

Meritocracy as an Islamic Value: A Comparative Study of Civil Apparatus Management Systems in Indonesian Law and Islamic Law

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Abstrak

Meritokrasi menjadi landasan normatif dalam manajemen Aparatur Sipil Negara (ASN) di Indonesia; namun praktiknya masih sering terhambat oleh patronase politik, fragmentasi regulasi, dan lemahnya integritas lembaga. Meskipun mekanisme rekrutmen dan promosi berbasis merit telah diformalkan, berbagai tantangan tetap menghambat tercapainya keadilan dan profesionalisme birokrasi. Sebaliknya, pemikiran politik Islam menawarkan konsep *ahl al-kifāyah*, yang menekankan integrasi kompetensi (*al-quwwah*) dan integritas moral (*al-amānah*) dalam kepemimpinan publik, sebagaimana tercermin dalam Al-Qur'an dan literatur fiqh siyasah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konstruksi meritokrasi dalam manajemen ASN di Indonesia dan membandingkannya dengan prinsip *ahl al-kifāyah*. Dengan menggunakan metode hukum normatif-komparatif dan studi kepustakaan, penelitian menelaah perundang-undangan, dokumen kebijakan, serta sumber-sumber Islam klasik dan kontemporer. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa secara konseptual, sistem merit di Indonesia selaras dengan prinsip Islam, khususnya terkait kompetensi dan tanggung jawab. Namun, nilai etis dan transendental belum sepenuhnya diinstitusionalisasikan sebagai bagian dari legitimasi kepemimpinan. Berdasarkan temuan ini, penelitian merumuskan kerangka meritokrasi Islam yang mengintegrasikan kompetensi teknis, integritas moral, dan kepemimpinan berbasis nilai dalam rekrutmen serta manajemen ASN. Kerangka ini menawarkan perspektif normatif untuk memperkuat tata kelola, menegakkan standar etika, dan mendukung reformasi ASN di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Meritokrasi, ASN, Ahl Al-Kifāyah, Siyasah Islam, Integritas Jabatan

Abstract

Meritocracy serves as a normative foundation in the management of Indonesia's State Civil Apparatus (ASN); however, its implementation is often hindered by political patronage, regulatory fragmentation, and weak institutional integrity. Although recruitment and promotion mechanisms based on merit have been formalized, various



challenges continue to obstruct the realization of fairness and bureaucratic professionalism. In contrast, Islamic political thought offers the concept of *ahl al-kifāyah*, which emphasizes the integration of competence (*al-quwwah*) and moral integrity (*al-amānah*) in public leadership, as reflected in the Qur'an and fiqh siyasah literature. This study aims to analyze the construction of meritocracy in ASN management in Indonesia and compare it with the principles of *ahl al-kifāyah*. Using a normative-comparative legal research approach and literature review, the study examines legislation, policy documents, and classical and contemporary Islamic sources. The findings indicate that, conceptually, Indonesia's merit system aligns with Islamic principles, particularly regarding competence and accountability. However, ethical and transcendental values have not been fully institutionalized as part of leadership legitimacy. Based on these findings, this study proposes an Islamic Meritocracy Framework that integrates technical competence, moral integrity, and value-based leadership into ASN recruitment and management. This framework provides a normative perspective to strengthen governance, uphold ethical standards, and support civil service reform in Indonesia.

Keywords: Meritocracy, Civil Apparatus, Ahl Al-Kifāyah, Islamic Governance, Public Integrity.

Introduction

The debate over meritocracy in Indonesia's bureaucracy intensifies as public demand grows for a professional, neutral, and ethical civil service. The merit system forms the foundation of civil service management under the Civil Service Law and its related regulations. However, studies show meritocracy in Indonesia remains more a legal norm than a true basis for managing positions by competence and integrity. Research has shown the merit system often fails to ensure neutrality and objectivity, especially when bureaucracy is influenced by electoral politics. Firman's (2017) research finds that politicization and the spoils system persist even after reform, especially during regional elections, when civil servants are used for political power and remain vulnerable to pressure over job transfers and promotions. These findings show that strong regulations do not automatically translate into meritocracy in practice.

The study by Safrida & Zendrato reinforces this conclusion. According to them, Indonesia's merit system faces structural obstacles, including bureaucratic politicization, weak commitment among civil service officials, and inconsistent application of the principles of competence and performance in recruitment and promotion. In fact, they highlight that merit regulations cannot be implemented without political will and consistent implementation across all levels of government. (Annafi & Zendrato, n.d.). Another study by Claudia & Mariyanti (2025) shows that, administratively, several regions have formally

implemented merit systems. Still, the old bureaucratic culture, lack of institutional capacity, and uneven implementation have prevented meritocracy from producing a truly professional bureaucracy free from political intervention. (Silitonga & Mariyanti, 2025).

