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From Individual Service to a Service-Oriented Network: The Role of E-Governance in Enhancing the Effectiveness of Islamic Governance

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Abstract

Efficiency in Islamic governance is not merely a technical or administrative indicator; rather, it constitutes a fundamental component of legitimacy, the realization of justice, and the protection of the public's rights (*ḥaqq al-nās*) in the public sphere. Nevertheless, the country's administrative system faces challenges such as an overgrown bureaucracy, fragmented and overlapping processes, weak institutional coordination, and inefficiencies in the delivery of public services. These challenges undermine the realization of effective governance and, consequently, the functional legitimacy of the political system. Against this backdrop, the central question of this study is how e-governance can be employed to reduce bureaucratic burdens, enhance transparency, and improve the effectiveness of Islamic governance within the framework of the *wilāya* (guardianship) system and the model of the servant-leader. The study hypothesizes that sustainable effectiveness in Islamic governance cannot be achieved either through the mere digitization of public services or solely through the personal virtues of administrators. Rather, it requires the establishment of a servant network founded upon e-governance—a data-driven network of institutions, processes, and electronic systems in which monitoring mechanisms and transparency, informed by agency theory, serve to institutionalize servant leadership and accountability. The theoretical framework of the study is based on a transition from agency theory to servant leadership theory and on elevating servant leadership from the level of an individual virtue to that of a structural and networked institutional principle. Within this framework, agency theory, by emphasizing the potential conflict of interests between the principal (the umma and the institution of *wilāya*) and the agents (government agencies and public administrators), demonstrates the necessity of transparency, oversight, and data-driven control. Servant leadership theory, in turn, emphasizes stewardship, service, and managerial responsibility, thereby providing the normative orientation of governance. By integrating these two perspectives, the study introduces the concept of servant

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e-governance as the institutional foundation for realizing a servant network. This research employs a descriptive-analytical methodology with a prescriptive orientation. The findings indicate that the digitization of services, in the absence of process redesign, data integration, role clarification, and effective mechanisms for evaluation and accountability, merely transforms the form of bureaucracy without improving its performance. By contrast, the establishment of an E-Governance Management Center under the institution of *wilāya*, serving as the strategic coordinator and supervisory authority of the servant network, can reduce the cost and time of service delivery, enhance transparency, strengthen accountability, improve perceptions of procedural justice, and align the interests of agents with the public good. In doing so, it provides the conditions necessary for achieving sustainable governmental effectiveness and, consequently, reinforcing the functional legitimacy of the Islamic political system. Accordingly, servant e-governance is presented as a necessary condition for realizing effective Islamic governance.

Keywords

Islamic Governance; e-Governance; Agency Theory; Stewardship Theory; Stewardship Network; Strategic Planning and Supervision Organization of the Office of the Supreme Leader.

1. Introduction

Effectiveness in Islamic governance is not merely a technical or managerial indicator; rather, it constitutes one of the fundamental elements of realizing justice, safeguarding the public's rights, and strengthening the legitimacy of the political system. In the logic of Islamic governance, legitimacy is not confined to normative and religious foundations. Its continuity and durability also depend on the system's ability to address public problems, secure the common good, and deliver public services effectively. For this reason, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution (Supreme Leader, September 21, 2004) has identified effectiveness as one of the essential pillars of legitimacy, emphasizing that failure to perform governmental duties efficiently undermines the legitimacy of the political system. Accordingly, effectiveness may be regarded as one of the most significant manifestations of functional legitimacy in an Islamic system of governance. Despite its significance, the country's administrative system has, in recent decades, faced numerous challenges, including the expansion of bureaucracy, the proliferation and fragmentation of administrative processes, weak interagency coordination, complex administrative procedures, delays in service delivery, and declining levels of accountability. The persistence of these problems has not only increased the costs of governing the country but has also widened the gap between the state and its citizens, thereby making the attainment of effective governance increasingly difficult. Under such circumstances, reforming administrative structures and enhancing the state's governance capacity have become among the most pressing imperatives of the Islamic political system. In recent years, e-governance has emerged as one of the principal approaches to improving the quality of governance and transforming the administrative system. However, the experience of numerous implementation initiatives demonstrates that the mere digitization of public services and the transfer of traditional administrative processes to digital platforms are, by themselves, insufficient to address the structural problems of bureaucracy or to enhance governmental effectiveness. In many cases, the absence of process reengineering, the lack of data integration, weak oversight mechanisms, and the persistence of conventional administrative structures have resulted in technology merely reproducing the existing bureaucracy in a new digital form. Accordingly, the central issue is not simply the adoption of technology, but rather how it can be employed to advance the objectives of Islamic governance.

