

The Integrative Framework for Environmental Sustainability in Islam

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Abstract. Climate disasters are occurring with increasing frequency and severity, underscoring that current global plans and actions are ineffective at addressing the crisis. This situation demands a holistic approach and transformative efforts to reduce climate risks and ensure environmental sustainability for future generations. This study aims to explore Islamic teachings as a holistic framework for fostering ecological awareness by integrating three elements: faith (aqidah), law (sharia), and ethics (akhlaq). The deep interrelationship among these elements serves as a divine framework, shaping human understanding and responsibilities toward the environment. This research uses an analytical approach, utilising secondary resources collected through a literature review and analysed qualitatively for deeper insights. The findings reveal that Islamic teachings promote environmental harmony and balance, supported by various imperative legal texts (nass) that command human beings, as vicegerents (khalifahs), to preserve nature. Environmental preservation was recognized as a crucial component of maslahah, which is a core objective of Islamic law (maqasid shariah). Furthermore, Islam advocates a nurturing, reciprocal relationship between people and the environment, even as nature is used to meet human needs. Therefore, to create a more effective and holistic approach, it is recommended that all stakeholders -governments, the private sector, and society- adopt this divine framework as an integral part of climate crisis planning and action strategies.

Keywords: Climate Crisis, Environmental Sustainability, Integrative Framework, Islam.

1 Introduction

Climate change represents one of the most significant challenges of the twenty-first century, leading to a series of international negotiations and agreements since the early 1990s. Prominent accords, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), established in 1992; the Kyoto Protocol, introduced

in 2005; and the Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015, are designed to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and promote adaptation. For resilience. Despite these efforts, increasing evidence suggests that global warming is accelerating. As a result, some scholars have begun to refer to the current situation as a climate emergency, characterized by a rise in the frequency and intensity of natural disasters and significant threats to ecological sustainability [1].

While these agreements represent significant commitments to global cooperation, their implementation has often been inconsistent, with issues of compliance, transparency, and enforceability. This ongoing gap between aspirations and actual results highlights the need for new approaches of climate governance that extend beyond narrow technical or economic solutions.

Existing frameworks reveal a significant gap between scientific consensus and political action regarding climate change. Scientific organizations consistently provide evidence of climate change caused by human activities, yet policymaking is often hindered by short-term economic interests, political inertia, and inconsistent international commitments [2]. Additionally, marginalized communities frequently encounter systemic barriers that restrict their ability to adopt sustainable practices, worsening socio-economic inequalities and climate vulnerability [3]. The failure of secular governance models to engage with cultural, ethical, and spiritual dimensions has further complicated the application of scientific findings into effective policies [4]. These issues indicate that climate governance needs a more comprehensive approach that integrates ethical imperatives and community-based values along with scientific and technical expertise.

The central research issue revolves around the effectiveness of secular approaches to climate governance. These approaches typically emphasise technical and managerial solutions, focusing on human-centred frameworks while overlooking essential moral and spiritual aspects. Critics argue that such strategies reinforce unsustainable consumption habits and do not engage communities at the grassroots level [5]. For example, secular environmental policies often depict adaptation as a purely technical adjustment rather than a moral responsibility, ignoring the relational and intergenerational aspects of ecological stewardship. This limited perspective undermines society's ability to respond effectively to the climate crisis, as it fails to connect with the values and lived experiences of affected communities.

Moreover, the failure to address root causes of ecological degradation, such as consumerism, materialism, and exploitative economic systems, highlights the limitations of liberal and secular paradigms. These frameworks often prioritise growth and profit over ecological integrity, leading to policies that do not align with planetary boundaries [5]. The legacy of the Enlightenment, characterised by anthropocentrism and secular rationalism, tends to transform natural resources into tools for human exploitation [6]. If we do not tackle these fundamental ethical issues, climate governance will likely remain ineffective in reversing environmental decline.

In response, scholars have proposed faith-based and ethical frameworks as complementary solutions to climate governance. Religious traditions, including Islam, provide moral and spiritual resources that can transform human attitudes toward the environment and encourage more sustainable behaviors [7]. Islamic eco-theology, for instance, emphasises principles such as stewardship (*khilafa*), balance (*mizan*), and the sacred trust (*amanah*) as guiding concepts for human interaction with nature [1]. These principles construct a normative framework that complements scientific recommendations by embedding ecological responsibility within spiritual and moral obligations.

