

Al-Mawardi's Wazarah and United Arab Emirates E-Government: A Comparative Governance Analysis

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

received: 13/07/2026

revised: 03/08/2026

accepted: 03/09/2026

Keywords:

Al-Mawardi; Wazarah; E-Government; United Arab Emirates; Digital Governance

DOI:

10.32509/mirshus.v6i2.218

ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of e-government in the United Arab Emirates has raised questions about whether digital public administration is solely a technological achievement or also reflects enduring ethical principles. This study examines the relevance of Imam Al-Mawardi's theory of *wazarah* to the United Arab Emirates' contemporary e-government system. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach with comparative analysis, the study analyzes primary sources, including *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah* and official United Arab Emirates policy documents, supported by secondary literature on Islamic governance and digital public administration. Data were analyzed through reduction, categorization, display, and interpretation, with source triangulation to enhance credibility. The findings show that the Emirati digital governance model reflects Al-Mawardi's administrative principles by operationalizing *kifayah* through AI-based performance evaluation, *amanah* through blockchain-enabled transparency, *syura* through the 01 Gov consultation platform, *keadilan* through the Smart Judicial System, and *maslahah* through integrated public services provided by UAE Pass and TAMM Abu Dhabi. The study concludes that Al-Mawardi's governance framework remains relevant in the digital era, demonstrating that sustainable digital governance requires the integration of technological efficiency with ethical accountability. These findings offer an alternative conceptual framework for Muslim-majority countries pursuing digital transformation while preserving Islamic governance values.

INTRODUCTION

The development of information technology has fundamentally transformed the paradigm of public administration across the globe, pressing governments to deliver services that are faster, more transparent, more efficient, and more accountable through the adoption of e-government (Al-Ansi et al., 2024; Zou et al., 2023). Within this global wave, the United Arab Emirates has emerged as one of the most advanced digital states, having built an

integrated ecosystem of digital identity, blockchain based transaction systems, artificial intelligence, and unified service portals that place it among the top ten countries in the United Nations E-Government Development Index (Alharmoodi et al., 2024; Hassouni & Mellor, 2025). The success of the Emirati model is academically intriguing because it has unfolded in a country whose constitutional and cultural framework is firmly rooted in Islamic tradition, raising the question of whether this digital achievement is solely a technological outcome or whether it also reflects normative principles inherited from the classical Islamic political tradition. Recent governance scholarship also highlights that digital transformation should not replace fundamental governance principles but rather strengthen administrative accountability and effectiveness (Syukri et al., 2025).

On the normative side, the concept of good governance is often treated as a product of Western public administration thought, with its associated vocabulary of New Public Management, digital governance, and performance measurement (Hanisch et al., 2023; Vigoda-Gadot & Mizrahi, 2024). Contemporary governance has shifted from hierarchical bureaucratic structures toward more adaptive models of digital governance that emphasize transparency, accountability, innovation, and citizen-oriented public services (Syukri et al., 2025). Yet the classical Islamic tradition had already developed a sophisticated body of thought on statecraft, most notably in the work of Imam Al-Mawardi (d. 1058 CE), whose treatise *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah* articulated a comprehensive theory of *wazarah* (ministerial governance) grounded in the dual pillars of *kifayah* (professional competence) and *amanah* (moral integrity) (Hakim & Noviyanti, 2024; Rahman & Hamid, 2024). Good governance requires not only institutional reform but also effective leadership capable of fostering accountability, transparency, and public service performance (Andilolo et al., 2024). Al-Mawardi argued that effective governance depends not on the proliferation of bureaucratic structures but on the quality of the human beings who operate them, and on the moral and supervisory mechanisms that hold officials accountable to the public trust.

The contrast between this rich classical heritage and the realities of many contemporary Muslim majority states is striking. In numerous such states, bureaucracies remain slow, corruption persists, nepotism undermines professionalism, and transparency is weak, making administrative reform an urgent necessity (Albab et al., 2025; Rastgar et al., 2023). The United Arab Emirates stands as an exception that demands explanation. Its digital state has not only modernized service delivery but also appears to encode, in its very architecture, principles that resemble those Al-Mawardi articulated nearly a millennium ago. This observation generates the central academic question that motivates the present study: to what extent does the success of Emirati e-government reflect the implementation of classical Islamic governance principles as formulated by Al-Mawardi, rather than being merely a product of technological modernization?