To address this issue, the present study draws upon two complementary theoretical frameworks. Agency theory, by emphasizing the potential conflict of interest between the principal (the umma and the institution of *wilāya* or guardianship) and the agents (government agencies and public administrators), explains the need for transparency, accountability, control, and data-driven oversight. Servant leadership theory, by contrast, emphasizes stewardship, service, responsibility, and the primacy of the public interest over personal gain, viewing the administrator not merely as an executive agent but as a servant of the people. Despite the significance of both perspectives, relying exclusively on either control mechanisms or the personal virtues of administrators is insufficient to ensure sustainable governmental effectiveness. It is therefore necessary to develop a framework that not only harnesses the oversight capabilities of agency theory but also elevates servant leadership from the level of an individual virtue to that of a structural and institutional principle. Accordingly, the present study proposes the concept of servant e-governance as the institutional foundation for realizing a servant network—a data-driven network of institutions, processes, and electronic systems in which transparency, accountability, and intelligent oversight serve to institutionalize servant leadership and safeguard the rights of citizens. Within such a model, technology is not merely an instrumental tool; rather, it functions as a mechanism for aligning the interests of agents with the public good, reducing information asymmetry, enhancing procedural justice, and improving the effectiveness of governance. The central research question of this study is how e-governance can be utilized to reduce bureaucratic burdens, enhance transparency, and improve the effectiveness of Islamic governance within the framework of the *wilāya* system and the model of the servant-leader. The study hypothesizes that sustainable effectiveness in Islamic governance is achieved through the establishment of a servant network grounded in e-governance—a network in which data-driven mechanisms of transparency and oversight are integrated with the values of servant leadership and public service. Accordingly, employing a descriptive-analytical methodology, this study examines the relationship among governmental effectiveness, agency theory, servant leadership theory, and e-governance, and proposes the establishment of an E-Governance Management Center under the institution of *wilāya* as the leading, regulatory, and supervisory body of the servant network. Such an institution, it argues, can provide the institutional foundation for achieving sustainable governmental effectiveness and strengthening the functional legitimacy of Islamic governance.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In this section, first the theoretical framework is elucidated and then the concepts are explicated.

2-1. Theoretical Framework

In recent years, two major perspectives on organizational management have emerged, each offering a different assessment of the motivations of managers. The first, known as agency theory, adopts an economic and materialistic perspective. It portrays managers as individuals primarily motivated by self-interest, who tend to prioritize their personal interests over those of the organization. From this standpoint, the central challenge is to identify mechanisms that align the objectives of managers with those of the organization, thereby transforming managers from mere agents acting on behalf of the organization into its genuine stewards or servants. The second perspective, known as stewardship theory, adopts a social and psychological orientation. It views managers as stewards of the organization who are committed to its objectives, dedicate themselves to advancing its mission, and place collective interests above their own personal interests (Alvani, 2002, pp. 6–11). The principal characteristics of these two theories are as follows:

1. Agency Theory

- The theory is founded on the model of the economic individual (homo economicus), who seeks to maximize personal utility and self-interest.
- Both managers and owners (or shareholders) are assumed to pursue the greatest possible benefit while employing the fewest possible resources.
- Because ownership is separated from management, there exists the potential for a conflict of interests between managers (agents) and owners (principals).
- To mitigate this conflict, the theory advocates the use of monitoring and control mechanisms, such as boards of directors and performance-based incentive and compensation systems.

2. Stewardship Theory

- The theory is rooted in psychology, sociology, and ethics, rather than in purely economic assumptions.
- Managers are viewed as stewards of the organization who place the collective and organizational interests above their own personal interests.
- Its model of human nature is that of a self-actualizing and collectivist individual, rather than a purely self-interested economic actor.
- Steward-managers act on the basis of substantive rationality, directing their decisions toward the long-term interests and well-being of both the

organization and society (Mohammadi & et al., 2025, pp. 307–330).

Table 1. Key Differences between the Two Theories

Concept	Agency Theory	Stewardship Theory
Model of Human	Economic individual (*homo economicus*)	Self-actualizing individual
Motivation	Extrinsic rewards	Intrinsic rewards
Behavior	Individualistic	Collectivist
Power	Organizational and legal authority	Personal and moral authority
Organizational Structure	Control-oriented	Flexible and participatory
Temporal Perspective	Short-term	Long-term

Accordingly, in the literature on management and governance, Agency Theory and Servant Theory are generally presented as two competing approaches to explaining the behavior of managers and organizational agents. Agency Theory is founded on the assumption that a potential conflict of interests exists between the principal—representing the interests of the people—and the agent. In the absence of effective monitoring and control mechanisms, agents may place their personal interests above those of the organization and society. Consequently, the theory's primary strategy for reducing agency costs is the development of systems of oversight, transparency, auditing, and performance evaluation. Despite its importance in curbing corruption, rent-seeking, and the abuse of power, Agency Theory adopts a predominantly control-oriented view of human behavior and organizations. Rather than seeking to transform the character of organizational agents, it focuses primarily on mitigating the risks arising from their behavior. By contrast, Servant Theory adopts a social, ethical, and psychological perspective, viewing the manager not as a self-interested agent but as a servant of the organization and society. Within this framework, managers are regarded as individuals who dedicate themselves to collective goals and place the public interest above their own personal interests. This perspective is also more consistent with the foundations of Islamic governance, in which the responsibility of governance is fundamentally regarded as a divine trust (*amāna*) and a form of service to the people. Accordingly, the ideal administrator is one who considers himself or herself a servant of the people rather than their master. Nevertheless, although Servant Theory represents an advance over Agency Theory, it is not, by itself, capable of resolving the structural challenges confronting contemporary systems of governance.