Several case studies demonstrate how Islamic values are being applied in practice. In Indonesia, Muslim organisations have engaged communities through faith-based environmental initiatives, green philanthropy, and *eco-pesantren*, which blend religious education with ecological awareness [8]. Additionally, *eco-sufism* has been highlighted as a model that integrates local traditions with Islamic principles, offering culturally relevant strategies for conservation and sustainability [9]. These examples illustrate the potential of Islamic ethics to provide context-sensitive, community-driven responses to climate challenges, complementing and enhancing secular approaches.

The literature highlights that integrating Islamic principles with modern policy frameworks can enhance the ethical foundations of environmental governance. Scholars argue that Islamic legal maxims, such as “*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*” (no harm, no reciprocating harm), align with global sustainability goals by prohibiting practices that cause ecological damage [10]. Additionally, the principle of *maslaha* (public interest) emphasises the importance of policies that prioritise ecological balance and intergenerational justice. These connections between Islamic jurisprudence and sustainability frameworks demonstrate how faith-based ethics can inform practical governance structures, from urban planning to corporate responsibility [11].

Despite the growth in scholarship of this topic, research gaps remain. While Islamic environmental ethics have been widely discussed from a normative perspective, there are fewer studies that have explored their direct integration into policy and governance frameworks at both the national and international levels [8]. Empirical analyses of how Islamic teachings influence environmental behavior in various muslim-majority societies are limited, as are comparative studies that assess their relevance in global governance contexts. Additionally, the potential of Islamic philanthropy, such as *zakat* and *waqf*, as tools for financing climate adaptation and mitigation has not been thoroughly examined in academic discourse.

This study addresses existing gaps by proposing an integrative framework that places Islamic teachings, through the trilogy of *aqidah* (faith), *sharia* (law), and *akhlaq* (morals), at the center of environmental governance. By connecting Qur’anic wisdom with modern science, this research aims to develop a paradigm that merges spiritual values with practical policy innovations to improve the effectiveness of climate action.

The originality of this approach lies in its interdisciplinary synthesis, which bridges theology, law, and environmental studies to propose actionable strategies for sustainability. The scope of this study includes both theoretical and practical aspects, offering insights into how Islamic ethics can contribute to global discussion on climate change while also providing context-specific models for implementation. In doing so, this research emphasises the urgent need to integrate moral and spiritual frameworks into environmental governance to achieve lasting ecological balance and sustainability.

2 Research Method

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive-analytical design to examine the contribution of Islamic teachings to environmental sustainability. Such an approach is particularly well-suited to exploring the intersection of religion and ecology because it provides nuanced insights into how spiritual values inform social practices and policy orientations.

This research relied primarily on an in-depth literature review encompassing a wide range of sources, including classical and contemporary works on fiqh and Islamic law, peer-reviewed articles on sustainable development and public policy, and reports from international and national organisations. The integration of these resources enabled a multifaceted analysis of how Islamic jurisprudence, ethical principles, and policy recommendations converge to address ecological challenges.

3 Findings

3.1 Failure of Secular Climate Projects

The Enlightenment project, which emerged in Western Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, has faced significant criticism for its impact on human-environment relations. By prioritising human reason over infinite divine light, Enlightenment rationalism redefined the human subject as autonomous and self-sufficient. This shift led to the environment being viewed primarily as an object of manipulation and control [12]. Critics argue that this intellectual transition created what they term the “soulless human” and “secular science”, where moral and spiritual coordinates were sidelined in favor of instrumental reasoning and technocratic solutions. As some researchers suggest, this secular perspective has contributed to consumer culture, destructive technologies, and ecologically unsustainable development models that continue to exacerbate the climate crisis today [2]. The influence of this rationalist worldview remains evident in climate policy, which often focuses on technocratic interventions while neglecting ethical, spiritual, and communal values.

The consequences of this Enlightenment legacy are evident in the secular framing of external interventions for climate change adaptation. Colonial and postcolonial

administrations, for instance, dismissed the spiritual values of land by viewing it solely in economic terms, a worldview that undermined indigenous and religious cosmologies of stewardship [13]. By privileging extraction and market utility, these frameworks displaced community-based moral obligations to the land, fostering alienation and ecological degradation. Some researchers emphasise that the underlying cause of ecological crises is not merely technological mismanagement, but the deeper orientation of human greed and selfishness institutionalised within Enlightenment rationality [12]. Thus, what is commonly diagnosed as a crisis of technology or governance is more accurately a crisis of worldview, the dislocation of human beings from their spiritual and moral responsibilities toward nature.

