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Al-Ghazali's Concept of Mashlahah as a Framework for Evaluating Contemporary Public Economic Policy in Indonesia

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Abstract
Purpose: This study examines how Al-Ghazali's conception of mashlahah can be operationalized as a normative perspective for evaluating contemporary public economic policies in Indonesia.
Design/methodology/approach: A conceptual and narrative literature review with a descriptive-critical approach was employed. Al-Ghazali's works and relevant scholarly literature were examined alongside official policy documents. The analysis considers benefit and prevention of harm, essential human interests, level of need, collective welfare, and distributive justice through eight evaluative questions concerning public need, mashlahah, mafsadah, beneficiaries, burdens, distribution, evidence, and safeguards.
Findings: The analysis indicates that mashlahah is useful for evaluating public policy when intended benefits are considered together with potential harm, distribution, evidence, and safeguards. The Free Nutritious Meals Program, 2025 economic stimulus, and Rp200 trillion government fund placement show potential alignment with mashlahah, but their public value remains conditional on equitable distribution, implementation quality, and evidence of actual benefits.
Originality/value: This study develops a qualitative, policy-oriented analytical perspective derived from relevant dimensions of Al-Ghazali's mashlahah and applies it across contemporary Indonesian public economic policies, while relating the analysis to the local social context of gotong royong.

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1. Introduction

Public economic policy plays an important role in determining how economic resources are directed toward social needs, particularly in a country as socially and economically diverse as Indonesia. Economic development is therefore not only concerned with increasing economic activity, but also with ensuring that the benefits of development reach society fairly and that public interventions do not create avoidable harm. From an Islamic perspective, these concerns are closely related to the pursuit of *mashlahah*, which places benefit, the prevention of harm, and the protection of human welfare within the broader purposes of Islamic normative reasoning. This makes *mashlahah* relevant to discussions of public policy, especially when governments are required to make decisions that affect different groups and competing social interests.

Previous studies have discussed Al-Ghazali's contribution to Islamic economic thought and have highlighted the ethical dimension of economic activity, social welfare, and the importance of directing human conduct toward beneficial outcomes (Rahmawati, 2012; Harahap et al., 2025). Other studies have examined *mashlahah* as a principle concerned with benefit and the prevention of harm and have connected it with the broader objectives of Islamic law (Kudaedah, 2020; Pertiwi & Herianingrum, 2024). This body of scholarship provides an important foundation for understanding why *mashlahah* has remained significant in Islamic thought. It also shows that questions of welfare, justice, and public benefit are not separate from the ethical foundations of Islamic economic reasoning.

Recent scholarship has begun to extend the discussion of Al-Ghazali beyond general economic thought toward contemporary Indonesian policy questions. For example, Setiadi et al. (2026) examine Indonesian poverty reduction policies through Al-Ghazali's socioeconomic thought, emphasizing *mashlahah*, distributive justice, ethical governance, and state responsibility. Other studies have similarly explored the application of *mashlahah* to specific contemporary economic or policy issues. These studies demonstrate the continuing relevance of Al-Ghazali's normative thought, but they generally focus on particular policy domains or broad normative alignment. The present study differs by developing a cross-policy, qualitative analytical perspective that makes the evaluative criteria explicit and applies the same eight questions across different forms of public economic intervention.

Yet, an important issue remains insufficiently addressed. Much of the existing discussion helps explain what *mashlahah* means and why it is important, but less attention has been given to how the concept can be translated into a clear analytical basis for examining contemporary public economic policy. Recognizing that a policy produces benefit is not, by itself, sufficient to establish that the policy serves the public

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interest in the sense required by *mashlahah*. Public policies may produce intended benefits while distributing those benefits unevenly, imposing costs on particular groups, creating unintended consequences, or failing to address the needs of those most vulnerable. The unresolved issue, therefore, is not simply whether contemporary policies are relevant to *mashlahah*, but how their relationship with *mashlahah* can be assessed in a systematic and transparent manner.

