



THE INSTITUTE FOR
MUSLIM ADVANCEMENT
AND RENEWAL

The Anatomy of Leadership

Power and the Making of Political Leaders

20
27

Call for Papers



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As America approaches 250 years since its founding, politics is marked by a strange contradiction where elections dominate national attention, yet many people feel increasingly dissatisfied with the quality of leadership available. The problem is usually framed as a failure of individual candidates when perhaps a more accurate diagnosis of the issue can come about by examining the conditions surrounding who runs for office. In 2027, IMAR seeks to move the conversation around politics beyond elections, parties and strategy alone. While debate tends to focus on which candidates should win, far less attention is given to the incentives, institutions, and moral assumptions that shape who becomes a leader in the first place. If communities are dissatisfied with the quality of leadership available to them, another type of examination is required. Rather than beginning with campaigns, IMAR's 2027 project begins with a more foundational question of how leaders are formed.

IMAR's 2027 journal invites contributors to examine the anatomy of political leadership, from the moral, psychological, and institutional to the financial and cultural forces that shape the people who seek public office. We are especially interested in work that draws from Islamic political thought and other enduring moral traditions beyond a simplistic or anachronistic way and as rightful sources of insight. Our goal is not to determine which candidates deserve support nor is it to advance a partisan agenda, rather, we seek to recover a richer conversation about leadership itself. What qualities should characterize those entrusted with authority? How do institutions shape character? What conditions enable principled individuals to pursue leadership without sacrificing their convictions? What would it take for communities to intentionally cultivate leaders capable of serving the common good? By asking these questions, our hope is to move beyond short-term political calculations.

Areas of Inquiry

1. The Making of a Candidate

How does a person become a candidate in contemporary American politics? What kinds of people are encouraged to run, and what kinds of people are filtered out?

- *What personal, financial, social, and institutional conditions make candidacy possible?*
- *Who is able to run for office, and who is realistically excluded?*
- *What kind of person is most likely to survive modern campaigning?*
- *Does the current political process select for wisdom, service and moral courage or for performance and wealth?*
- *How do party structures, donor expectations, media exposure, and opposition research shape who is willing to run?*
- *What happens to good people when they enter systems built around compromise, fundraising, image management, and partisan pressure?*

2. The Psychology of Political Ambition

Political leadership begins with the human being. Any serious theory of public leadership must examine the nafs, in other words, human ego, insecurity, sincerity and the desire for recognition.

- *What motivates people to seek public office?*
- *Can the desire for leadership itself become morally dangerous?*
- *How does campaigning reshape a person's self-understanding?*
- *What temptations are unique to public recognition and political influence?*
- *Can a person seek office without becoming attached to power?*
- *What spiritual or ethical disciplines are necessary for public leadership?*

Areas of Inquiry

3. Corrupting Factors

Even principled leaders do not act in a vacuum. They enter systems of incentives, pressures, dependencies and compromises.

- *What incentives push elected officials toward poor behavior?*
- *How do fundraising, lobbying, party discipline, media cycles, and career incentives shape political conduct?*
- *Can morally serious people do good within morally compromised systems?*
- *What kinds of compromise are unavoidable and what kinds become spiritually or ethically corrosive?*
- *Are elected officials truly free to lead, or are they constrained by structures beyond public view?*
- *How should communities evaluate leaders who operate within broken systems?*

Areas of Inquiry

4. Career Politicians, Term Limits, and Public Service

Today, Americans distrust career politicians yet isn't it reasonable to expect that political leadership also requires experience, knowledge and institutional memory?

- *Should political office be a career, a temporary duty, or a part-time form of service?*
- *What do career politicians produce, for better and worse?*
- *What do term limits solve and what problems might they create?*
- *Should elected officials be fully compensated, minimally compensated, or expected to serve from other forms of livelihood?*
- *How do different models of public service shape incentives, independence, and accountability?*
- *What historical models of leadership might help us think beyond current assumptions?*

5. Local Leadership

If national politics feels resistant to reform, can local politics offer a different field of possibility?

- *Is better leadership more possible at the local level?*
- *Can local systems be designed to reduce some of the corrupting incentives of national politics?*
- *How can communities cultivate, support, and hold accountable people who enter public office?*
- *How can local politics actually become a training ground for better leadership, and what gets in the way of that now?*



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Our Approach

IMAR is not a conventional academic center. We work at the intersection of scholarship, lived faith, public discourse, and community experience. Our aim is to cultivate and share substantial forms of moral and intellectual reflection capable of speaking meaningfully to contemporary society. We are especially interested in work that:

- *crosses disciplinary boundaries,*
- *challenges inherited assumptions,*
- *engages both historical depth and modern realities,*
- *remains accessible beyond narrow academic audiences.*

Our grounding within the Tarbiya community provides a unique vantage point into how moral, spiritual, social, and political questions unfold within lived communities rather than only theoretical frameworks. Through journals, symposia, public conversations, and meaningful collaboration, IMAR seeks to recover richer ways of thinking about governance, responsibility, and flourishing in the modern world. We welcome contributions from Muslim and non-Muslims alike who are interested in serious, nuanced engagement with these themes.



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Submission Process

Phase 1: Call for Papers

Submit a well-drafted abstract which aligns with one of our Areas of Inquiry above (300–600 words) outlining your proposed contribution. Selected contributions will undergo review for early ideation and refinement by December 2026.

Abstract Deadline: November 20, 2026

Phase 2: Writing & Editing (Jan-May 2027)

Contributors write their paper, receive structured feedback, theological review, and editorial support.

Phase 3: Publication Readiness (June-July 2027)

Phase 4: Publication & Rollout (September 2027)

Print and digital journal launch.

Phase 5: Symposium (In-Person) October 2027)

Informed by the ideas from the journal, a public event geared at impacting public discourse, inviting both an interfaith and interdisciplinary community. This will be an opportunity to hear from esteemed scholars as well as sharing the journal.



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**Submit an Abstract by November 1, 2026
on www.imar.org**





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Who Should Contribute?

- *scholars and academics*
- *writers and essayists*
- *practitioners and professionals*
- *theologians and philosophers*
- *policy thinkers*
- *graduate students and emerging researchers*
- *community leaders and public intellectuals*
- *thoughtful individuals working across disciplines*

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