Its principal limitation is that it conceives of servanthood primarily as an individual managerial virtue. Within this framework, organizational effectiveness depends largely on the presence of committed, ethical, and service-oriented managers. Experience with administrative systems, however, has shown that even when capable leaders are placed at the head of organizations, an overgrown bureaucracy, complex administrative procedures, fragmented data systems, a lack of transparency, and weak oversight mechanisms can still undermine their service-oriented objectives. In other words, servanthood at the individual level is a necessary condition for good governance, but it is not a sufficient one.

3. Conceptual Framework

Here it is necessary to clarify what I mean by the concepts and terms I used in the article.

3.1. Performance

To understand this concept, it is first necessary to distinguish it from three related concepts: efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity. Efficiency refers to performing a task correctly and denotes the relationship between the outputs produced and the inputs required to achieve them. Effectiveness, by contrast, refers to the extent to which predetermined objectives are attained; in other words, it encompasses the results achieved through the performance of a system (Mousavi, 2012a). Accordingly, effectiveness means doing the right things, whereas efficiency means doing things right, although some authors have mistakenly treated the two concepts as synonymous (Golriz, 2007, p. 171). The most widely accepted definition of productivity incorporates both efficiency and effectiveness. Thus, productivity may be defined as doing the right things right, combining both of these dimensions. On this basis, defining performance solely in terms of either efficiency or effectiveness commits the logical fallacy of the false exclusive disjunction. When one states "A or B," the formulation may erroneously suggest that either A or B—but not both—can be true. Such expressions are structurally prone to creating this misconception and may mislead the researcher (Faramarz Qara Maleki, 2009, pp. 90–91). Likewise, performance should not be understood as referring exclusively to either efficiency or effectiveness; rather, it encompasses both. In this sense, performance is conceptually equivalent to productivity. Accordingly, the performance of a government or political system may be defined as its ability to achieve its predetermined objectives while expending the least possible resources—that is, to operate productively (Mousavi, 2012b, pp. 34–37).

3.2. Governance

In the age of technological transformation, one of the most significant contemporary manifestations of governance is the phenomenon known as e-governance. E-governance is not merely the digitalization of public services; rather, it refers to the systematic application of information and communication technologies (ICT) across all dimensions of governance, including policymaking, implementation, oversight, public participation, and accountability (Deghati & et al., 2019, pp. 203–230). Within this framework, e-governance may be defined as:

> An intelligent, data-driven, and integrated system for the redesign and implementation of governance processes that harnesses the capabilities of information and communication technologies (ICT) to address the interconnected challenges of governance while promoting transparency, justice, public participation, and accountability, thereby maximizing governmental performance.

3.3. IT-Based

IT-basedness refers to a condition in which organizational structures, processes, decision-making, or service delivery are fundamentally founded upon and dependent on information technology (IT). In such a state, information technology functions not merely as a supporting tool but as the primary platform and strategic infrastructure for organizational activities. More precisely, an IT-based system is one in which all components—including the executive structure, data processing, decision-making, and service delivery—are designed, managed, and implemented according to the capabilities, logic, and architecture of information technology. This goes beyond the limited application of technology in a particular area and becomes a foundational model for governance and administration. Accordingly, becoming IT-based constitutes a structural transformation, rather than merely equipping an organization with electronic tools. A common misconception is to reduce e-governance to the installation of a few isolated software applications. In reality, becoming IT-based means institutionalizing information technology at the core of organizational structures, administrative processes, and decision-making through business process reengineering, data integration, and the establishment of a coherent digital infrastructure.

Accordingly, becoming an IT-based organization entails the following characteristics:

1) A Clearly Defined System Design Objective (Problem-Solving Orientation): The first step is to determine the purpose for which the system is being designed and the problems it is intended to solve. This requires analyzing a network of problems—that is, identifying interconnected issues that interact with one another rather than focusing on a single isolated problem.

2) Accurate Identification of System Stakeholders: Identifying and analyzing both primary and secondary stakeholders is a fundamental principle of successful system design. Stakeholders include citizens, employees, managers, oversight bodies, and higher-level authorities. Understanding their needs, concerns, and expectations is essential for ensuring both user acceptance and system performance.

3) Electronic Design of Workflow Processes: Administrative and decision-making processes must be electronically redesigned. This involves not merely digitizing traditional procedures but comprehensively reengineering business processes. Workflows, forms, approval pathways, and responsibilities should all be designed within an integrated digital environment.

4) Minimization of Process Time: One of the principal objectives of e-governance is to reduce bureaucratic delays and improve productivity. Every process should be analyzed in terms of its total completion time and redesigned to eliminate unnecessary steps, enable parallel processing, and maximize automation.

5) Simplification of Data Items and Information Forms: The data forms and items used within the system should be simple, comprehensible, and limited to essential information. Excessive complexity is a primary source of user error and organizational inefficiency.

6) Clear Definition of Stakeholder Roles and Levels of Participation: Each stakeholder should have a clearly defined role and degree of involvement at every stage of the process. This enhances transparency, accountability, and prevents functional overlap. Such role delineation is especially critical in multi-agency and interorganizational systems.