This distinction between the conceptual recognition of *mashlahah* and its practical operationalization provides the central research gap addressed by this study. Rather than treating Al-Ghazali's concept merely as a historical explanation of benefit and harm, this study develops a policy-oriented analytical perspective based on relevant dimensions of his conception of *mashlahah*. The analysis considers public benefit together with the prevention of harm, the protection of essential human interests, the level of need addressed, collective welfare, and distributive justice. These dimensions are used to examine whether a public economic policy responds to genuine social needs, how its benefits and burdens are distributed, what potential *mafsadah* may arise, and what evidence and safeguards support its public value.

This analytical perspective is considered within the Indonesian social context, where public welfare is also shaped by communal values and locally embedded forms of mutual responsibility. *Gotong royong*, for example, reflects a longstanding orientation toward mutual assistance and shared concern for community well-being. Although *gotong royong* is not presented here as a direct formulation of Al-Ghazali's theory, its communal orientation provides a useful context for examining questions of shared benefit, social responsibility, and the distribution of burdens in public policy. Bringing this context into the discussion allows the study to consider how Islamic normative reasoning may speak to the social realities in which contemporary economic policies are implemented.

Accordingly, this study asks: How can Al-Ghazali's conception of *mashlahah* be understood and operationalized as a normative analytical perspective for evaluating contemporary public economic policies in Indonesia? By addressing this question, the study seeks to contribute to Islamic economic and public policy scholarship in two related ways. First, it clarifies the analytical dimensions through which *mashlahah* can be used to examine public economic policy rather than merely identifying policies as generally beneficial. Second, it connects Al-Ghazali's normative conception with contemporary Indonesian policy contexts, allowing the analysis to consider public need, distributive justice, potential harm, collective welfare, and the social context in which policy outcomes are experienced. In this way, the study seeks to move the discussion of *mashlahah* from a general statement of relevance toward a more explicit approach to policy evaluation.

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2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a conceptual and narrative literature review with a descriptive-critical approach. The study does not seek to measure the effectiveness of a particular economic program or generate primary empirical data. Instead, it examines how Al-Ghazali's conception of *mashlahah* can be understood and used as a normative analytical perspective for examining contemporary public economic policies in Indonesia. The analysis therefore combines conceptual interpretation of Islamic scholarly sources with contextual examination of selected contemporary policy materials.

The literature was identified through searches of scholarly publications and relevant documentary sources using combinations of the terms "Al-Ghazali," "Al-Ghazali's thought," "Al-Ghazali's concept of *mashlahah*," "*mashlahah*," "maqasid al-shariah," and "Indonesian public economic policy." The search focused on materials that directly addressed Al-Ghazali's understanding of *mashlahah*, Islamic economic thought, public welfare, or contemporary Indonesian economic policy. Books and scholarly publications were considered when they provided substantive discussion of the concepts examined in this study, while policy-related sources were selected when they contained information directly relevant to the policies discussed.

Three types of sources were used and treated differently in the analysis. First, Al-Ghazali's primary or attributed works were used to identify the underlying normative concepts and arguments concerning *mashlahah*, benefit, harm, human needs, and public welfare. Second, secondary scholarly literature was used to interpret, contextualize, and critically examine Al-Ghazali's ideas and their relationship to Islamic economic thought. Third, contemporary policy documents and relevant official information were used to establish the purpose, mechanism, target, and intended public benefits of the selected Indonesian economic policies. This distinction was maintained to avoid treating later scholarly interpretations or contemporary policy language as if they were direct statements by Al-Ghazali.

Source selection followed three basic considerations: relevance to the research question, substantive engagement with the concepts or policies under examination, and sufficient bibliographic or institutional reliability to support the analysis. Sources that only mentioned Al-Ghazali, *mashlahah*, or Indonesian economic policy without providing meaningful conceptual or policy information were not used as primary evidence for the main argument. Particular attention was given to distinguishing primary textual claims from interpretations made by later scholars, especially when contemporary economic terminology was used to describe Al-Ghazali's thought.

