertheless, some factions opposed the decision. Even so, Ali eventually accepted the proposal for arbitration as it reflected the demands of the majority within his army (Munawira et al., 2024).

Consequently, this event signified the official end of the military confrontation between the Iraqi and Syam armies, as the Iraqi side accepted the Syamn proposal for *tahkim,* a decision that later became a significant catalyst for the political turmoil during Ali's rule (Aldzakhiroh et al., 2024). Despite this, some within Ali's faction rejected the arbitration outcome and urged him to resume fighting; however, Ali remained steadfast and refused their demands (Munawira et al., 2024). As a result, this group seceded and came to be known as the *Khawarij*.

When the results of the arbitration were announced publicly, the final decision stated explicitly that both Ali and Mu'awiyah were to be removed from the caliphate, and that the next leader should be selected through communal consultation. However, Amr bin al-'Ash exploited the situation by affirming the dismissal of Ali while simultaneously declaring Muʿawiyah as the rightful successor (Munawira et al., 2024). This maneuver led Ali to feel betrayed, especially as Muʿawiyah's true intention was to secure the caliphate for himself. Accordingly, Ali maintained his own claim to the caliphate and regarded Muʿawiyah as a rebel (Nasution, 2022).

In brief, several groups emerged or became involved in this episode: The *Khawarij* (those who had initially supported Ali but later defected); the *Shi'a* (those who remained loyal to his leadership from the outset); the *Murjiʾah* (those who adopted a neutral stance and distanced themselves from the political turmoil); and the faction of Muʿawiyah (composed of those who had originally supported Caliph Utsman) (Noor et al., 2022)

Following the conclusion of the Battle of Shiffin and the arbitration *(taḥkim)*, which was perceived as detrimental to the position of Caliph Ali bin Abi Thalib, a segment of his forces rejected the decision on the grounds that Ali had allowed divine law to be replaced by human deliberation. From this rupture arose a new faction known as the *Khawarij*, derived from *kharaja*, meaning "to exit," referring to their withdrawal from Ali's camp (Permana, 2021). They were also called *Haruriyah*, because they first gathered and encamped in the area of *Haruraʾ* near Kufah. Approximately 12,000 individuals left Ali's army under the leadership of Abdullah bin Wahab ar-Rasibi, establishing Nahrawān that located along the banks of the Dujayl River between Kufah and Baghdad as their operational base (Saleh Rahim, 2018). This group became known for their fanatic slogan, "*La hukma illa li Allah*" (no judgment except God's judgment), and declared Ali, Muʿawiyah, and Amr bin al-'Ash as unbelievers for accepting and manipulating the arbitration process (Noor et al., 2022). When reminded that they themselves had compelled Ali to accept arbitration, they retorted, "We erred, but why did you follow our error? As a caliph, you should have possessed foresight and deep judgment" (Nasution, 2022). The *Khawarij* therefore shifted blame entirely onto Ali and continued to challenge his legitimacy (Muthoharoh & Aisyah, 2021).

Efforts toward reconciliation undertaken by Ali through dialogue with Abdullah ibn Abbas were only partially successful. A small faction of the Khawārij returned to Ali's side, but the majority remained uncompromising, committing acts of violence including the killing of the Prophet's companion Abdullah bin Khabbab and his pregnant wife. These actions compelled Ali to take decisive military action. Thus, the Battle of Nahrawan took place in Ṣafar 38 AH / 658 CE and was named after the region where it occurred. In this confrontation, Ali commanded approximately 10,000 troops, while the *Khawarij* numbered only around 1,000. Despite their smaller force, the battle unfolded with intensity but ended swiftly with Ali's victory. Most of the leading Khawarij including Abdullah bin Wahab ar-Rasibi, Hurqush bin Zuhair, and Syuraih bin Aufa were killed, whereas only seven of Ali's men fell in the battle. Since then, the Battle of Nahrawan has been regarded as the first rebellion in Islamic history undertaken in the name of "religious purification," yet culminating in violence and profound internal division within the Muslim community (Noor et al., 2022).

In summary, the emergence of the *Khawarij* stemmed from their disappointment with the outcome of the arbitration *(taḥkim)*, which later evolved into a serious threat to the governance of Ali bin Abi Thalib and ultimately culminated in his assassination approximately two years after the Battle of Nahrawān (Meliantina, 2024). What initially appeared as a political rebel movement eventually transformed into a distinct religious sect within Islamic thought (Junaidin, 2020). Among these sects were the *Azariqah*, the *Shufriyah*, and the *Ibadhiyah* (Hervrizal, 2020). Despite the prolonged conflict, Ali consistently upheld the authentic values of Islam, refraining from violence except in situations of necessity, and maintaining an unwavering commitment to peace and justice (Mulyani et al., 2025).

The complex socio-political dynamics during the caliphate of Ali bin Abi Thalib required him to focus more on maintaining political stability than on implementing territorial expansion or major administrative reforms. His leadership spanned approximately four years and nine months, from 25 *DZulhijjah* 35 AH to 17 Ramadhan 40 AH. This period was marked by recurring internal upheavals, ranging from political rebellions to ideological fragmentation (Rasyid, 2015). Tragically, Ali passed away at approximately sixty-three years of age, and his governance, lasting four years and nine months signified the end of the era of the *Khulafa' al-Rashidin* (Abrar & Corresponding, 2018)

Conclusion

The leadership of Ali ibn Abi Thalib represents the most complex phase in the history of the *Khulafaur Rasyidin*, as it unfolded amid a profound crisis of legitimacy and the socio-political disintegration of the Muslim community. Historically, Ali exemplified a leader of exceptional knowledge, firmness, and moral justice in governance. However, his political idealism frequently confronted a social reality marked by factionalism and intrigue, especially following the fragmentation that emerged after the assassination of Utsman bin Affan. The conflicts of *Jamal*, *Ṣhiffīn*, and the arbitration *(taḥkim)* demonstrate that Ali's government was not merely a

series of political events, but also a reflection of early Islam's theological and social struggles in defining political legitimacy and religious truth.

The socio-political context of Ali's era illustrates a shift from the solidarity of *ukhuwah* to a power-centered political landscape driven by competing interests. Meanwhile, the emergence of sects such as the *Khawarij*, the *Shi'a*, and the *Murji'ah* reveals how religious interpretations developed as responses to political conflict. Sociologically, these divisions became the foundational roots of sectarian identities and doctrinal schools that continue to shape Islamic thought into the modern era. Despite this turbulent environment, Ali upheld values of justice, equality, and moral responsibility, embodying Islamic ideals amid social disintegration. His ethical principles and spiritual discipline reflect the notion that Islamic political leadership must be grounded in truth and justice rather than the pursuit of power.

Thus, the caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Thalib may be understood as a mirror of the crises and transformations that shaped early Islamic civilization. It provides an enduring lesson that power devoid of moral integrity inevitably leads to division, whereas leadership rooted in justice and knowledge endures as a lasting spiritual legacy in Islam

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