7) Managerial Involvement Only: Where Necessary Managers should participate only in strategic or sensitive stages of organizational processes, rather than in routine or repetitive operational tasks. This principle prevents decision-making bottlenecks, reduces dependence on individual managers, and facilitates faster service delivery.

8) Comprehensive Transparency (Information Disclosure): Transparency requires that all stakeholders receive timely information regarding the status, progress, modifications, and outcomes of organizational processes. This can be achieved through real-time information systems and comprehensive documentation, thereby strengthening public trust.

9) Intelligent Automation: The system should evolve beyond being merely electronic to becoming intelligent. System decisions should be optimized through artificial intelligence and data analytics. For example, personnel files may be assigned automatically to specialists based on each specialist's current caseload, thereby balancing workloads efficiently.

10) Information and Organizational Knowledge Management: An infrastructure for storing, analyzing, and retrieving organizational information is essential for sustaining e-governance. Its objectives are to eliminate dependence on individuals, preserve institutional knowledge within the system itself, and prevent the alteration of records once operations have been completed.

11) Uniform Application of Rules and Regulations: The system should eliminate discretionary or inconsistent application of laws and regulations. This can be achieved by embedding decision rules and legal requirements within the system so that regulations are implemented consistently and uniformly.

12) Comprehensive Electronic Records: Complete records for all users (citizens, employees, and managers) should be created, maintained, and searchable within electronic files. Such records facilitate monitoring, evaluation, continuous improvement, and data analysis (data survey).

13) Online Management Dashboards: Managers should have access to real-time dashboards that present key information visually through charts, status indicators, and alerts. These dashboards support informed decision-making and effective oversight.

14) Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms: Regular electronic collection of feedback from users, citizens, and other stakeholders regarding system performance, user satisfaction, and recommendations is essential for the continuous improvement of e-governance. Such surveys should be scientifically designed, conducted on an ongoing basis, and produce data suitable for systematic analysis.

4. Research Background

The literature review examines and evaluates the body of scholarly work relevant to the research problem, including dissertations, peer-reviewed journal articles, specialized books, and other authoritative sources. Its purpose is to establish the position of the present study within the existing body of research, trace the development of the relevant literature, identify existing gaps and shortcomings, and avoid unnecessary duplication of previous studies. Accordingly, the following table presents and compares the principal studies conducted in the field of e-governance.

Table 2. Research Background

Authors (Year) – Methodology	Research Objectives / Main Questions	Principal Findings
Tavakkoli Rad & Miri (2021) Method: Systematic literature review.	To develop a conceptual model of Transformative Governance (T-Gov) and examine its role in governance transformation.	The study identifies the distinction between e-government and e-governance. It further argues that citizens play a central and strategic role in the operationalization of the transformative governance model.
Ahmadi, Mashhadi, & Atrian (2021) Method: Descriptive-analytical; data collected through documentary and library research.	To examine how the need for e-government in the information society has shifted governance from traditional models toward modern electronic governance.	The study concludes that information technology has facilitated interactions among government agencies, between government and citizens, and between government and the private sector. It has also contributed to administrative reform, citizen-centered service delivery, the development of e-government, and broader transformations in governance.
Ghassabzadeh & et al. (2023) Method: Applied, descriptive-survey research using standardized questionnaires.	To investigate the impact of e-governance on organizational sustainability, with good governance serving as a mediating variable in organizations in Kerman County.	The findings indicate, with a 95% confidence level, that both e-governance and good governance exert a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational sustainability. Good governance also mediates the relationship between e-governance and organizational sustainability.
Ghahramani Afshar & et al. (2021) Method: Analytical–prescriptive approach based on a library (documentary) study.	This article seeks to answer what a good E-governance is.	The findings indicate that e-governance not only enhances transparency, accountability, public service delivery, and the efficiency, speed, and quality of government services, but also promotes more informed and intelligent public participation.
Ghorbani & Tebyanian (2024) Method: The initial model was developed through comparative methodology and meta-synthesis, followed by four rounds of Delphi surveys to validate the identified components.	To develop a dynamic, trans-temporal model identifying the dimensions, concepts, and indicators of e-governance as an integrated framework capable of guiding its balanced and purposeful implementation.	The study conceptualizes e-governance through a four-category model comprising context, development process, content, and era. The findings reveal reciprocal relationships among context, development process, and content. The final model further suggests that each historical era generates new forms of e-governance content requiring corresponding contextual conditions and development scenarios, resulting in a continuous spiral of e-governance evolution.

Authors (Year) – Methodology	Research Objectives / Main Questions	Principal Findings
Yaghoubi (2017) Method: Descriptive-explanatory quantitative research based on field data collection.	To examine the role of establishing and implementing e-government in improving the indicators of good governance in Iran.	The findings demonstrate that the implementation of e-government improves the indicators of good governance through enhanced transparency, accountability, participation, trust, oversight, governmental performance, and access to public services. The study further finds that improved implementation of laws and regulations, greater transparency in administrative procedures, expanded information dissemination, freer information flows, stronger oversight, increased transparency in transactions, improvements in public administration and recruitment, and administrative automation all contribute to strengthening good governance.
Deghati & et al. (2020) Method: Meta-synthesis of qualitative studies.	To develop a model for the implementation and development of e-governance using a meta-synthesis approach.	The study identifies ICT infrastructure, secure high-speed internet, technological readiness, infrastructure design, data confidentiality, multiple stakeholders, government modernization, improvement of governmental processes, and service reliability as the principal factors influencing the three stages of identifying prerequisites, implementation, and development of e-governance.
Deghati & Yaghoubi (2021) Method: Exploratory and library research followed by Delphi analysis using a researcher-developed questionnaire completed by experts.	To identify the factors influencing the implementation and development of e-governance in public-sector organizations.	The findings indicate that contextual, content-related, and structural factors all significantly influence the implementation and development of e-governance in governmental organizations. Among these, content-related factors exert the strongest influence, with an estimated effect coefficient of 8.56.