The search process was iterative rather than systematic in the PRISMA sense

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because the study was designed as a conceptual and narrative review. Search results were screened for substantive relevance to the research question, conceptual relevance to Al-Ghazali's conception of mashlahah, and direct relevance to the Indonesian policy cases examined. Sources were retained when they contributed substantive conceptual, historical, or policy information to the analysis, while materials that only mentioned the relevant concepts without meaningful engagement were excluded from the analytical basis of the study.

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, relevant passages and arguments concerning Al-Ghazali's conception of *mashlahah* were identified and organized around benefit, prevention of harm, essential human interests, levels of need, collective welfare, and distributive considerations. Second, these concepts were interpreted in relation to the policy-oriented analytical framework developed in this study. Third, selected contemporary Indonesian public economic policies were examined according to their stated public needs, intended beneficiaries, distribution of benefits and burdens, potential *mafsadah*, available evidence of public benefit, and safeguards against unintended harm. Finally, the findings from the conceptual and policy analysis were compared to identify areas of alignment, possible tension, and limitations in the application of *mashlahah* to contemporary public economic policy. This procedure allows the study to move from textual interpretation to structured policy analysis rather than simply asserting that a particular policy is consistent with *mashlahah*.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Al-Ghazali's Conception of Mashlahah

Al-Ghazali's conception of *mashlahah* is most clearly articulated within his discussion of the objectives of Sharia in *al-Mustaṣfā*. He defines *mashlahah* not as any benefit perceived by human beings, but as the preservation of the purposes of Sharia. These purposes include the protection of religion (*hifz al-din*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), intellect (*hifz al-'aql*), lineage (*hifz al-nasl*), and wealth (*hifz al-mal*). Conversely, whatever undermines these essential purposes constitutes *mafsadah*, while preventing such harm forms part of *mashlahah* (al-Ghazali, 1993, pp. 286–287). This formulation is important because it places a normative boundary around the concept: a policy cannot be treated as *mashlahah* merely because it generates an immediately observable economic benefit. Its legitimacy also depends on whether the benefit is compatible with the purposes of Sharia and whether significant harm to those purposes is avoided.

Al-Ghazali's treatment of economic conduct places ethical responsibility and human welfare alongside material considerations. His broader ethical framework

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connects economic conduct with legitimate human needs, moral responsibility, and the avoidance of conduct that may harm others (Al-Ghazali, 2005). Subsequent scholarship has examined these ideas in relation to exchange, production, money, public finance, and ethical conduct in economic and business activity (Ghazanfar & Islahi, 1990; Ghazanfar, 2000; Sidani & Al Ariss, 2015). In this study, these economic dimensions are used only as interpretive context; they are not treated as evidence that Al-Ghazali formulated modern economic theories in their contemporary disciplinary form.

At the same time, contemporary terminology must be used carefully when interpreting Al-Ghazali. His discussions of exchange, markets, production, money, and economic behaviour may be read in ways that resonate with modern economic concerns, but this does not mean that he formulated modern economic theories in their present form. For example, describing his discussion of market exchange through the contemporary language of "supply and demand" may be useful as an interpretive comparison, but it should not be presented as evidence that Al-Ghazali developed a formal modern theory of supply and demand. The same caution applies to the concepts of monetary circulation, market structure, and production systems. These terms are used in this study as analytical language for interpreting aspects of his thought rather than as direct historical formulations by Al-Ghazali. This distinction is consistent with recent scholarship, which continues to examine Al-Ghazali's economic ideas through the historical sources while relating them carefully to contemporary economic questions (Febriza et al., 2025; Rahmawati, 2012).

The normative significance of *mashlahah* can therefore be understood through several connected concerns: securing benefit, preventing harm, protecting essential human interests, responding to genuine needs, and maintaining broader social welfare. These concerns provide the conceptual foundation for the policy analysis developed in this study. They do not, however, constitute a contemporary policy model formulated by Al-Ghazali himself.