Even at the regulatory level, issues with meritocracy are clear. Nurmalita Harahap (2024) notes that the civil service transfer policy in Minister of Home Affairs Circular No. 821/5492/SJ creates regulatory disharmony and enables deviations from the merit system by granting transfer authority to regional heads without strict approval mechanisms. This threatens objectivity, fosters patronage, and strays from the meritocracy mandated by the Civil Service Law. At the regional level, Elazhari & Siregar (2025) describe how patrimonial culture, weak oversight, and low institutional capacity have stalled the merit system and failed to curb patronage in filling strategic posts.

These findings indicate a significant research gap: most research on meritocracy in Indonesia highlights institutional, regulatory, and technocratic aspects, whereas almost none explores the ethical-transcendental dimension underlying the legitimacy of the merit system. The failure of modern meritocracy, therefore, arises not only from technical shortcomings but also from the absence of a strong moral foundation for appointing public officials. At this point, the principles of Islamic siyasah become essential. The concepts of al-quwwah (competence) and al-amānah (moral integrity), as embodied in Qur'anic figures such as Moses (al-qawwī al-amīn) and Joseph (ḥafīẓ 'alīm), provide a normative framework that aligns with meritocracy and excels in public morality.

There is both an academic and practical need to connect two previously separate domains: the administrative-technocratic ASN merit system, and the principle of ahl al-kifāyah from the ethical-normative tradition of Islamic politics. This integration is not only theoretically relevant but also practically urgent, since the weakness of Indonesian meritocracy stems from the absence of a moral foundation guiding the administration of public office. By addressing this void, this study offers a new perspective on meritocracy in Indonesia.

The research question in this study stems from the central question of how the principle of merit in the ASN selection and management system can be analyzed, compared, and developed through the principle of al-quwwah–al-amānah in the Islamic siyasah tradition.



This question is extended to two sub-issues: first, the extent of normative harmony between the Indonesian merit system and the principle of *ahl al-kifāyah*; second, how Islamic principles can enrich and improve the weaknesses of modern meritocracy in the context of civil service selection.

The purpose of this study is to examine the conceptual compatibility between the ASN merit system and the principles of Islamic eligibility for public office, identify weaknesses and implementation gaps that arise in the Indonesian merit system, and formulate an Islamic Meritocracy Framework as an integrative model that combines technical competence, moral integrity, and ethical-spiritual legitimacy in the selection and appointment of ASN officials. Thus, this study is expected not only to contribute academically to the study of public administration and Islamic politics but also to provide practical recommendations for strengthening civil service policies in Indonesia.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative, normative-comparative legal research approach, focusing on both Indonesian civil service regulations and classical Islamic political thought. The normative component involves analyzing primary legal texts—PP 11/2017 and its amendments (PP 17/2020), and PP 49/2018 on PPPK management—alongside Qur’anic verses, hadith, and classical *fiqh siyasah* works by scholars such as al-Māwardī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Taymiyyah. This approach enables reconstruction of the principles of meritocracy in Indonesian ASN management and the ethical-normative criteria for public office eligibility in Islam.

The comparative component systematically examines similarities, differences, and potential integration between the ASN merit system and the concept of *ahl al-kifāyah*, particularly in terms of value structures, epistemic foundations, and operational characteristics. Data sources include primary and secondary data. Primary data consist of the regulations and Islamic texts, which define eligibility criteria for public office. Secondary data comprise journal articles, books on public administration, and previous studies on meritocracy implementation in Indonesia, providing context and supporting the identification of operational challenges and normative gaps. Data collection was conducted through library research, encompassing legal documents, *fiqh siyasah* literature, tafsir works, and relevant scientific publications. Analysis employed content analysis techniques, including concept coding, thematic categorization, and textual interpretation of key terms

such as *al-quwwah*, *al-amānah*, *ahl al-dzikh*, merit, competence, integrity, and selection objectivity.

The extracted data were organized in a structured comparison matrix to identify normative equivalencies, epistemic divergences, and areas of potential integration. From this, an Islamic Meritocracy Framework was synthesized, combining technical competence, moral integrity, and value-based leadership. This approach not only maps the theoretical alignment between the two systems but also develops a conceptually robust framework for integrating ethical legitimacy with administrative rationality in Indonesian civil service management

Research Finding

Meritocracy in the Civil Apparatus Management System in Indonesia

The management of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) in Indonesia is designed as a legal system that places professionalism, competence, and integrity as fundamental principles of modern bureaucracy. (Aswin Maysura, 2025). Under Indonesian law, civil servants are divided into two categories: Civil Servants (PNS) and Government Employees with Work Agreements (PPPK). Each has a different regulatory regime. PNS management is governed by Government Regulation No. 11 of 2017 concerning PNS Management and its amendments, namely Government Regulation No. 17 of 2020 (hereinafter referred to as the PNS Management Government Regulation), while PPPK management is regulated by Government Regulation No. 49 of 2018 (hereinafter referred to as the PPPK Management Government Regulation). These three regulations emphasize that the ASN system is implemented "to produce professional employees who have basic values, professional ethics, are free from political intervention, and are free from practices of corruption, collusion, and nepotism," as stated in Article 1 of the PPPK Management PP. This normative statement establishes that meritocracy is not merely a selection principle but also a moral-administrative orientation that provides direction for the entire ASN management cycle (Desti Meliya Nur Zahra, 2025).

