



NEPOTISM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE ERA OF THE KHULAFAR-RASHIDIN AND MODERN GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

Nepotism is a form of abuse of power that still frequently occurs in various governmental systems. In Islam, leadership is viewed as a trust (amanah) that must be carried out with full responsibility, justice, and honesty. This article discusses how anti-nepotism values were applied during the era of the Khulafa' al-Rashidin and their relevance to modern systems of governance. This study employs a qualitative method with a literature review approach, examining primary sources such as the Qur'an, hadith, as well as scholarly literature and recent studies (2020–2025) on leadership ethics and nepotistic practices. The findings show that Islamic leadership rejects all forms of appointment to office based on personal closeness without regard to competence and trustworthiness. The exemplary conduct of the Khulafa' al-Rashidin demonstrates that the principles of justice, transparency, and moral responsibility serve as the main foundation for upholding clean and ethical governance. These values remain relevant for implementation in modern governmental systems as efforts to cultivate a leadership culture grounded in justice and free from nepotistic practices.

Keywords: Good governance; Modern governance; Nepotism; Khulafa Ar-Rashidin

1. INTRODUCTION

Nepotism is a classic issue that continues to emerge throughout the history of governance, including in the modern era. In Islam, leadership is viewed as a trust (amanah), not a privilege. Leaders are required to act justly and appoint positions to those who are competent, as stated by Allah SWT:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ

"Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, judge with justice." (QS. An-Nisa [4]: 58)

This verse emphasizes that authority must be granted to those who are deserving and just, not based on family ties. This principle was practiced during the era of the Khulafa' al-Rashidin, where integrity and justice formed the foundation of leadership. In contrast, some modern governments still face nepotistic practices despite the implementation of meritocratic systems

The study conducted by Pratiwi and Yopan (2025) emphasizes that the implementation of accountability and transparency principles in governance serves as a strategic step to minimize nepotistic practices. Both function as social control mechanisms that encourage recruitment and appointment systems based on competence and justice, rather than personal relationships.¹ In line with this, Meriç and Fettahlioğlu (2025) reveal that ethical leadership supported by a meritocracy-based organizational culture can reduce public perceptions of nepotism. Such a culture fosters public trust in the integrity and professionalism of leaders.²

Thus, this study highlights how the anti-nepotism values in Islamic leadership during the era of the Khulafa' al-Rashidin can serve as a foundational lesson for modern governance systems in establishing just and integrity-driven leadership.

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a library research approach. The primary data sources consist of texts from the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical literature discussing the concept of leadership in Islam. In addition, this study also utilizes secondary sources such as scientific journals, books, and academic articles published between 2020 and 2025 that are related to nepotism, leadership ethics, and modern governance.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the social and governmental context, nepotism can be understood as the act of granting positions, authority, or certain benefits to family members and close relatives without considering an individual's competence, professionalism, or eligibility. Such practices fundamentally contradict the principles of justice and meritocracy. According to Budiman, Zuhri, and Harahap (2025), nepotism is a form of granting power or positions based on kinship, and it becomes negative when it does not align with the values of justice and public welfare.³

In modern life, nepotistic practices often appear in bureaucratic and political systems when decisions are based more on personal relationships than on competence. Sirait (2024) explains that nepotism arises from the misuse of authority that is unprofessional and disproportionate, potentially disregarding moral values and public responsibility. This perspective indicates that the root of nepotism lies not only in family ties but also in a crisis of trust (amanah) and justice in the exercise of power.

¹ Kurnia Pratiwi and Muhammad Yopan, 'The Role of Accountability and Transparency in Advancing Meritocracy in the Selection of State Officials', *Golden Ratio of Law and Social Policy Review*, 5.1 (2025), pp. 10–19, doi:10.52970/grlspr.v5i1.1182.

² Şevval Nur Meriç and Ömer Okan Fettahlioğlu, 'The Mediating Role of Meritocracy and the Moderating Effect of Organizational Culture on the Impact of Ethical Leadership on Perceived Nepotism', *Yönetim Bilimleri Dergisi*, 23.56 (2025), pp. 663–93, doi:10.35408/comuybd.1478725.