Based on the review of the preceding studies, the principal innovations of the present research may be summarized under the following headings:

1. Shifting the Focus from Administrative Functionality to Servant Performance as a Component of Legitimacy: Previous studies have generally regarded e-governance as an instrument for improving public service delivery, enhancing transparency, strengthening accountability, and optimizing administrative performance. The novelty of the present study lies in its treatment of performance within the framework of Islamic governance not merely as a technical or managerial indicator, but as a fundamental component of the political system's legitimacy. The study argues that sustainable performance cannot be achieved solely through the digitalization of public services or through reliance on the personal virtues of individual managers. Rather, it requires the establishment of servant e-governance and the development of a servant network composed of interconnected institutions, administrative processes, and data-driven electronic systems.

2. Reframing E-Governance within the Framework of *Wilāyat al-Faqīh* and

the Agency–Servant Theory Paradigm: Unlike previous studies, which have conceptualized e-governance primarily on the basis of conventional models of good governance and technical considerations, the present study situates it within the framework of the doctrine of *Wilāyat al-Faqīh* (guardianship of the jurist) and interprets it through an integrated application of Agency Theory and Servant Theory. Within this framework, data-driven mechanisms, transparency, and electronic oversight are employed to narrow the gap between the principal (the umma and the institution of *wilāya*) and the agents, thereby creating the conditions for institutionalizing servanthood, strengthening accountability, and aligning the interests of public officials with the public good.

3. Distinguishing Between the Mere Digitalization of Services and Data-Driven Servant E-Governance: A further innovation of this study lies in its distinction between the mere digitalization of public services and data-driven servant e-governance. Contrary to conventional approaches, which equate the development of electronic systems with improvements in governance, the present study argues that sustainable performance can be achieved only through the reengineering of administrative processes, integration of data, and the establishment of a servant network founded on transparency and accountability. Within this framework, e-governance not only reduces the cost and time associated with public service delivery but also promotes procedural justice, strengthens public trust, and enhances the functional legitimacy of the Islamic political system.

4. A Concrete Institutional Proposal: Establishing an "E-Governance Management Center" under the Institution of *Wilāya*: Whereas many previous studies have been limited to identifying influential factors, developing conceptual models, or analyzing relationships among variables, the present study advances a concrete and strategic institutional proposal: the establishment of an E-Governance Management Center under the institution of *wilāya*, charged with designing and coordinating a servant network founded upon e-governance. This center would be responsible for integrating governmental data, redesigning administrative processes in accordance with the principles of servanthood, regulating principal–agent relationships through mechanisms of transparency and accountability, and providing comprehensive technological oversight of the performance of public institutions. In doing so, it seeks to transform the synergy among *Wilāyat al-Faqīh*, information technology, Agency Theory, Servant Theory, and competent human resources into a practical solution to the challenges of performance and legitimacy in Islamic governance.

5. Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical research methodology. Analysis constitutes one of the principal conceptual tools and methods for the collection, processing, and interpretation of data and is employed across various forms of research, including the study of religion. Accordingly, the analytical method functions as a methodological instrument selected by the researcher in light of the theoretical framework and hypothesis underlying the research problem. When a researcher employs, in combination, the tools of definition, description, explanation, and justification in addressing a research question, this approach is conventionally referred to as the analytical method. In other words, whether at the stage of understanding a theory or at the stage of its critical evaluation, the analytical method may involve defining the problem, describing it, explaining it, and justifying it—or, at a minimum, providing its description or explanation (Mousavi, 2025, p. 244).