The existing literature suffers from three interrelated gaps that this study seeks to address. The first is a theoretical gap. Scholarship on Al-Mawardi has typically confined itself to the analysis of *imamah*, leadership, and the formal structure of *wazarah*, while research on e-government has largely drawn on modern public administration theories such as New Public Management and digital governance, and the two bodies of work rarely intersect (Ongaro & Tantardini, 2023; Van Hulst & Visser, 2025). The second is a conceptual gap. Most studies treat e-government as a technological innovation, whereas the present study argues that its success is also shaped by ethical values such as *amanah*, *kifayah*, *keadilan*, and moral supervision,

dimensions that are underrepresented in mainstream digital governance scholarship (Aprianto et al., 2026; Ritonga et al., 2025). The third is an empirical gap. Although the United Arab Emirates has been studied as a case of digital transformation, no systematic attempt has been made to use it as a test case for the contemporary relevance of Al-Mawardi's theory of administrative efficiency (Alshehhi et al., 2024; Ayyad et al., 2025).

This study demonstrates that the development of modern governmental technology does not have to be severed from the intellectual heritage of classical Islamic political thought. The author contends that Al-Mawardi's theory retains explanatory power in the twenty first century and can illuminate the normative foundations of digital public administration. The specific objectives of the study are fivefold: first, to analyze the concept of administrative efficiency according to Al-Mawardi, with particular attention to the requirements of *kifayah* and *amanah*; second, to identify the principal implementations of e-government in the United Arab Emirates; third, to compare the classical theory with the contemporary practice; fourth, to explain the extent to which the principles of competence and integrity are reflected in digital governance; and fifth, to show the relevance of classical Islamic political thought to the construction of modern good governance (Fadhilah et al., 2025; Zul et al., 2026).

The novelty of this article lies not in its object of study, since both Al-Mawardi and Emirati e-government have been examined separately, but in the analytical bridge it constructs between them. Conceptually, the study develops an analytical framework that integrates the theory of *wazarah* with the concept of modern e-government, drawing on Islamic bureaucratic ethics as evaluative indicators. Analytically, it uses the indicators of *amanah*, *kifayah*, *meritokrasi*, and *masalah* to assess the success of digital government, moving beyond the conventional metrics of effectiveness, efficiency, and service quality (Pullen et al., 2026; Yaghi & Yaghi, 2023). Contextually, it positions the United Arab Emirates as an empirical demonstration that modern digital government can be analyzed using classical Islamic political theory, rather than relying exclusively on Western administrative frameworks. The study thereby contributes theoretically, methodologically, and practically to the fields of Islamic public administration and digital governance, and offers a reference point for Muslim majority states seeking to design digital bureaucratic reforms anchored in ethical values (Azam et al., 2026; Sati et al., 2025).

METHOD

Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach using comparative analysis. The qualitative approach was selected because the objective is to explore and interpret public administration concepts in Al-Mawardi's political thought and compare them with the implementation of contemporary digital government in the United Arab Emirates rather than to test statistical hypotheses (Abulbasher, 2026; Van Hulst & Visser, 2025). The design treats the two domains as distinct bodies of evidence that are compared through a common analytical matrix, rather than assuming that UAE practices are direct applications of Al-Mawardi's thought. The comparison therefore examines convergence, partial convergence, divergence, and transformation, while preserving differences in historical setting, institutional form, and technological capacity (Hanisch et al., 2023; Sadat, 2025).

Type and Object of Study

The research is designed as library research because all data originate from documentary sources without involving field observations or interviews. The conceptual object is Al-Mawardi's theory of public administration, particularly *wazarah* and the principles of *kifayah*, *amanah*, justice, consultation, public welfare, differentiated administrative authority, and leadership responsibility in *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah* (Hakim & Noviyanti, 2024). These concepts were selected because they are central to Al-Mawardi's account of the qualifications, duties, limits, and public purposes of executive authority, and because each can be translated into a governance question without reducing it to a modern technological indicator. The empirical object comprises UAE Pass, Smart Dubai, TAMM Abu Dhabi, blockchain-based government services, artificial intelligence in public administration, the digital judiciary, cybersecurity, and integrated public services (Alharmoodi et al., 2024; Alshehhi et al., 2024). The UAE was selected as an information-rich case of advanced digital administration, not as a presumed embodiment of Islamic governance. The two objects share concern with administrative capacity and accountable rule, but differ substantially in historical context and institutional mechanism.