3.1.1 Supporting Juristic Maxims and Their Scope

Two juristic maxims are relevant to the policy-oriented interpretation developed in this study, but neither is treated as a direct formulation of Al-Ghazali's theory. The first is the maxim dar' al-mafasid muqaddam 'ala jalb al-masalih, which emphasizes the need to prevent significant harm when benefit and harm come into tension. The second is the maxim tasarruf al-imam 'ala al-ra'iyyah manut bi al-maslahah, which links governmental action toward the population with public interest. These principles are treated here as juristic maxims developed within the broader tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, rather than as quotations or formal policy principles

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formulated by Al-Ghazali himself. The second maxim has also been examined in recent Indonesian scholarship in relation to government policy (Satriani et al., 2025). Their role in this study is therefore limited to providing supporting juristic bridges between classical mashlahah reasoning and contemporary policy evaluation. The primary theoretical foundation remains Al-Ghazali's own conception of mashlahah, particularly the preservation of the objectives of Sharia and the prevention of mafsadah.

3.2 From Mashlahah to a Policy-Oriented Analytical Framework

The discussion above becomes more useful for public economic policy when the normative meaning of *mashlahah* is translated into questions that can be applied to actual policy decisions. A government program cannot be regarded as serving the public interest simply because its stated objective is economic growth, poverty reduction, social assistance, or increased purchasing power. Its public value also depends on the need it addresses, the people affected by it, the benefits it creates, the burdens it imposes, and the possibility of unintended harm.

This approach is also consistent with contemporary discussions of Islamic public policy that emphasize purposefulness, collective decision-making, and rectification as important dimensions of policy reasoning (Abdelgafar, 2021). On this basis, this study develops a policy-oriented analytical perspective from relevant dimensions of Al-Ghazali's conception of mashlahah.Five considerations are used: benefit and prevention of harm, protection of essential human interests, the level of need addressed, collective welfare, and distributive justice**.** These dimensions are not presented as a policy framework authored by Al-Ghazali. Rather, they are an analytical reconstruction developed in this study from his normative conception of *mashlahah* and its relationship to human welfare. For clarity, the term "framework" in this article refers to an analytical framework reconstructed by the authors from relevant dimensions of Al-Ghazali's conception of mashlahah; it does not refer to a policy-evaluation model explicitly formulated by Al-Ghazali himself.

This approach is consistent with later scholarship showing that maqasid-oriented reasoning can be translated into more concrete evaluative approaches. Ascarya and Masrifah (2023), for example, developed a maqasid index for evaluating Islamic corporate social responsibility in Indonesia. Their work demonstrates that Islamic normative objectives can be organized into evaluative dimensions rather than remaining only at the level of general ethical statements. The present study takes a different approach: instead of constructing a numerical index, it uses *mashlahah* as a qualitative normative lens for examining public economic policy (Ascarya & Masrifah, 2023).

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The framework is therefore applied through eight questions. First, what public need does the policy address? Second, which dimension and level of *mashlahah* does it serve? Third, what potential *mafsadah* may arise? Fourth, who receives the benefits? Fifth, who bears the costs or burdens? Sixth, how are benefits and burdens distributed? Seventh, what evidence demonstrates public benefit? Finally, what safeguards are available to reduce unintended harm? These questions allow the analysis to move beyond a general statement that a policy is "consistent with *mashlahah*" and toward a more careful assessment of how such consistency can be demonstrated.

The Indonesian social context also matters in applying this perspective. Public welfare is experienced not only through formal government programs but also through communal relationships and practices of mutual assistance. *Gotong royong*, for example, reflects a longstanding orientation toward shared responsibility and collective assistance. It is not treated here as equivalent to Al-Ghazali's *mashlahah*. Rather, it provides a local social context in which questions concerning shared benefit, social responsibility, and the fair distribution of burdens can be considered. This distinction allows the study to connect Sharia-based normative reasoning with Indonesian social realities without reducing one concept to the other.

Gotong royong has also been discussed in the Indonesian social context as a form of collective action, mutual assistance, and community-based welfare provision, although its meaning and institutional expression may vary across social and local settings (Bowen, 1986; Sumarto, 2017). This broader understanding supports its use here as a contextual lens for examining collective welfare and social responsibility rather than as a substitute for the Islamic concept of mashlahah.