6. Research Findings

The present article is founded on the proposition that the evolution of governance should neither end with Agency Theory nor regard Servant Theory as its final stage. Rather, governance must progress from agency to servanthood, and from individual servanthood to structural and networked servanthood. This transition is realized when servanthood transcends the personal qualities of individual managers and becomes institutionalized within the structures, processes, rules, and systems of governance. It is at this point that e-governance assumes a pivotal role. In this study, e-governance is understood not merely as the digitalization of public services or the application of information technology to administrative affairs, but as a mechanism for transforming individual servanthood into institutional and networked servanthood. Information and communication technologies make it possible to embed the values of servanthood within the very fabric of the governance system, thereby reducing the dependence of public service delivery on the personal characteristics of individual managers. On this basis, the concept of the servant network is proposed as the theoretical core of the model. A servant network is defined as a data-driven system composed of institutions, administrative processes, rules, databases, and electronic platforms, in which every organizational node simultaneously possesses two essential characteristics. First, it is subject to continuous transparency, evaluation, and oversight. Second, it regards its primary mission as providing equitable, accountable, and high-performing public service to citizens. Within such a model, servanthood is no longer merely an individual virtue; rather, it becomes an inherent feature of the architecture of governance. Within the servant network, Agency Theory is not discarded; instead, it is reinterpreted at a higher level and placed in the service of servanthood. Mechanisms such as data transparency, the electronic recording of administrative processes, digital records, managerial dashboards, online performance evaluation, public opinion surveys, and real-time monitoring of decisions all function as instruments for reducing information asymmetry and mitigating conflicts of interest. In this way, Agency Theory provides the institutional infrastructure for oversight and control, while Servant Theory supplies the normative orientation and ultimate purpose of public service. E-governance serves as the connecting link between these two approaches and provides the institutional framework through which they are realized in practice. According to this model, the relationship among the article's principal concepts may be understood as an evolutionary sequence. Islamic governance initially confronts problems such as conflicts of interest, poor performance, and information asymmetry. Agency Theory identifies these problems and provides the necessary mechanisms of oversight and control. Servant Theory then seeks to reshape managerial attitudes by fostering a commitment to public service and responsibility. However, because individual servanthood alone is insufficient to reform institutional structures, e-governance enables the transition of servanthood from the individual to the systemic level, culminating in the formation of a servant network. The resulting network promotes greater transparency, accountability, public participation, data integration, administrative justice, and the reduction of corruption, all of which collectively enhance the performance of the governance system. Since, within Islamic governance, performance constitutes one of the principal foundations of functional legitimacy, the ultimate outcome of this process is the strengthening of the political system's legitimacy. Accordingly, the central thesis of this study is that the transition from Agency Theory to Servant Theory does not mark the culmination of governance reform. Rather, servanthood must itself evolve from an individual managerial virtue into a structural and networked institutional principle. Such a transformation is possible only through e-governance and the establishment of a data-driven servant network composed of transparent, accountable, and continuously monitorable public servants and institutions. Within this framework, technology is not merely an administrative tool but the institutional medium through which servanthood is embedded and performance is realized in

Islamic governance.

A second major finding of this study concerns the necessity of establishing an E-Governance Management Center within the Strategic Planning and Oversight Organization of the institution of *wilāya*. As the knowledge-based and strategic arm of the institution of *wilāya* in the field of data-driven governance, this center would be responsible for monitoring and analyzing technological developments, designing a comprehensive governance data architecture, standardizing and integrating information technology infrastructures, and overseeing the implementation of national policies related to intelligent governance and the servant network. In this way, the institution of wilāya would possess the institutional instruments necessary to exercise servant-oriented leadership and data-driven oversight over the network of governmental agents. The rationale for this proposal is that the Leader (Rahbar), as the highest constitutional authority and the central pillar of the institutional structure of the Islamic Republic, occupies a unique position from which to maintain equilibrium within the political system. In other words, whenever any of the Republic's systems or subsystems deviate from equilibrium—whether through the loss of self-regulation in an organic system or the disruption of stability in a mechanical one—the Leader, by virtue of his constitutional position, is able to restore systemic balance. According to the principles of Islamic government and the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Leader does not constitute a "fourth branch" of government. Rather, although the legislative, executive, and judicial branches operate alongside one another, they function within the framework of the Leader's constitutional authority and are subject to his overall supervision and coordination. The Leader also possesses significant constitutional mechanisms for maintaining balance among the three branches. The Head of the Judiciary is appointed directly by the Leader. Legislation enacted by the Islamic Consultative Assembly must ultimately receive the approval of either the Guardian Council or, where applicable, the Expediency Discernment Council, whose members are appointed by or under the authority of the Leader. Likewise, the President assumes office only after receiving the Leader's formal endorsement (*tanfīdh*). Consequently, the Leader occupies a uniquely positioned role for preserving equilibrium among the three branches of government. This balancing function is indispensable for preventing systemic entropy and has been described by some scholars as the system of guidance (*hidāya*) (Amid Zanjani, 1987, vol. 1, p. 297). Within the constitutional order of the Islamic Republic of Iran, this role is assigned to the institution of the

Leadership. The institution of *wilāya* is conceived as a neutral institution that, in times of disagreement, serves as a reconciler and final arbiter—in short, as the principal mechanism for maintaining systemic equilibrium. Accordingly, the institution of *wilāya*, by virtue of its unique constitutional capacities, is regarded as the ultimate guarantor of the political system's performance across the executive, legislative, and judicial domains. As is evident from the writings of Islamic jurists, the *Walī al-Faqīh* is understood to bear ultimate responsibility for the political system, while other public officials function as his deputies and assistants in the administration of public affairs. Furthermore, under the Preamble and the provisions of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran—particularly Article 57 and paragraphs (1) and (2) of Article 110—the *Walī al-Faqīh* bears primary responsibility for guiding and supervising the three branches of government and for preventing public institutions from deviating from their authentic Islamic functions. Accordingly, although the *Walī al-Faqīh* does not engage directly in executive administration, strategic guidance, supervision, and evaluation in accordance with the state's general policies fall within his constitutional responsibilities. For this reason, any governmental program that does not conform to these overarching policies should be accompanied by appropriate legal mechanisms to ensure both the implementation of those policies and effective oversight of their execution.