³ Trian Azhari Fadilah Sirait, Ali Imran Sinaga, and Fadlin Fajri, 'Telaah Kajian Nepotisme Dalam Perspektif Islam', *Instructional Development Journal*, 7.2 (2024), p. 281, doi:10.24014/idx.v7i2.21033.

Islam itself holds a firm view on this phenomenon. The main principle in Islamic teachings emphasizes that every trust (amanah) must be given to those who are entitled and carried out with justice. This is stated in the words of Allah SWT in QS. An-Nisa, verse 58:

إِنَّ بِهِ يَعِظُكُمْ نِعَمًا اللَّهُ إِنَّ بِالْعَدْلِ تَحْكُمُوا أَنَّ النَّاسَ بَيْنَ حَكْمَتُمْ وَإِذَا أَهْلَهَا إِلَى الْأَمْنِ تَوَدُّوا أَنْ يَأْمُرُكُمْ اللَّهُ إِنَّ
بَصِيرًا سَمِيعًا كَانَ اللَّهُ

"Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due. When you judge between people, judge with justice. Indeed, Allah instructs you in the best manner. Indeed, Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing."

This verse emphasizes two important points: first, a trust (amanah) must not be given to those who are not entitled, and second, every decision must be based on justice. These two principles form the foundation that nepotism based solely on family ties, without considering competence, is an act that violates Islamic values.

However, Islam does not outright reject the appointment of relatives to positions as long as it is done based on justice, eligibility, and trustworthiness. As stated in QS. Al-Qashash [28]:26:

"Indeed, the best person you can employ with us is one who is strong and trustworthy."

This verse provides a moral foundation that anyone entrusted with responsibility should meet two main criteria: competence and trustworthiness (amanah). Therefore, in a modern context, nepotistic practices that ignore these two principles cannot be justified, as they have the potential to cause injustice and abuse of power.

Thus, the principles of justice and trust become the main benchmarks for assessing a person's eligibility to hold a position. In classical Islamic history, issues similar to nepotism also drew the attention of leaders and scholars. One often-discussed example is the policy of Caliph Uthman bin Affan, who appointed several relatives to strategic government positions. This decision sparked debate over the line between legitimate political policy and practices resembling nepotism. Nevertheless, some historians argue that Caliph Uthman's actions were more based on considerations of competence, trust, and the responsibility of the individuals appointed, rather than solely on kinship. This demonstrates that from the early days of Islamic governance, there was an awareness to balance personal loyalty with the principles of justice and public welfare.

It can be understood that debates about nepotism are not new in Islamic civilization; rather, they have been part of the discourse on leadership ethics since the early days of governance. From the perspective of Islamic ethics, nepotism is assessed not merely by kinship but by the extent to which such practices align with or contradict the moral values underlying the concept of leadership in Islam. The main principles that serve as benchmarks in Islamic ethics are 'adl (justice), amanah (trustworthiness), and maslahah 'ammah (public welfare). When a person is appointed without considering competence and responsibility, it constitutes a betrayal of the trust that Allah has entrusted.

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said:

"When a trust is betrayed, expect destruction." (HR. Bukhari)⁴

This hadith emphasizes that every form of abuse of power, including nepotism that ignores the principles of justice and professionalism, is a violation of the high value of trust upheld in Islam. From the perspective of Islamic ethics, a position is not a privilege that can be inherited by family or granted on the basis of personal closeness; rather, it is a moral responsibility for which one will be held accountable before Allah SWT. Therefore, a leader is required to act justly and objectively in decision-making, placing individuals according to their competence and honesty. Islam stresses that authority is essentially a trust to uphold justice and public welfare, not a means to serve personal interests that can undermine public trust and fairness.

Anti-Nepotism Practices during the Era of the Khulafa Ar-Rasyidin

The leadership of the Khulafa Ar-Rasyidin represents a concrete example of Islamic governance that rejects all forms of abuse of power, including nepotism. The main principles they upheld were justice, trust (amanah), and moral responsibility, as taught in the Qur'an and Sunnah. In their view, a position was not a family inheritance but a trust that demanded competence and integrity.

Abu Bakar ash-Shiddiq serves as the primary example in enforcing anti-nepotism principles during the early period of Islam. Throughout his leadership, he never granted important positions to his own family. Even in appointing his successor, he chose Umar bin Khattab not based on personal ties, but by considering his capacity, decisiveness, and fairness, which enabled him to safeguard the community.⁵ This action demonstrates that a meritocratic system had been applied since the early history of Islamic governance, where loyalty to values and honesty was prioritized over blood relations or social closeness.