The connection between secular liberal law and ecological degradation highlights the limitation of this paradigm. Some researchers critique legal frameworks rooted in Enlightenment thinking for prioritising individual rights and instrumental rationality, which reinforce a governance system centred on human interests [14]. In these frameworks, nature is viewed merely as a resource to be managed, exploited, and regulated, rather than as a moral entity deserving inherent respect. An academician points out that this legal approach normalises market-based mechanisms and technocratic solutions, effectively obscuring ethical limits and communal responsibilities that could help curb overconsumption and environmental damage [2]. As a result, we have a legal structure that perpetuates unsustainable exploitation, often disguised as “sustainable development.”

Sustainable development itself has come under scrutiny for operating within the rationalist logic of the Enlightenment. Critics argue that it often prioritizes economic growth and profit while subordinating ecological sustainability and planetary integrity [1]. By centring the human subject as the locus of concern, sustainable development initiatives risk reinforcing anthropocentric, top-down, techno-managerial solutions that fail to address the relational and ethical dimensions of ecological balance [2]. This approach reduces complex socio-ecological systems to management variables, thereby neglecting the deeper moral imperatives of intergenerational justice and stewardship. The persistence of environmental degradation despite decades of sustainable development discourse indicates that the paradigm is insufficient for achieving long-term planetary balance.

The literature thus converges on the view that the failure of secular climate projects lies not in their scientific foundation but in their lack of integrated ethical and spiritual coordinates. The enlightenment rationalism privileges calculation and control, sidelining the relational and sacral dimensions that traditionally placed limits on human consumption [12]. One of the researchers reinforced this critique by showing how secular epistemologies alienate humans from their ecological responsibilities, leading to unsustainable practices [13]. In contrast, comparative studies of religious and eco-philosophical traditions highlight stewardship, temperance, and sacral obligations as a vital corrective framework [1]. These values

reorient human-nature relations by embedding ethical limits within cultural and spiritual contexts, offering a counterbalance to the excesses of secular rationalism.

The critique of secular environmentalism does not imply an anti-science stance; rather, it highlights the limitations of scientific rationality when it is detached from a moral and spiritual foundation. Science alone cannot provide the motivation or communal solidarity needed to address climate crises [2]. Instead, it must be paired with ethical frameworks that root ecological responsibility in cultural and spiritual narratives. Islamic teachings on sustainability offer a comprehensive model that integrates moral, legal, and communal responsibilities, effectively addressing the anthropocentric tendencies of secular governance. These insights suggest that the way forward requires not the abandonment of science but rather its integration with sacred and ethical worldviews.

Humanity's post-war prosperity and development illustrate the persistence of Enlightenment rationality in practice. The drive to dominate nature and extract resources under the guise of modernization reflects the continuation of anthropocentric paradigms that place human interests above ecological balance [13]. Liberal law and policy, shaped by rationalist thinking, sustain hierarchies that subordinate nature to human needs, thereby perpetuating ecological crises. Some researchers contend that until environmental law is re-embedded within broader moral and communal frameworks, it will continue to reproduce unsustainable outcomes [14]. The call for alternative paradigms is therefore not a rejection of modernity but an acknowledgement that its secular foundations are insufficient for the scale of ecological challenges now faced.

In summary, the results of this analysis reveal that secular climate projects have largely failed due to their Enlightenment-derived focus, which prioritises instrumental rationality and anthropocentric governance while neglecting moral and spiritual dimensions. The literature shows that this paradigm leads to unsustainable practices by treating nature as an object of control rather than a sacred trust. By overlooking ethical limits and communal responsibilities, secular frameworks normalise overconsumption and ecological harm, ultimately undermining their own stated goals of sustainability. Scholars across environmental philosophy, law, and theology agree on the need for alternative paradigms that incorporate religious, ethical, and communal values into environmental governance. These findings affirm the necessity of moving beyond secular rationalism to develop holistic approaches capable of addressing the profound moral, social, and ecological dimensions of the climate crisis.

3.2 The Trilogy of Islamic Teachings

As global society confronts the accelerating consequences of environmental degradation, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and deforestation, scholars and policymakers are increasingly exploring alternative approaches that go beyond purely technical solutions. Much of the current climate discourse has centred on technological and economic interventions; these strategies are often criticised for

treating ecological crises as end-of-the-pipeline issues, rather than addressing their root causes. Scholars argue that these approaches overlook the deep interconnections between spirituality, religion, and the environment [1]. In recent discussions, religious and ethical traditions have reemerged as a vital resource for shaping human behavior and values, providing insights into how moral frameworks can complement technical expertise in promoting sustainability. This renewed attention to the relationship between religion and ecology has generated a growing body of literature, positioning faith-based teachings, particularly Islamic teachings, as essential components of a comprehensive response to the climate crisis.