The Civil Servant Management Regulation governs fourteen areas of management, which describe the comprehensiveness and scope of civil servant management, namely: planning and determining requirements; procurement; rank and position; career



development; career patterns; promotion; transfer; performance appraisal; remuneration and allowances; awards; discipline; termination; pension and old age security; and protection. This scope framework shows that meritocracy is positioned as a strategic principle that shapes the entire process, not just the initial recruitment stage. (Firdaus, 2025). At the initial stage of determining requirements, for example, government agencies must develop their staffing structures based on job and workload analyses. This requirement ensures that staffing needs are determined by measurable organizational needs, thereby preventing the creation of artificial staffing structures oriented towards sectoral interests or bureaucratic patronage (Maharani & Raharja, 2024).

The procurement stage is the most explicit manifestation of meritocracy. The selection of CPNS through computer-assisted tests (CAT), competency assessments, and integrity tests is a series of steps that demonstrates the selection's objectivity. Reforms in the Civil Servant Management Government Regulation reinforce this aspect by emphasizing technical, managerial, and socio-cultural competency requirements for applicants for Senior Leadership Positions (JPT), in addition to a good track record and morality. In line with this, the PPPK Management Government Regulation also regulates competency-based selection, which is conducted openly through administrative stages, competency selection, and integrity evaluation. This rigorous selection process makes the recruitment process more transparent and accountable than selection models dominated by subjectivity. (Irvianda & Masdupi, 2025).

In terms of career development and career patterns, the Civil Servant Management Regulation bases job mobility on competency, performance appraisal, and organizational needs. The implementation of the corporate university approach demonstrates the government's systematic efforts to build civil servants' capacity through continuous learning. (Lumbanraja & Lumbanraja, 2024). This effort reflects the meritocratic ethos that emphasizes personal capacity-building as a prerequisite for professional performance. For PPPK, although they do not have a tiered career pattern like civil servants, the principle of merit remains strong through a contract extension mechanism based on performance achievements and suitability for the position in the current year. (Juliartha et al., 2024).

Promotions and transfers are also important areas for ensuring the implementation of a merit system. The Civil Service Management Regulation stipulates that promotions to senior leadership positions must be conducted through open selection processes free of

conflicts of interest (Dwiputrianti, 2020). At the same time, transfers must consider competence and proportional length of service. With this model, promotions can no longer be used as a tool for political favors or to accommodate structural proximity between employees and civil service officials. This system directs the process of filling strategic positions based on merit and suitability for competencies (Sunara et al., 2024).

Performance appraisal is a mechanism that ensures meritocracy continues to function. The Civil Servant Management Regulation and PPPK Management Regulation require performance appraisals to be objective, measurable, accountable, participatory, and transparent (Nur Khobiburrohma et al., 2020). In the PPPK environment, performance appraisals are the primary basis for determining whether employment contracts will be extended or terminated. These provisions emphasize that job continuity is not automatic but must be demonstrated through compelling performance achievements. This system shifts civil servants' work orientation from simply "serving" in the long term to "performing" against measurable targets and achievements. (Sari & Marsal, 2025).

Regulations concerning discipline, termination of employment, and protection of civil servants cannot be separated from the principle of meritocracy. Provisions for dismissal due to disciplinary violations or failure to achieve performance targets indicate that professional standards have clear consequences for job security. Conversely, provisions regarding civil servant protection emphasize that employees with integrity and outstanding performance must be protected from arbitrary actions, political intervention, and other structural pressures. Through this protection mechanism, meritocracy gains healthy space to grow because employees no longer work in repressive structures or those fraught with political risk. (Sumarlin et al., 2024).

Overall, both the PP on Civil Servant Management and the PP on PPPK Management form a civil service legal ecosystem that is consistent with the principle of meritocracy. The PP on Civil Servant Management emphasizes merit in terms of long-term career development and job mobility. At the same time, the PP on PPPK Management focuses on merit in terms of performance and competence in contract-based employment relationships. The harmony between the two shows that Indonesia has not only adopted a procedural merit system model but also strives to internalize meritocratic values as the normative foundation



of modern bureaucracy. With this kind of regulatory architecture, bureaucratic reform has a strong foundation for forming a competent, integrity-driven, and more responsive civil service that meets public needs (Sumantri, 2022).