This principle was further emphasized during the era of Umar bin Khattab. He was known as a firm and disciplined leader in supervising his officials. Umar did not hesitate to remove or replace governors who showed signs of abusing their positions, including enriching themselves or their families. To maintain governmental integrity, Umar even implemented a policy of auditing officials' wealth before and after holding office as a form of transparent public control.⁶ This policy can be considered a milestone in establishing a just and responsible governance system in Islamic history.

Meanwhile, during the caliphate of Utsman bin Affan, accusations of nepotism arose because several of his relatives were given important positions in the government.⁷ However, when examined objectively, these decisions were more based on political considerations and

⁴ Khoirotun Nisa, 'Jurnal Penelitian Nusantara Konsep Amanah , Ihsan , Dan Masalah Sebagai Pilar Manajemen Sumber Menulis : Jurnal Penelitian Nusantara', 1.1 (2025), pp. 61–70.

⁵ Muhammad Usman Siddique, Syed Ali Sultan, and Dr. Arfan Arshad, 'A Study of Islamic Perspective on Leadership', *Al-NASR*, 2023, pp. 58–72, doi:10.53762/anasr.02.03.e05.

⁶ Mohammed Hashim Ali Sajid, 'Governance Reforms in the Caliphate of Omar IBN Abd Al-Aziz (RA): A Historical and Economic Overview (717-720 CE)', *International Journal of Applied Research*, 10.10 (2024), pp. 110–13, doi:10.22271/allresearch.2024.v10.i10b.12084

⁷ Murtiningsih Murtiningsih, 'Tuduhan Nepotisme Terhadap Utsman Bin Affan Dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Kekhalifahan Ali Bin Abi Thalib', *Jurnal Ilmu Agama: Mengkaji Doktrin, Pemikiran, Dan Fenomena Agama*, 19.1 (2018), pp. 159–76, doi:10.19109/jia.v19i1.2385.

administrative needs to maintain the stability of a state facing various internal and external threats. Therefore, Utsman's actions should be viewed in the context of political *ijtihad* and governance policy, not merely as favoritism toward family.

Ali bin Abi Thalib also demonstrated his anti-nepotism stance through concrete and courageous actions. One example is when he rejected the request of his brother, Aqil bin Abi Thalib, who sought a share of the *baitul mal* without entitlement. For Ali, justice could not be sacrificed for familial relationships.⁸ His stance became a symbol of moral integrity in Islamic leadership, showing that honesty, responsibility, and trust (*amanah*) are far more valuable than personal or family interests.

The Prevalence of Nepotism in Modern Governance

Nepotism in modern governance remains a serious issue that undermines bureaucratic integrity and the quality of public administration. Nepotism occurs when public positions, political offices, or economic opportunities are granted to relatives, close friends, or individuals with personal connections, rather than based on competence and professionalism. In the context of Indonesia, this practice is evident at the central and regional government levels, as well as within religious institutions. A study conducted by Kaffah et al. found that in village administrations across several regions of Indonesia, the recruitment of officials was often influenced by familial and personal relationships rather than competence and meritocracy.⁹ This indicates that professionalism and transparency in bureaucracy are still weak. When recruitment processes are no longer based on merit, the quality of selected human resources declines, potentially leading to inefficient public services, conflicts of interest, and reduced public trust in government officials. Furthermore, nepotism creates social disparities within the workplace, as high-performing employees feel undervalued and promotional opportunities are closed to those without personal connections to certain officials.

Additionally, the culture of patronage and reciprocal political favors often encourages officials to appoint close associates as a means of loyalty and political security. Structurally, weak implementation of merit systems and insufficient oversight of bureaucratic recruitment processes increase the likelihood of deviations. From a Weberian bureaucratic perspective, nepotism represents a deviation from the principles of rationality and meritocracy, as bureaucratic decisions should be based on competence and performance, not personal relationships.¹⁰

The consequences of nepotism are extensive and detrimental to society. The first impact is the decline in public trust toward the government. When citizens see positions awarded to incompetent individuals due to personal ties, the legitimacy and credibility of the government decrease. Fauzi explains that bureaucratic integrity and ethics are key factors in building public trust; the higher the level of nepotism, the lower the public's trust in government institutions.¹¹

⁸ Rutegibigeni Daniel, 'The Impact of the Leadership Style of the Four Caliphates on the Politics of Islam in Contemporary Time Rutegibigeni Daniel St. Paul's University', 9.Ii (2024), pp. 1–24.