In another work, I proposed the establishment of a Strategic Planning and Oversight Organization under the institution of *wilāya* (Mousavi, 2024, pp. 65–86). Within that framework, the guardianship and leadership of the jurist (*Wilāyat al-Faqīh*) is elevated from the level of merely normative and macro-level guidance to a more operational and institutional role. The political authority of the *Walī al-Faqīh* is thereby embodied in a stable, program-oriented institutional structure through which all branches of government operate within the framework of the strategic planning of the institution of *wilāya* and remain subject to its strategic oversight. Building upon that proposal, the present study adds the layer of servant e-governance to the proposed Strategic Planning and Oversight Organization. It argues that the transition from Agency Theory to Servant Theory, and the elevation of servanthood from an individual virtue to a structural and networked principle, requires a strategic institution responsible for the design, regulation, and oversight of e-governance. Accordingly, the proposed E-Governance Management Center should not be regarded as merely another executive body but rather as the missing institutional component required to achieve sustainable performance within the system of Islamic governance. Without such an institution, the formation of the proposed servant network, and consequently the full realization of governmental performance, would remain incomplete. The rationale for locating this center within the Strategic Planning and Oversight Organization of the institution of *wilāya* stems from the experience of governance in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Whenever major national initiatives have not been anchored in a supra-institutional and supra-governmental body, they have gradually been undermined by political turnover, divergent institutional preferences, and the discontinuity of public policies. E-governance, as the infrastructure for transforming public administration, would face similar risks if entrusted exclusively to multiple executive agencies subject to changes in governments and political administrations. Such an arrangement could lead to strategic fragmentation, duplication of institutional efforts, organizational discontinuity, and even opportunities for misuse. For this reason, locating the E-Governance Management Center under the institution of *wilāya* is presented not merely as a preferable option but as a strategic necessity for transforming e-governance from a temporary technological project into a permanent servant-oriented institutional structure. This necessity is supported by several considerations. First, the institutional continuity and stability of the institution of *wilāya* across successive governments and political transitions provide the essential precondition for long-term and intergenerational planning in the fields of technology and governance. Second, because e-governance is inherently cross-sectoral and extends beyond the jurisdiction of any single branch of government, coordinating and enforcing its implementation across the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, as well as other public institutions, requires a level of constitutional authority that, according to the author's argument, is uniquely vested in the institution of *wilāya*. Third, safeguarding the political neutrality of national data and technological infrastructures is regarded as imperative. Entrusting these infrastructures entirely to changing administrations, the author argues, risks conflicts of interest, policy instability, and diminished public trust. Owing to its distance from partisan political competition, the institution of *wilāya* is presented as being capable of safeguarding strategic security, national cohesion, and public confidence in this domain. Furthermore, if e-governance—as one of the pillars of governance—is integrated with the responsibilities attributed to the institution of *wilāya*, including merit-based governance, strategic monitoring, long-term foresight, and the expansion of the servant network throughout the governmental system, it may become one of the principal institutional instruments for realizing the vision of a New Islamic Civilization. By contrast, locating such a center within institutions characterized by relatively short planning horizons and limited institutional continuity, such as the executive branch, would, according to the author, likely result in institutional fragmentation, conflicting policy approaches, disruption of data architecture, and erosion of social capital. On this basis, the study's principal finding is that the E-Governance Management Center should be established within an institution that simultaneously possesses three defining characteristics: institutional continuity, binding constitutional authority over all branches and public institutions, and political neutrality with respect to partisan competition. According to the argument advanced in this study, these characteristics are uniquely embodied in the institution of *wilāya*. Consequently, locating the proposed center within the Strategic Planning and Oversight Organization of the institution of *wilāya* is presented as a precise response to the strategic, structural, and normative requirements of e-governance in the Islamic Republic of Iran and as a necessary step toward transforming e-governance into a servant-oriented, data-driven, and legitimacy-enhancing system.

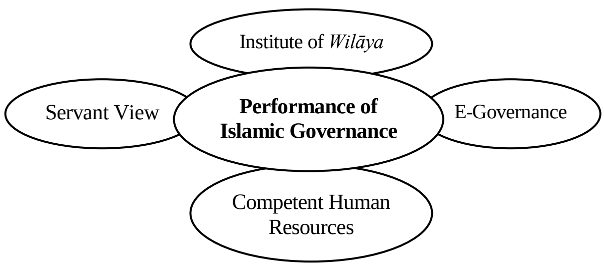

Figure 1. Components of Performance in Islamic Governance

Accordingly, the integration of Servant Theory and e-governance, together with divinely guided leadership and competent human resources, gives rise to a model of intelligent servant governance that is aligned with the principles and values of the Islamic system and leads to enhanced performance. Within this model, technology functions as the enabling instrument, while systemic rationality constitutes the governing principle underlying its design and implementation. The principal functions of the proposed center are as follows:

1) Formulating macro-level policies and conducting strategic foresight for technology-enabled servant governance.

2) Identifying and evaluating the requirements for implementing servant e-governance.