Despite the comprehensive regulatory architecture governing civil service management in Indonesia, this study finds that the merit system remains predominantly procedural. Merit is operationalized through administrative compliance, competency standards, and performance indicators, yet it lacks a deeper ethical foundation capable of sustaining legitimacy beyond formal legality. Integrity, although normatively emphasized, is treated largely as an administrative variable rather than as a constitutive element of public office legitimacy. As a result, the Indonesian merit system demonstrates a strong technocratic design but remains vulnerable to political patronage and instrumental rationality, revealing a structural gap between regulatory merit and moral authority in bureaucratic governance.

Civil Apparatus Management from the Perspective of the Quran

The concept of meritocracy in the management of the state apparatus is not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. However, the Qur'an uses a key term closely related to the idea of merit: *ahlun*, meaning "deserving," "worthy," or "competent." According to Ar-Rāghib al-Aṣḥāhānī, the expression "*fulān ahlun li-kadzā*" indicates a person who has the qualifications or competence for a task. (Ar-Rāghib Al-Ashfahānī, 1412). This term appears 126 times in the Qur'an, with a wide variety of meanings—ranging from family relationships and community to shared beliefs and people with specific skills. First, the word *ahlun* in the Qur'an is mentioned 126 times, with 52 instances attached to a singular word (*mufrad*), such as *ahlal-bait* (Al-Ahzāb: 33), *ahlal-kitab* (Ali-‘Imrān: 71), *ahladz-dzikh* (An-Nahl: 43). Second, it is attached to pronouns (*dlamir*) 74 times, such as *ahlahu* (Al-Baqarah: 126), *ahluhā* (Al-Qashash: 59), and *ahlika* (Hūd: 46).

Not all words need to be explained here, because their meanings vary, and only those meanings that are close to meritocracy will be explained further. As stated by Abdul Mu'ti, the word 'expert' in the Qur'an has five meanings, namely. (Afandi, n.d.):

1. An expert is a person with specialized skills or abilities in a particular field.

2. An expert can also refer to someone who has a family relationship, especially in the context of inheritance and family matters. This is generally known in matters concerning family affairs.
3. The term ahli refers to kinship relationships within family genealogy.
4. The term ahli is also interpreted as referring to an individual who shares the same religious beliefs. Therefore, even if someone has a blood relationship and kinship, it is not enough to be considered an ahli, as in the story of the Prophet Noah and his son Kan'an, where the status of ahli cannot be inherited or conferred as a guardian.
5. Ahli can also be interpreted as a resident of a region or a member of a particular community.

The first principle of merit in Islam appears in QS. An-Nisa' 58:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا

“Indeed, Allah commands you to return trusts to their owners. When you judge between people, judge with justice. Indeed, Allah gives you the best instruction. Indeed, Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.”

This verse forms the normative basis for competency-based selection, as required by Government Regulations 17/2020 and 49/2018, which emphasize that every civil servant must be appointed through a mechanism that guarantees competence, qualifications, and integrity. The reason for the revelation of this verse concerns the strategic selection of a position, namely, the handover of the key to the Kaaba from Uthman bin Thalhah to the Prophet Muhammad. After the verse was revealed and in accordance with Allah's command, the Prophet returned the key to Uthman, not to al-'Abbas, even though al-'Abbas was a relative of the Prophet and had converted to Islam. In this incident, competence and experience (track record) were the primary basis for determining positions, not family ties or personal relationships.

The meaning of ahlun in this verse refers to qualified people, as can be seen from the sabab nuzul or the background of its revelation. Al-Wâhidî (Al-Wâhidî, 1411) and Wahbah az-Zuhailî (Wahbah az-Zuhailî, 1418) explain that this verse relates to 'Uthman bin Talhah,

who was the keeper of the keys to the Ka'bah (sadanah). After the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad asked 'Uthman to hand over the keys to the Ka'bah. 'Uthman was about to hand over the key, but al-'Abba's bin 'Abdul Muthalib claimed responsibility for providing drinking water (as-siqayah) for the pilgrims. Hearing this, 'Uthman refrained from handing over the key. However, the Prophet Muhammad still asked 'Uthman to hand over the key. Finally, 'Uthman handed over the key to the Ka'bah to the Prophet Muhammad, saying, "I hand over this key based on the trust of Allah." After that, the Prophet opened the door of the Ka'bah, entered it, came out, and recited this verse (An-Nisa: 58), then called 'Uthman and returned the key to him.

The reason for this verse's revelation is that the Prophet did not hand over the key to the Ka'bah to al-'Abbas, who was also his uncle. However, after the verse was revealed, he returned the key to 'Uthman as the expert who was entrusted with it in the context at that time, because from the beginning, he had overseen the key. Meaning he was experienced in such matters and thus more qualified than his uncle al-'Abbas, who had experience in other fields. However, according to the narration from Ibn Juraij, 'Uthman had not yet embraced Islam at that time. (Al-Qurthubî, 1964). Even though in other accounts it is mentioned that he professed his faith after the event. (Al-Baghawî, 1420).