⁹ Fhisilmi Kaffah, Irda Desbanita, and Aini Hafizah, 'Nepotisme Dalam Pemerintahan Desa : Studi Kasus Penyelenggaraan Pemerintahan Di Kabupaten Kuantan Singingi Tahun 2015-2021 Nepotism in Village Government : A Case Study of Government Administration In Kabupaten Kuantan Singingi Tahun 2015-2020', 22.01 (2023), pp. 102–113, doi:10.35967/njip.v22i1.449.

¹⁰ Eze Elekwachi and Henry Ufomba, 'Political Patronage and Bureaucracy : Studies in Nigeria and Indonesia', 3.1 (2024), pp. 1–26, doi:10.59066/jmi.v3i1.564.

¹¹ Ahd Fauzi and Rita Sukaesih, 'Public Trust , Ethic and Integrity in the Bureaucracy', 1.2 (2022), pp. 196–202.

The second impact is the emergence of social injustice. Competent and high-achieving individuals are often sidelined, while those with “insider connections” gain strategic positions. This generates dissatisfaction, social inequality, and even horizontal conflicts within society. The third impact is the decline in governmental performance, as incompetent officials fail to execute their duties effectively. Research in Iran shows that nepotism negatively affects the performance and efficiency of public institutions.¹²

Solutions to Nepotism from the Perspective of Islamic Leadership

The persistence of nepotism in various governmental institutions reflects a crisis of moral and spiritual values in leadership practices. Therefore, efforts to combat nepotism cannot rely solely on institutional reform; they must be rooted in the enhancement of spiritual values, ethics, and principles of justice within both leaders and the governance system as a whole. The following are some solutions offered by Islam for building leadership free from nepotism:

1. Upholding the Principles of Trustworthiness (Amanah) and Justice

In Islam, leadership is a trust (amanah) that must be exercised with full responsibility and justice. A leader is required to uphold the principle of adl (justice) and avoid all forms of abuse of power. Studies indicate that trustworthiness and justice are two main pillars in building an integrity-based leadership system oriented toward the welfare of the people.¹³ Spiritual awareness and fear of Allah (taqwa) provide a moral foundation for leaders, preventing favoritism in carrying out their responsibilities.¹⁴ This encourages them to enforce justice without regard to closeness, social status, or familial relationships. In modern socio-political contexts, this value plays a crucial role in preventing nepotism, which often undermines meritocratic systems and reduces public trust in governmental institutions. Leadership based on trustworthiness and justice not only ensures the welfare of the people but also preserves the moral integrity of power in accordance with Islamic guidance.

2. Competency- and Morality-Based Selection System (Meritocracy)

Islam emphasizes that positions should be granted to those who possess competence and honesty, not merely due to family ties or personal closeness. This concept of meritocracy aligns with the principle of al-qawiyy al-amīn someone who is strong in capacity and trustworthy in moral integrity. Recent research confirms that integrating the values of honesty (shiddiq), responsibility (amanah), and wisdom (fathanah) serves as the primary standard for effective and ethical leadership.¹⁵ By placing individuals according to their expertise, the quality of policies and public services improves, reducing opportunities for abuse of power. Morality complements competence because technical ability without integrity opens the door to corruption and nepotism. Thus, meritocracy serves as a preventive mechanism in line with Islamic values that

¹² Lee, ‘Examining the Challenges of Implementing Merit-Based Civil Servant Recruitment in Zimbabwe Overson Musopero Doctoral Student , Korea University Geon Lee Associate Professor , School of Policy Science , Seoul 04763 , Korea’.

¹³ Mohammad Eisa Ruhullah and Thameem Ushama, ‘Leadership in Islam: A Spiritual and Theological Doctrine’, *Fikroh: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam*, 18.1 (2025), pp. 54–74, doi:10.37812/fikroh.v17i1.1737.