3) Designing and establishing the architecture of the "servant network" within the e-governance framework.

4) Developing and institutionalizing servant e-governance across the various sectors of the Islamic governance system.

5) Providing strategic leadership, oversight, and evaluation of the servant network within the e-governance framework across the different sectors of the Islamic governance system.

6.1. Proposals

In light of potential resistance at various organizational levels, the following recommendations are essential for the successful and sustainable implementation of e-governance:

1. Comprehensive Institutional Coverage: No governmental or executive institution should be exempt from the implementation of e-governance and the establishment of a data-driven governance system. The only exceptions should be security, military, and law enforcement institutions, which, owing to the special nature of their missions, may be excluded from this framework.

2. Managing Conflicts of Interest Among Technology Providers: Given the potential conflicts of interest among the software and hardware companies contracted by government agencies, it is recommended that all such firms operate as members of a unified consortium responsible for implementing the e-governance system. Under this arrangement, the project should not be awarded exclusively to a single company while excluding others, as such an approach could generate opposition, obstruction, and the use of non-transparent practices that undermine the implementation process.

3. Safeguarding Employees' Job Security: The successful implementation of e-governance may reduce the need for certain segments of the existing administrative workforce. Accordingly, appropriate measures should be adopted to safeguard the job security of affected employees. Concerns over potential job loss are among the principal sources of organizational resistance and should therefore be addressed proactively throughout the implementation process.

4. System Integration: All fragmented ("stand-alone" or "siloed") software applications and information systems currently operating independently across government agencies should be phased out. Instead, all administrative, financial, and support processes should be consolidated within a single integrated national platform, enabling the entire public sector to operate through a unified digital ecosystem.

5. Structural Enforcement Mechanisms: The full realization of e-governance requires a coherent institutional structure under the institution of wilāya, together with a centralized government funding model. In practical terms, funding for public institutions should be channeled exclusively through this unified framework. Such an arrangement would provide the structural enforcement necessary for effective implementation while preventing institutional fragmentation and minimizing organizational resistance.

7. Conclusion

This study began with the premise that performance in Islamic governance is not merely a managerial or technical indicator but rather one of the fundamental pillars of the Islamic system's performance-based legitimacy and an essential prerequisite for realizing justice and safeguarding the rights of the people in the public sphere. Accordingly, deficiencies in the administrative system, bureaucratic inefficiency, lack of transparency, and ineffective public service delivery should not be viewed merely as operational shortcomings; they also have the potential to erode social capital and diminish public trust. Against this background, the central question of the study was how e-governance can be employed to enhance the performance of the governance system within the normative framework of Islamic governance. The theoretical analysis demonstrated that Agency Theory and Servant Theory each illuminate important aspects of governance, yet neither is sufficient on its own to address the complex challenges of contemporary governance. Agency Theory, by emphasizing the potential conflict of interests between the principal and the agent, underscores the importance of transparency, oversight, and accountability but remains primarily focused on mechanisms of control. Servant Theory, by contrast, offers a compelling normative vision grounded in trustworthiness, responsibility, and service to others. However, if confined to the personal virtues of individual managers, it lacks the institutional capacity to overcome entrenched bureaucracy and reform structurally inefficient administrative systems. The principal finding of this study is that the process of governance reform should not conclude with the transition from Agency Theory to Servant Theory. Rather, servanthood itself must evolve from an individual managerial virtue into an institutional and networked principle. Such a transformation is possible only through e-governance—understood not merely as the digitization of public services but as the data-driven redesign of governance structures, administrative processes, and institutional relationships. On this basis, the study introduces the concept of a servant network based on e-governance as its principal theoretical contribution. This network consists of interconnected institutions, processes, and digital systems, each characterized by two defining features. First, every organizational node operates under conditions of continuous transparency, evaluation, and oversight. Second, each regards its primary mission as providing public services that are just, accountable, and high-performing. Within this framework, the control mechanisms emphasized by Agency Theory are reoriented toward institutionalizing servanthood, while servanthood itself is elevated from an ethical recommendation to a foundational principle of governance architecture. Building on this analysis, the study proposes the establishment of an E-Governance Management Center within the Strategic Planning and Oversight Organization of the institution of *wilāya* to direct this transformation at the national level. Rather than functioning as another executive agency, this center would serve as the strategic, regulatory, and supervisory authority for servant e-governance. Its responsibilities would include developing national e-governance standards, integrating governmental data systems, continuously evaluating the performance of public institutions, monitoring procedural justice, preventing the fragmentation of digital systems into isolated "information silos," and guiding the development of the proposed servant network across the state. In conclusion, the study argues that sustainable performance in Islamic governance is neither the product of oversight and control alone nor merely the result of the ethical commitment of individual managers. Rather, it emerges from the integration of these two dimensions within a servant network founded upon e-governance. From this perspective, servant e-governance constitutes the necessary condition for achieving sustainable governmental performance, while *Wilāyat al-Faqīh*, as the institutional center of guidance and systemic integration within the Islamic polity, provides the necessary direction for that performance. The outcome of this integration is a model of governance in which technology is placed at the service of justice, transparency, the dignity of citizens, and the realization of the aspirations of a New Islamic Civilization.

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