Islam offers a spiritually grounded, morally coherent, and historically validated framework for environmental ethics that directly challenges the secular instrumentalism prevalent in contemporary climate governance. Unlike secular paradigms, which often overlook divine accountability, Islamic thought regards ecological consciousness as an act of worship (*ibadah*). This perspective embeds environmental responsibility within a broader context of faith and moral obligation [1]. Key Qur'anic principles such as *tawhid* (divine unity), *mizan* (cosmic balance), *khalifa* (stewardship), and *fitra* (innate disposition) reflect a worldview in which humanity is both part of creation and entrusted with its care. These concepts together mitigate anthropocentric excess by positioning humanity within a theocentric framework that acknowledges the sacredness of the natural world [15]. By grounding ecological ethics in divine revelation, Islam not only prohibits environmental harm but also encourages proactive stewardship, thus providing a comprehensive normative resource for addressing ecological crises.

Historically, Islamic societies institutionalised conservation principles through mechanisms such as *hima* (protected pastures), *harim* (conservation zones), *waqf* (charitable endowments), and *hisba* (market and moral regulation). These institutions illustrate how Islamic jurisprudence translated theological and ethical imperatives into concrete governance practices that preserved ecological balance [16]. Reviving and adapting these institutions in contemporary contexts has been identified by scholars as a critical pathway for strengthening environmental governance today [10]. For example, the principle of *khalifa* (stewardship) has been operationalised through *fiqh* doctrines that emphasise responsible use of resources, ensuring that actions do not violate the maxim "*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*" (no harm, no reciprocating harm). This principle, embedded in Islamic jurisprudence, mandates both individual and institutional responsibility for preventing environmental degradation, making it a valuable resource for contemporary regulatory frameworks [1].

The trilogy of Islamic teachings, *aqidah* (faith), *shari'a* (law), and *akhlaq* (morals), provides a comprehensive framework for ecological sustainability by linking belief, legal obligation, and ethical behavior. *Aqidah* establishes the Islamic worldview based on divine unity, balance, and human responsibility as stewards (*khalifa*) to the earth. This perspective fosters a spiritual connection that aligns with ecological stewardship.

Shari'a brings these principles into practice through binding legal norms that prohibit harmful activities such as pollution and deforestation. It also mandates pursuing *maslaha* (public interest) to ensure ecological and social well-being. The principle of *maslaha* has increasingly been used to advocate for policies that prioritize the protection of ecosystems and sustainable development, connecting Islamic jurisprudence with modern environmental governance. *Akhlaq*, on the other hand, anchors these obligations in ethical behavior. It emphasizes moderation (*wasatiyyah*), avoidance of waste (*israf*), and compassion for all living beings. This ethical guidance draws upon prophetic teachings that highlight mercy toward humans, animals, and even inanimate nature.

The ethical dimension of *akhlaq* is particularly salient in light of the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) teachings. His encouragement to plant a sapling even on the day of judgment underscores the timeless obligation of environmental responsibility (Musnad Ahmad, 12981). Similarly, his admonition against wasting water, even when abundant, reflects a principle of resource conservation that resonates with modern sustainability concerns (Sunan Ibnu Majah, 425). These narrations illustrate that Islamic ethics not only prohibit environmental harm but also actively cultivate attitudes of care, restraint, and foresight that can reshape societal relationships with nature. Some of the scholars argue that such ethical teachings provide a moral compass that complements juridical mechanisms, ensuring that sustainability efforts remain deeply rooted in justice and compassion [17].

Islamic jurisprudence not only provides normative principles but also offers concrete legal maxims that are increasingly relevant in contemporary policy discussions. One such maxim, *lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*, supports regulatory efforts to prevent harmful projects. Additionally, the principle of *maslaha* informs various areas, such as spatial planning, mining regulations, and ecosystem protection [16]. Research by one of the researchers highlights how these jurisprudential principles have been translated into financial instruments such as green *sukuk* and *waqf*-based investments, enabling Islamic finance to play a significant role in sustainability initiatives [18]. These examples demonstrate how classical Islamic principles can be reinterpreted to address modern ecological challenges, creating a normative ethics, practical governance, and economic solutions.

The literature emphasises the significant role of contemporary Islamic institutions and movements in applying environmental principles through community-based initiatives. A researcher documents how Indonesian muslim organizations mobilize communities for climate action through faith-based advocacy, educational programs, and philanthropic initiatives such as green *zakat* and *waqf* [8]. Similarly, another researcher explored eco-sutism within the Ammatoa community, where spiritual practices are integrated with conservation efforts to protect local ecosystems [9]. These examples illustrate how Islamic teachings can inspire grassroots action and institutional reform, complementing both national and international climate policies. A researcher further demonstrates how green *pesantren* initiatives in Indonesia

incorporate environmental responsibility into religious education, fostering behavioral change and cultivating a generation of environmentally conscious muslims [19]. Such community-based efforts highlight the multidimensional nature of Islamic environmental ethics, which extend beyond abstract principles into actionable steps. They show that integrating Islamic values into education, finance, and policy can create grassroots legitimacy and resilience that are often lacking in top-down secular approaches.