The meaning of this verse then applies generally, no longer specifically to 'Uthman bin Talhah, but to everyone who is entitled to be entrusted with a mandate. Ath-Thabarî said that the correct meaning is, "The leaders of the Muslim community are obliged to carry out the mandate to individuals who have surrendered their responsibilities and rights, and to carry out the various tasks entrusted to them. Therefore, it is best for leaders to be wise in their decisions and to demonstrate fairness, as this reflects the responsibility they bear." (Ath-Thabarî, 2000)

Another verse that contains the word 'ahlun' with the meaning of merit is the verse about the recommendation to ask experts in remembrance if one lacks knowledge, as in An-Nahl verse 43:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوْحِي إِلَيْهِمْ فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

"We did not send any messenger before you (Prophet Muhammad) except men to whom We revealed Our message. So, ask the people of knowledge if you do not know."

And Al-Anbiya' verse 7:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوْحِي إِلَيْهِمْ فَسَلُّوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“We did not send before you (Prophet Muhammad) except men to whom We revealed. So, ask the people of knowledge if you do not know.”

Al-Wâhidî states that verse 43 of Surah an-Nahl relates to the polytheists in Mecca who rejected Muhammad's prophethood. They doubted that Allah's messenger was only a human being, while they hoped that His messenger would be an angel. In his interpretation, Al-Qurthubî explains that Allah responded to their doubts by stating that before Muhammad, Allah had never sent a messenger who was not human to previous nations. The verse emphasizes that questions should be asked of those who have knowledge, which, in this context, can refer to believers among the People of the Book. If the polytheists do not know, then the People of the Book will explain that all the prophets sent by Allah were ordinary human beings. (Al-Qurthubî, 1964).

From this explanation, those who can confirm that the prophets are ordinary human beings, as doubted by the polytheists of Mecca, are the people of the book, because they have the capacity to convey this information through their books. Al-Qurthubî also offers a different interpretation of *ahlu dzikr*, described in Al-Anbiya verse 7 as experts in the Qur'an. Therefore, the meaning can be summarized as, "then seek guidance from the believers who know the experts in the Qur'an. Do not begin by rejecting and stating the opinion that the messenger comes from among the angels. Instead, seek explanations from the believers so that they can explain that the messenger actually comes from among humans."

From this verse, Al-Qurthubî concludes that "ordinary people should follow the guidance of their scholars, just as a blind person follows someone whom he trusts to determine the direction when experiencing difficulties. Therefore, those who lack knowledge and understanding of the meaning of the religion they follow should follow those who know. For this reason, laypeople should not issue fatwas, as they do not understand the meanings that determine what is halal and haram." (Al-Qurthubî, 1964).

In addition to the word *ahlu*, messages about meritocracy are also explicitly contained in various verses that refer to the values of competence attached to figures in the

Qur'an in relation to leadership and position or a job, as found in al-Qashas verses 25-27, which mean:

Then one of the two came to Moses, walking shyly. He said, "My father invites you to reward you for giving our animals water." When Moses came to him and told him his story, he said, "Do not be afraid! You have escaped from the wrongdoers." One of the two women said, "OH my father, hire him. Indeed, the best person you can hire is one who is strong and trustworthy." He (the father of the two women) said, "Indeed, I intend to marry you to one of my two daughters on the condition that you work for me for eight years. If you complete 10 years, that would be a kindness from you. I do not intend to burden you. Insha'Allah, you will find me among the righteous."

The woman who invited him stated that Moses was a strong and reliable individual in his assignments (al-qawiyul-amîn), as evidenced by his ability to lift the well stone, his instructions to his father, and his response when walking by, saying, "Walk behind me." Moses' response to the woman's embarrassment with a similar attitude was also a contributing factor. When the woman approached him, Moses bowed his head. This whole incident provided a strong enough basis to show that Moses was worthy of being given a job. Strong and trustworthy in the merit system, showing his ability to work hard and be responsible and trustworthy, so that from this verse, the existence of meritocracy in job placement can be identified.

Then, there is the meritocracy of Joseph as the treasurer of Egypt, who is referred to as hafidzun 'alîm.

وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ إِنِّي أرى فِيهِ لِنَفْسِي فَهَلُمَّ كَلِمَةً قَالَ إِنَّكَ الْيَوْمَ لَدَيْنَا مَكِينٌ أَمِينٌ؟ ٥٤ قَالَ اجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلِيمٌ؟ ٥٥

The king said, "Bring him (Joseph) to me so that I may choose him (as someone close) to me." When he (the king) had spoken to him, he (the king) said, 'Indeed, from this day forward, you shall be a man of high standing in our midst and greatly trusted.' He (Joseph) said, 'Make me the treasurer of the land (of Egypt). Indeed, I am one who is skilled in safeguarding (trust) and very knowledgeable.'