¹⁴ Amelia Nur Rochim and M Imamul Muttaqien, ‘Keadilan , Amanah , Dan Musyawarah : Integrasi Nilai Kepemimpinan Islam Dalam Manajemen Pendidikan Modern ᠎᠎’, *Jurnal Visi Manajemen*, 11.2 (2025), pp. 1–12.

¹⁵ Zahrotunnisa` Siswahyuningsih and others, ‘Leading with Prophetic Integrity: Strengthening Islamic Education through Shiddiq, Amanah, and Fathanah’, *Managere: Indonesian Journal of Educational Management*, 7.2 (2025), pp. 224–35, doi:10.52627/managere.v7i2.868.

uphold justice and responsibility.

3. Transparency and Accountability in Appointment Processes

One of the causes of rampant nepotism is the opacity of public office appointments. In Islam, all forms of power must be accountable to both people and Allah. Therefore, appointment mechanisms should be open and transparent. Accountability is part of the amanah inherent to every holder of authority.¹⁶ Transparency in appointments fosters public trust and minimizes suspicion of favoritism. When the public can access information regarding selection criteria and results, social oversight functions naturally. Accountability ensures that leaders do not act arbitrarily but comply with rules and moral values prescribed in Islam. Transparency is a concrete application of the principle of hisbah oversight to promote good and prevent wrongdoing.

4. Moral and Spiritual Education for Leaders and Public Officials

Moral and spiritual improvement is key to shaping leaders of integrity. Islamic leadership education emphasizes the internalization of values such as honesty, social responsibility, and spiritual awareness.¹⁷ Moral education helps cultivate an understanding that power is a means of service, not a privilege. Without ethical and spiritual foundations, leaders are easily swayed by worldly ambitions. Through ongoing training and guidance, officials can comprehend the moral consequences of every policy they enact. This fosters an ethical organizational culture where integrity becomes the norm rather than the exception.

5. Strengthening God-Consciousness (Taqwa) in Leadership

The foundation of all the above solutions lies in strengthening the God-consciousness of a leader. Awareness that every action will be accounted for in the Hereafter cultivates fear of wrongdoing or favoritism.¹⁸ When taqwa is deeply ingrained, leaders exercise strong self-control and are not easily tempted to prioritize personal interests. They will evaluate policies based on justice and public welfare. Spiritual reinforcement through practices such as self-reflection (muhasabah), Quranic exegesis studies (tafsir), or spiritual mentoring can instill the existential awareness that leadership is not only a worldly matter but also a responsibility before Allah. In this way, taqwa becomes the most effective safeguard against nepotism.

4. CONCLUSION

Nepotism is a practice that contradicts the fundamental values of Islamic leadership because it disregards the principles of trustworthiness (amanah), justice, and professionalism. Islam emphasizes that every position is a responsibility that must be entrusted to competent and trustworthy individuals, not merely to relatives or close associates. The examples set by the Khulafa Ar-Rashidin demonstrate that justice and morality are the main pillars in managing power. Abu Bakr and Umar bin al-Khattab refused to assign positions to their family members, while Ali bin Abi Thalib upheld justice even when it meant rejecting his own brother's request. These actions

¹⁶ Donny Agung Harvida and Chandra Wijaya, 'Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi Negara', *Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi Negara*, 16.1 (2020), pp. 13–23.

¹⁷ Muhammad Imam Prasjo and Naufal Athallah, 'Leadership Ethics in Islam', 2.1 (2025), pp. 28–34.

¹⁸ Ruhullah and Ushama, 'Leadership in Islam: A Spiritual and Theological Doctrine'.

illustrate leadership oriented toward the welfare of the people rather than personal interests.

In contrast, in modern governance, nepotism often arises due to weak meritocratic systems, limited transparency, and low spiritual awareness among leaders. Therefore, the solutions offered by Islam include upholding trustworthiness and justice, implementing competency-based selection, enhancing public accountability, providing moral and spiritual education for officials, and strengthening taqwa as a moral safeguard. If these principles are applied consistently, modern governance systems can achieve greater integrity, fairness, and alignment with the values of Islamic leadership. In a journal article's conclusion, authors should summarize the main findings of their research, interpret their significance, and discuss their implications.

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