A researcher highlights how Muslim civic projects, including cooperatives and eco-food networks, promote sustainable consumption and local resilience [20]. Additionally, comparative mobilizations across faith traditions frame biodiversity conservation through religious ethics. Together, these examples confirm that Islam's normative and institutional resources are adaptable and scalable, capable of addressing ecological challenges at both local and global levels.

From a governance perspective, integrating *aqidah*, *shari'a*, and *akhlaq* contributes to both normative coherence and policy diversity and innovation. By providing theological foundations (such as *tawhid*, *mizan*, *khalifa*) that challenge anthropocentrism, juridical mechanisms (including *maqasid al-shari'a*, *qawa'id fiqhiyya*) that justify regulation, and ethical orientations (like *wasatiyyah* and compassion) that promote behavioural change, Islam offers a comprehensive toolkit for ecological governance [17]. These elements come together in contemporary applications such as green *sukuk*, *eco-pesantren*, and advocacy movements by organisations such as *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*, which connect doctrinal reflection with practical activism [21]. These initiatives demonstrate how Islamic values can diversify and enhance global governance by introducing moral and communal dimensions that are often lacking in secular frameworks.

The trilogy of Islamic teachings offers a unique and integrative approach to ecological balance, addressing ethical, legal, and spiritual dimensions of sustainability simultaneously. While secular models often prioritise technical efficiency and economic growth, Islamic frameworks emphasise ecological responsibility as a moral obligation rooted in divine command. This perspective ensures that environmental stewardship is treated not as optional but as a requirement. By utilising principles such as *tawhid* (unity), *mizan* (balance), *khalifa* (stewardship), and *fitra* (natural disposition), Islam translates these concepts into legal instruments and community-based practices. This provides both a normative foundation and the practical mechanisms for promoting ecological sustainability. In the context of the global climate crisis, these insights highlight the potential of Islamic environmental ethics to reshape the sustainability conversation, offering both corrective and complementary approaches to the limitations of secular environmentalism. Ultimately, the trilogy of *Aqidah* (faith), *shari'a* (law), and *akhlaq* (ethics) illustrates how faith-based paradigms can contribute to global efforts to achieve balance, justice, and sustainability for present and future generations.

4 Conclusion

The findings of this research highlight the inadequacy of secular frameworks in addressing the climate crisis and underscore the potential of Islamic teachings as a comprehensive approach to ecological sustainability. Secular methods, rooted in enlightenment rationalism, have largely focused on technocratic solutions and economic growth, often neglecting the ethical and spiritual dimensions that shape human interaction with nature. This perspective has led to policies that normalize overconsumption and environmental degradation, revealing a fundamental disconnect between scientific recommendations and moral imperatives. Consequently, the global failure to curb ecological decline cannot be addressed solely through technical means; it requires alternative paradigms that reintegrate moral and communal responsibilities into governance.

In this context, the trilogy of Islamic teachings, *aqidah*, *shari'a*, and *akhlaq*, emerges as an integrative framework that can realign ecological governance with spiritual accountability and ethical conduct. *Aqidah* provides the theological foundations of stewardship, emphasizing the concept of *tawhid* (unity of god), *mizan* (balance), *khalifa* (stewardship), and *fitra* (natural disposition) as guiding principles that place humanity within a theocentric order. *Shari'a* translates these imperatives into binding legal mechanisms, including the principles of *maslaha* and *maqasid al-shari'a*, and the *qawaid fihiyya*, to regulate environmental behaviour and legitimize sustainable initiatives. Meanwhile, *akhlaq* grounds these obligations in daily practice, promoting moderation, compassion, and proactive environmental care as essential moral virtues.

The significance of these findings lies in demonstrating that Islamic teachings not only complement scientific and technical expertise but also address crucial gaps in motivation, legitimacy, and community engagement. By integrating theology, law, and ethics into climate governance, this framework enriches our understanding by offering a holistic, actionable, culturally relevant paradigm. It contributes to the broader discourse on sustainability by illustrating that faith-based approaches can foster ecological balance, justice, and intergenerational responsibility, thereby addressing the key research questions regarding how Islamic principles can inform more effective environmental governance.

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