Al-Qurthubî provides an interesting commentary on this verse. According to him, Yusufas did not say, "Indeed, I am good at calculating and noble," as the Prophet said, Yusufas was a noble man, the son of a noble man (Ya'qub as.), the son of a

noble man (Isaac, peace be upon him), the son of a noble man (Abraham, peace be upon him), or say, "Indeed, I am handsome and good-looking," but instead he said, "Indeed, I am skilled in guarding and knowledgeable." This means that he presented himself based on his ability to guard and his knowledge, not on his lineage or good looks (Al-Qurthubî, 1964). Being able to maintain and possess knowledge reflects moral integrity, namely trustworthiness and responsibility, as well as capability, because they have the knowledge to carry out their duties.

The meritocracy of Adam and his descendants as caliphs on earth: *ta'lim al-asmâ, iman, wa amal ash-shâlih*. Allah says in Q.S al-Baqarah, verses 30-31, which means, "Remember when your Lord said to the angels, 'I am going to put a caliph on earth. They said, 'Why would You want to create (a caliph) on earth who will cause corruption on it and shed blood, when we always praise You and sanctify You? God said, "Indeed, I know what you do not know." And He taught Adam the names of all things, then presented them to the angels and said: "Tell Me the names of these things if you are truthful." (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 30-31)

When God wanted to appoint a caliph on earth, namely Adam and his descendants, the angels expressed their concerns about the potential for destruction and bloodshed that humans might cause. Unlike the angels, who constantly praise and sanctify Him, humans have the potential to commit acts that are contrary to the truth. Allah responded to these concerns by stating that He had a deeper understanding of the secrets contained within this creature, which were unknown to the angels. Allah specifically gave humans knowledge that was beyond the reach of the angels.

In his interpretation, Wahbah az-Zuhaili explains that Allah gives humans an understanding of al-asmâ, which are the names of tangible objects around them, such as plants, trees, fruits, tools, animals, and other inanimate objects. This knowledge is given so that humans can benefit from these objects to fulfill their needs, such as food and drink. Human life, which requires various kinds of objects, encourages them to work, think, and search for these objects so that they can inhabit this world and improve their means of life in various fields (Wahbah az-Zuhailî, 1418).

Adam, as the first caliph, was not equipped with complex knowledge, but rather with the names of objects to identify what he needed to carry out his still 'simple' tasks. In other words, teaching names was a means of survival. This was the first thing humans did before moving on to other activities. The knowledge needed to survive by knowing what could be utilized became a competency, because without it, life would not continue, and other activities would automatically not be carried out. In contrast, the duties of the caliphs after Adam, when life had begun to stabilize and civilization to take shape, became more complex. Therefore, these duties could no longer be given to just anyone. As mentioned in An-Nūr verse 55, which means:

"And Allah has promised those among you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them rulers on earth, as He made those before them rulers, and that He will surely establish for them their religion, which He has approved for them, and He will surely replace their fear with security. They will worship Me alone, associating nothing with Me. And whoever disbelieves after that—those are the transgressors."

Those entrusted as caliphs have made two important achievements: faith (which leads to morality) and righteous deeds (the ability to do good and valuable work). The reward for these two achievements is extraordinary: they will be granted the right to rule the caliphate on earth, be strengthened in their faith, and be guaranteed freedom from fear. (Mu'ammaraZaynQadafy, 2025). Because without faith and righteous deeds, what the angels questioned happened. Humans have committed destruction and bloodshed on Earth.

Regarding this verse on the caliphate, Al-Qurthubî explains at length leadership and the laws related to it. In one of his discussions, he mentions the eleven criteria for leaders in Islam, namely: 1) descent from Quraish; 2) ability to be a judge and exercise *ijtihad*; 3) having experience and proficiency in warfare, as well as defending the people; 4) being firm in enforcing the law; 5) being free; 6) being Muslim; 7) being male; 8) having no physical disabilities; 9) being mature; 10) being rational; and 11) being fair (Al-Qurthubî, 1964). Finally, Thalut's meritocracy as a king is known as *basthatan fil- 'ilm wal-jism*. Allah says in Q.S al-Baqarah, verses 246-247, which means:

"Did you not observe the leaders of the Children of Israel after Moses died, when they said to one of their prophets, 'Appoint a king for us, and we will fight in the way of Allah.' He replied, 'Perhaps if you are commanded to fight, you will not fight.' They said, 'Why should we not fight in the cause of Allah when we have been driven from our homes

and separated from our children?" But when fighting was made obligatory upon them, they turned away, except for a few of them. Allah is All-Knowing of the wrongdoers." Their prophet said to them, "Indeed, Allah has appointed Talut as your king." They replied, "How can he have authority over us when we are more deserving of it than he is, and he has not been given much wealth?" (Their prophet) replied, "Indeed, Allah has chosen him for you and has given him superior knowledge and physical strength." Allah grants His kingdom to whom He wills. Allah is All-Encompassing (in His power and provision) and All-Knowing."