3.3 Application to Contemporary Indonesian Public Economic Policies

3.3.1 Free Nutritious Meals Program

The Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program was launched nationally on 6 January 2025 through Nutrition Fulfilment Service Units (SPPG). Its initial target included students, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and young children, with implementation also involving local food producers and small businesses (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2025). However, early policy evaluation indicates that the direct effects of MBG on outcomes such as stunting and anemia remained unverified because formal outcome tracking was still limited, while food safety, logistics, and targeting remained important implementation challenges (Suprapto et al., 2025).

The Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program represents a public intervention directed primarily toward nutritional well-being and the protection of human development. From a *mashlahah* perspective, its strongest normative basis lies in its

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response to an essential human need. Adequate nutrition is closely related to the protection of life and human capacity, while its wider implementation may also affect education and local economic activity. The policy therefore provides a relevant case for examining how a public program can address a need that extends beyond immediate consumption.

Its relevance to *mashlahah*, however, should not be established only from its stated objective. The analysis must also consider whether the intended benefits reach the groups most in need, whether access is distributed fairly, and whether implementation creates avoidable harm. Issues such as beneficiary identification, food safety, regional inequality, procurement, financial management, and accountability therefore form part of the *mashlahah* assessment. A policy designed to protect human welfare may produce weaker public value if implementation is poorly targeted or if risks are not adequately controlled.

The program can therefore be understood as showing relatively strong alignment with the protection of essential human interests and collective welfare at the level of policy purpose. The broader assessment remains conditional, however, because the realization of *mashlahah* depends on implementation quality, equitable access, accountability, and evidence of actual outcomes. This distinction is important: the existence of a welfare-oriented objective provides a basis for *mashlahah* analysis, but it does not by itself prove that the policy has produced the intended welfare effects.

3.3.2 2025 Economic Stimulus Program

The 2025 Economic Stimulus Program was announced by the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs on 27 May 2025 as a set of measures intended to maintain household purchasing power and domestic consumption and to support second-quarter economic growth. The measures included transport discounts, toll-road discounts, electricity support, social assistance, and wage-related support (Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Perekonomian Republik Indonesia, 2025).

The 2025 Economic Stimulus Program addresses a different public need. Its measures were designed to support purchasing power and maintain economic activity through a combination of transport incentives, electricity support, social assistance, wage subsidies, and other temporary interventions. The policy therefore operates more directly on household economic conditions and short-term economic stability.

From the perspective of *mashlahah*, the policy is relevant to the protection of livelihood and wealth as well as to collective economic welfare. Its potential benefit lies in helping households and workers withstand economic pressure and in supporting continued economic activity. The normative assessment, however,

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requires attention to who receives the assistance, how long the benefits last, and whether the intervention reaches groups facing genuine economic difficulties.

Potential *mafsadah* also needs to be considered. Temporary assistance may provide meaningful short-term relief without necessarily producing lasting improvements in income, employment, or household resilience. Unequal access, weak targeting, administrative costs, or fiscal pressure may also reduce the wider public value of the intervention. The policy therefore shows meaningful alignment with *mashlahah* at the level of its public purpose, but the strength of that alignment depends on targeting, distribution, duration, and evidence concerning actual outcomes.

The available policy documentation establishes the intended objectives and implementation measures of the stimulus, but it does not by itself establish the magnitude or durability of its welfare effects. Accordingly, the assessment in this study remains normative and documentary rather than an empirical determination of policy effectiveness.

3.3.3 Government Placement of Rp200 Trillion in Partner Banks

The Government's Rp200 trillion fund placement was formally established through Minister of Finance Decree No. 276 of 2025 on 12 September 2025. The funds were placed in five partner banks—BRI, BNI, Bank Mandiri, BTN, and BSI—with the stated purpose of supporting real-sector growth and improving the transmission of liquidity into productive economic activity. The placement was set for six months, subject to extension, and participating banks were required to report the use of the funds monthly (Kementerian Keuangan Republik Indonesia, 2025).