Al-Qurthubî states that this verse contains the criteria for becoming a leader and related aspects. The verse emphasizes that the right to lead can be obtained only through knowledge, religious conviction, and strength, not through hereditary factors. Allah explains that the selection of Talut as their king was based on his knowledge and strength, even though that group had superior lineage. (Al-Qurthubî, 1964). In this verse, wealth is not considered more important than knowledge and strength. Proficiency in knowledge and a strong body represent capability and the ability to work hard, which are the main competencies a leader must have.

Taken together, the Qur'anic narratives of Moses, Joseph, Talut, and Adam reveal a consistent normative pattern in the construction of public office eligibility: competence (*al-quwwah*) and moral integrity (*al-amānah*) function as inseparable foundations of authority. These figures are not legitimized by lineage, wealth, or proximity to power, but by demonstrable capability and ethical trustworthiness. This pattern converges with modern meritocracy in its rejection of patronage and arbitrariness; however, it diverges fundamentally in its epistemic basis. While modern merit systems derive legitimacy from procedural objectivity and administrative rationality, Qur'anic merit is grounded in ethical-transcendental accountability, where public office is understood as a moral trust rather than merely a functional assignment.

Discussion

Islamic Meritocracy Framework

The Islamic Meritocracy Framework proposed in this study is not merely a normative alternative, but the result of a systematic comparative synthesis between Indonesia's civil

service merit system and the ethical-political tradition of Islamic siyasah. This framework emerges from identifying both the convergence in competence-based selection and the structural divergence in how legitimacy of public office is constructed. Whereas modern meritocracy prioritizes procedural rationality and performance accountability, Islamic meritocracy embeds technical capacity within a broader moral and value-oriented justification of authority.

The idea of meritocracy in Islam does not exist as a standard administrative system, such as civil service management, but as an ethical-normative framework that develops from Qur'anic texts, prophetic practices, and fuqaha elaborations in siyasah literature. While modern meritocracy is based on administrative rationality, procedural objectivity, and performance accountability, Islamic meritocracy is grounded in the integration of technical capabilities (*al-quwwah*) and moral integrity (*al-amānah*) as the two pillars of eligibility for public office (Rahman & Abdul Hamid, 2024). This principle is rooted in the Qur'anic figure of *al-qawwī al-amīn*, a term that appears in the story of Moses and its analogies in Joseph, Talut, and Adam as caliphs. Each figure displays characteristics of technical competence and moral prowess, pointing to an ethical construction of merit rather than mere technocracy (Chanifah et al., 2024).

If, in the ASN management system, meritocracy is understood through 14 managerial subsystems ranging from needs planning to ASN protection, then in Islam, meritocracy can be found through a range of values structured across various normative sources. QS. *al-Nisā'* 58, for example, affirms the principles of *ta'diyat al-amānah* (entrusting responsibilities to competent persons) and *al-'adl* (fairness in decision-making). This verse actually contains the principle of selection: public office is a responsibility that must be entrusted to competent individuals (Al-Rasbi et al., 2025). The *sabab nuzūl* (reason for revelation) of this verse—the incident of returning the keys to the Ka'bah to Uthman bin Talhah—shows that professional competence is prioritized over family ties or personal affiliations. This selection model aligns with the modern principle of meritocracy, which emphasizes competence and track record, but is stronger because it is underpinned by moral-spiritual legitimacy.

In addition, QS. *an-Nahl* 43 and QS. *al-Anbiyā'* 7, which encourages matters to be referred to *ahl al-dzīkr*, demonstrates the principle of epistemic meritocracy: a person can serve as an authoritative reference only if they have scientific capacity. When translated into a public office selection system, this principle contains two key messages: first, not everyone

is qualified to hold a specific position; second, positions must be given to those with relevant expertise, not to those who are simply close to power (Kolvani & Nistotskaya, 2025). This principle is consistent with the merit structure in civil service management, which prohibits patronage and requires a match between competence and job requirements.

If the meritocracy of the ASN is operationalized through stages of recruitment, promotion, transfer, and performance appraisal based on competency standards, then the principles of Islamic meritocracy can be seen through the operationalization of values in the stories of Moses (al-qawiyy al-amīn), Joseph (ḥafīz ‘alīm), Thalut (baṣṭatan fil-‘ilm wal-jism), and Adam, who gained legitimacy as caliph through the process of teaching al-asmā’. Each story contains a principle of selection: Moses was chosen for his strength and integrity; Joseph for his managerial skills and intelligence; Thalut for his physical capabilities and knowledge; Adam for his epistemic capacity. From a public administration perspective, the four reflect the dimensions of technical, cognitive, moral, and leadership competencies—dimensions that in the merit system are classified as technical, managerial, socio-cultural, and integrity competencies. This parallel structure opens the space to build an Islamic Meritocracy Framework as a model that combines Islamic values with modern meritocracy (Zin et al., 2024).