The Government's placement of Rp200 trillion of state funds in partner banks represents a different form of economic intervention because its effects operate through the financial system rather than through direct household assistance. The policy was intended to improve banking liquidity and create greater room for credit distribution to productive sectors. Its relevance to *mashlahah* therefore depends on the extent to which the financial intervention produces wider economic benefits.

From a *mashlahah* perspective, increased liquidity is not itself the final public benefit. The more important question is whether improved liquidity is transmitted into productive financing, lower financing constraints, investment, employment, and broader economic opportunities. The policy can therefore be examined through the relationship between an immediate financial effect and its potential wider social consequences.

Distribution is particularly important in this case. The immediate institutional beneficiaries are the participating banks, while businesses, workers, and households may benefit indirectly through increased financial intermediation. A *mashlahah*-based

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assessment therefore needs to ask whether credit reaches productive sectors broadly, including groups that face genuine financing constraints, or whether the benefits become concentrated among borrowers who already have greater access to financial resources.

Potential *mafsadah* must also be considered. Additional liquidity does not automatically guarantee productive investment. Weak transmission, inefficient allocation, or excessive concentration of credit could limit the public benefit or create new risks. The policy should therefore be assessed not only by the amount of liquidity made available but also by evidence of how that liquidity moves through the economy.

The policy consequently shows potential alignment with collective economic welfare and the protection of economic interests, but the alignment is conditional. Its strength depends on the quality of financial transmission, the distribution of credit, the prevention of distortions, and evidence that improved financial conditions produce wider social and economic benefits.

To make the application of *mashlahah* more systematic, the three policy cases were assessed using the same analytical considerations. The assessment focuses on the public need addressed, the relevant welfare dimension, potential *mafsadah*, the distribution of benefits, available evidence, and safeguards against unintended harm.

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Table 1. Comparative Assessment of Public Economic Policies through a Mashlahah Perspective

Policy	Public need	Mashlahah / potential mafsadah	Beneficiaries and distribution	Evidence / safeguards	Overall assessment
MBG	Nutrition and human development	Supports essential human interests; risks include unequal access and food-safety problems	Primarily children and other eligible groups; benefits should be distributed equitably, while fiscal and administrative burdens should be managed transparently	Early evaluation indicates limited outcome tracking; monitoring, food-safety controls, and accountability are required	Strong normative alignment at the level of stated purpose, but conditional on implementation and evidence
2025 Economic Stimulus	Purchasing power and economic stability	Supports household welfare and livelihoods; risks include weak targeting, temporary effects, and fiscal pressure	Households, workers, and targeted groups; benefits may vary across groups, while fiscal and administrative burdens require proportional management	Outcome evaluation is needed to establish sustained effects; targeting and distribution require monitoring	Relevant alignment, conditional on targeting, distribution, duration, and demonstrated outcomes
Rp200 Trillion Fund Placement	Banking liquidity and productive financing	May support *hifz al-mal* and economic activity; risks include weak credit transmission and concentration	Banks benefit directly; businesses, workers, and households may benefit indirectly, while opportunity costs and distributional risks require monitoring	Monthly reporting and monitoring are required; public benefit depends on productive credit transmission	Potential alignment, conditional on broad productive financing and evidence

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The comparison shows that the three policies have different pathways to public benefit. MBG addresses an immediate human need, the 2025 economic stimulus supports household purchasing power, and the Rp200 trillion placement seeks to generate wider benefits through financial intermediation. However, none can be considered *mashlahah* solely on the basis of its stated objective. Public benefit must also be examined through distribution, potential harm, evidence of outcomes, and safeguards. Thus, the assessment supports a conditional rather than automatic judgment of *mashlahah* alignment.

3.3.4 Synthesis of the Policy Analysis

The three cases illustrate why *mashlahah* is more useful as an analytical perspective than as a general label for government programs. MBG primarily addresses nutritional and human-development needs; the 2025 economic stimulus focuses on household purchasing power and short-term economic stability; while the Rp200 trillion placement works through banking liquidity and productive financing. Each policy therefore addresses a different public need and generates different pathways through which benefits may reach society.

The comparison also shows that the assessment of *mashlahah* cannot stop at policy intention. A policy may have a legitimate public objective while still producing unequal benefits, imposing burdens on particular groups, or creating unintended consequences. For this reason, benefit must be considered together with harm, distribution, evidence, and safeguards. This is where the policy-oriented perspective developed in this study adds value: it provides a consistent set of questions for examining whether the public orientation of a policy can be supported rather than simply assumed.

The Indonesian context adds another important dimension. Public policy is implemented within communities where collective responsibility, mutual assistance, and locally embedded social relationships remain meaningful. The connection with *gotong royong* should not be understood as an equation between local tradition and Islamic legal theory. Instead, it shows how a normative concern for collective welfare can be examined in relation to the social setting in which policies are experienced. This makes the discussion of *mashlahah* more relevant to the distinctive focus of JSLT while preserving the conceptual distinction between Sharia-based normative reasoning and Indonesian local traditions.

Overall, the analysis suggests that Al-Ghazali's conception of *mashlahah* remains useful for contemporary public economic policy not because it provides ready-made answers to modern policy problems, but because it directs attention toward questions

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that remain important: What genuine need is being addressed? Who benefits? Who bears the burden? What harm may occur? Are benefits distributed fairly? And what evidence shows that the intervention actually contributes to public welfare? These questions provide a more careful basis for bringing classical Islamic normative thought into conversation with contemporary Indonesian policy.

4. Conclusions

This study shows that Al-Ghazali's concept of *mashlahah* can provide a normative perspective for evaluating contemporary public economic policy through benefit, prevention of harm, protection of essential human interests, level of need, collective welfare, and distributive justice (Al-Ghazali, 1993; Kudaedah, 2020). These dimensions are operationalized through eight questions concerning public need, *mashlahah*, potential *mafsadah*, beneficiaries, burdens, distribution, evidence of benefit, and safeguards. The analysis of three Indonesian policy cases indicates that alignment with *mashlahah* is conditional rather than automatic. The Free Nutritious Meals Program, 2025 economic stimulus measures, and Rp200 trillion government fund placement address different public needs, but their realization of *mashlahah* depends on equitable distribution, implementation quality, evidence of public benefit, and prevention of potential harm. This perspective is also relevant to the Indonesian context, where collective welfare and mutual assistance are reflected in practices such as *gotong royong* (Bowen, 1986; Sumarto, 2017). The main contribution of this study is a qualitative, policy-oriented analytical perspective reconstructed from relevant dimensions of Al-Ghazali's *mashlahah*, rather than a policy model directly formulated by Al-Ghazali. The study is limited by its conceptual and documentary design and therefore does not establish causal policy effects. Future research should empirically test this framework through comparative policy evaluation, beneficiary experiences, and distributional analysis.

Author Contribution

Dita Nur Amaliatul Chusniah as the corresponding author contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, supervision, writing the original draft, and reviewing and editing the manuscript. **Ahmad Rian Nasharuddin** contributed to project administration, supervision, literature review, formal analysis, manuscript review and editing, and coordination of the submission, revision, and publication processes. **Moh Bisri Musthofa** & **Rama Imam Wijaya** contributed to data curation, formal analysis, and validation. All authors contributed substantially to the study, approved the final version of the manuscript, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work

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Ethics Approval

This study does not involve human participants, interviews, surveys, or the collection of personal data. Therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required. The research was conducted through normative legal analysis and library research using legal regulations, academic literature, and other publicly available scholarly sources.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The author declares that there is no potential conflict of interest related to this article.

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Data Availability Statement

The authors state that the data presented in this research is the data found in the research field. All data relevant to this research can be found in this article; and if you have other questions regarding data availability, you can ask the authors directly.

AI Usage Declaration

The author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with language translation, manuscript organization, and improvement of writing clarity during the preparation of this article. AI was not used to generate research findings, conduct data analysis, interpret results, or draw conclusions. All research concepts, research design, legal analysis, interpretation of findings, and conclusions were developed and critically reviewed by the author. The author takes full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, integrity, and final content of this manuscript.

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