The concept of ahl al-kifāyah in fiqh siyasah shows that Islam has a conceptual framework for the eligibility of public officials that is no less systematic than the merit system. In the traditions of al-Māwardī, Ibn Taymiyyah, and al-Ghazālī, leadership requirements always include competence and integrity. Al-Māwardī, for example, demanded the ability to perform ijtihad, administrative skills, physical strength, and moral integrity as requirements for an imam or wali al-amr (Imam al-Mawardi, n.d.). Ibn Taymiyyah even emphasized that leadership is invalid if a person lacks both quwwah and amanah (Moch. Azis Qoharuddin, 2019). This principle provides a moral depth that is not always found in modern merit systems, which tend to emphasize technocratic aspects without a strong ethical foundation (Moch. Azis Qoharuddin, 2019).

When compared with the ASN management system, Islamic values appear to fill the void in modern meritocracy. The merit system in the Civil Service Management Regulation and the PPPK covers aspects such as competence, track record, selection objectivity, and

performance appraisal. However, it is relatively weak in its commitment to transcendental morality. Integrity is treated as an administrative variable rather than as an ethical-spiritual commitment that underpins job behavior (Sunara et al., 2024). On the other hand, Islamic siyasah principles have normative advantages because they combine morality, honesty, and trustworthiness as the basis for the legitimacy of office, but do not always provide measurable operational mechanisms. Therefore, an Islamic Meritocracy Framework is needed to integrate the technocratic dimensions of modern systems with the ethical dimensions of Islamic systems.

The Islamic Meritocracy Framework can be constructed through three layers. The first layer is technical competence, which, in the Islamic perspective, is derived from the concept of *al-quwwah* and, in the modern perspective, aligns with job competency standards, CAT assessments, and performance evaluations. The second layer is moral integrity, which, in the Qur'an, is illustrated by the concept of *al-amānah* and, in the modern merit system, is represented by track records and compliance with codes of ethics. However, it is not yet at the core of the system. The third layer is value orientation, namely spiritual awareness and ethical justice, which guide the development of public office—a dimension that is relatively absent from the modern ASN system (Ali Khozi & Jafar Shodiq, 2025). By combining these three layers, the Islamic Meritocracy model provides a more comprehensive ASN selection framework than modern meritocracy, which focuses on administrative rationality.

Through this layered construction, the framework clarifies the respective strengths and limitations of both systems. The Indonesian ASN merit system exhibits relative strength in operationalizing technical competence through measurable standards and procedures, yet it remains normatively weak in embedding moral integrity as a foundational criterion of legitimacy. Conversely, Islamic political thought provides a robust ethical justification for public office rooted in trust, justice, and moral accountability, but lacks the procedural precision necessary for large-scale bureaucratic implementation. The Islamic Meritocracy Framework thus serves as a bridge, integrating administrative rationality with ethical legitimacy within a single conceptual framework.

This model not only maps the meeting point of the two systems but also critiques their respective weaknesses. Modern meritocracy can become more humane and moral when enriched by Islamic ethics. In contrast, the tradition of Islamic siyasah can take on a more precise operational dimension when combined with the ASN management structure. It is in

this context that the Islamic Meritocracy Framework serves as an integrative model that brings together modern competence, morality, and legality into a single construct, oriented towards justice, effectiveness, and public trust. This framework also contributes conceptually to the disciplines of public administration and Islamic studies, as demonstrated by the comparative analysis in this paper.

Without ethical grounding, modern meritocracy risks degenerating into a purely instrumental system vulnerable to political manipulation. Conversely, without operational mechanisms, ethical ideals risk remaining aspirational rather than institutional. By integrating technical competence, moral integrity, and value-oriented legitimacy, the Islamic Meritocracy Framework addresses these mutual deficiencies and offers a more holistic justification for public office selection, balancing effectiveness, justice, and public trust.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Indonesia's civil service merit system aligns substantively with the Islamic normative framework for public office by integrating competence (*al-quwwah*) and moral integrity (*al-amānah*), as embodied in the concept of *ahl al-kifāyah*. While modern meritocracy emphasizes professionalism, fairness, and accountability, the ethical reinforcement offered by Islamic *siyasah* provides a deeper moral foundation often absent in current administrative practice. Building on this alignment, the study proposes the Islamic Meritocracy Framework, situating technical competence within an ethical-spiritual orientation to justify the holistic selection and appointment of public officials.

The study is limited by its normative-comparative design and reliance on secondary sources, without empirical testing of the framework in practice. Future research is recommended to operationalize this model into measurable instruments for recruitment, promotion, and leadership development, and to evaluate its effectiveness in strengthening institutional integrity and legitimacy in real-world public administration contexts.

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