Data Sources

The study relies exclusively on secondary data. Primary sources consist of Al-Mawardi's *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah* and official policy documents published by the United Arab Emirates government, including documents issued by the Telecommunications and Digital Government Regulatory Authority, Smart Dubai, Abu Dhabi Digital Authority, and the Federal Authority for Government Human Resources. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, reports published by the United Nations concerning the E-Government Development Index, government reports, and studies related to Islamic political thought and digital governance (Hochstetter et al., 2023; Thanasi-Boçe & Kulakli, 2023).

Documents were selected using four criteria: (1) direct relevance to the research questions; (2) academic credibility or publication by recognised governmental or international institutions; (3) sufficient conceptual or empirical detail regarding public administration or digital governance; and (4) recency for empirical sources so that the account reflects current UAE developments. Sources were not excluded merely because they reported limitations, ethical risks, weak participation, privacy concerns, centralisation, or implementation failures. Such material was retained as potential contradictory or negative-case evidence.

Data Collection

Data collection followed a four-stage documentation process. First, literature was identified on Islamic political administration, Al-Mawardi, e-government, digital governance, and public administration. Second, documents were screened against relevance, credibility, completeness, and publication-date criteria. Third, information was entered into structured extraction sheets that separately recorded (a) the textual meaning and scope of each Al-Mawardi principle, (b) the stated purpose and documented operation of each UAE practice, (c) supporting evidence, (d) contradictory or limiting evidence, and (e) plausible alternative interpretations. Fourth, the material was organised under competence, integrity, justice, consultation, public welfare, transparency, accountability, efficiency, security, and

participation (Alzayed, 2024; Tskhadadze, 2024). Modern categories were used as sensitising concepts rather than treated as exact synonyms for the classical terms.

Data Analysis

The study employed qualitative comparative analysis through five sequential stages: data reduction, dual-domain coding, categorisation, criterion-based comparison, and synthesis. Data reduction retained information relevant to either the meaning of the classical principles or the operation and consequences of UAE digital governance, including material that challenged an anticipated correspondence.

Coding combined deductive and abductive procedures. An initial codebook was derived from Al-Mawardi's account of executive authority, particularly competence, integrity, justice, consultation, and public welfare. The UAE documents were first coded on their own terms for institutional objective, mechanism, implementation, outcome, and documented limitation. Only after this separate coding were the two sets of codes compared. Abductive review was then used to consider rival explanations, including whether an observed practice was better explained by contemporary administrative efficiency, security policy, state capacity, or global digital-governance standards than by an Islamic ethical principle (Van Hulst & Visser, 2025).

Each comparison was classified using explicit decision rules. A match was recorded when the classical principle and the contemporary practice aligned in normative purpose, operative mechanism, and documented administrative outcome. A partial match was recorded when they shared a purpose or outcome but differed in mechanism, scope, institutional safeguards, or available evidence. A divergence was recorded when the practice contradicted the principle, produced a documented ethical trade-off, or lacked sufficient evidence of the principle beyond rhetorical similarity. These judgements were made across four fields: administrative objective, governance mechanism, implementation practice, and outcome. A correspondence indicates analytical or functional similarity only; it does not establish historical influence or prove that UAE policy was derived from Al-Mawardi (Hanisch et al., 2023; Roehl & Hansen, 2024).

Contradictory evidence was actively sought through searches and within-document review for terms associated with privacy, surveillance, exclusion, centralisation, opacity, implementation failure, digital inequality, and accountability deficits. Negative cases were retained in the comparison matrix and used to downgrade an apparent match to a partial match or divergence where appropriate. This procedure prevented successful programmes and official claims from automatically being treated as evidence of ethical alignment.

Validity and Trustworthiness

The credibility of the findings was enhanced through source triangulation by comparing information obtained from Al-Mawardi's original writings, peer-reviewed studies on Islamic political thought, United Nations reports, official UAE government publications, and contemporary public administration literature. Findings were considered robust only when supported by multiple credible sources.

In addition, interpretive consistency was maintained through systematic application of the predefined analytical framework throughout the coding and comparison process. Researcher reflexivity was also incorporated by continuously evaluating potential subjective

interpretations during analysis and ensuring that all conclusions were grounded in documentary evidence rather than personal assumptions (Gupta et al., 2025; Hsu & Schletz, 2024).

The analytical framework guiding the study is presented in Figure 1, illustrating the research flow from problem identification, literature review, document selection, thematic coding, comparative analysis, triangulation, and synthesis of findings.

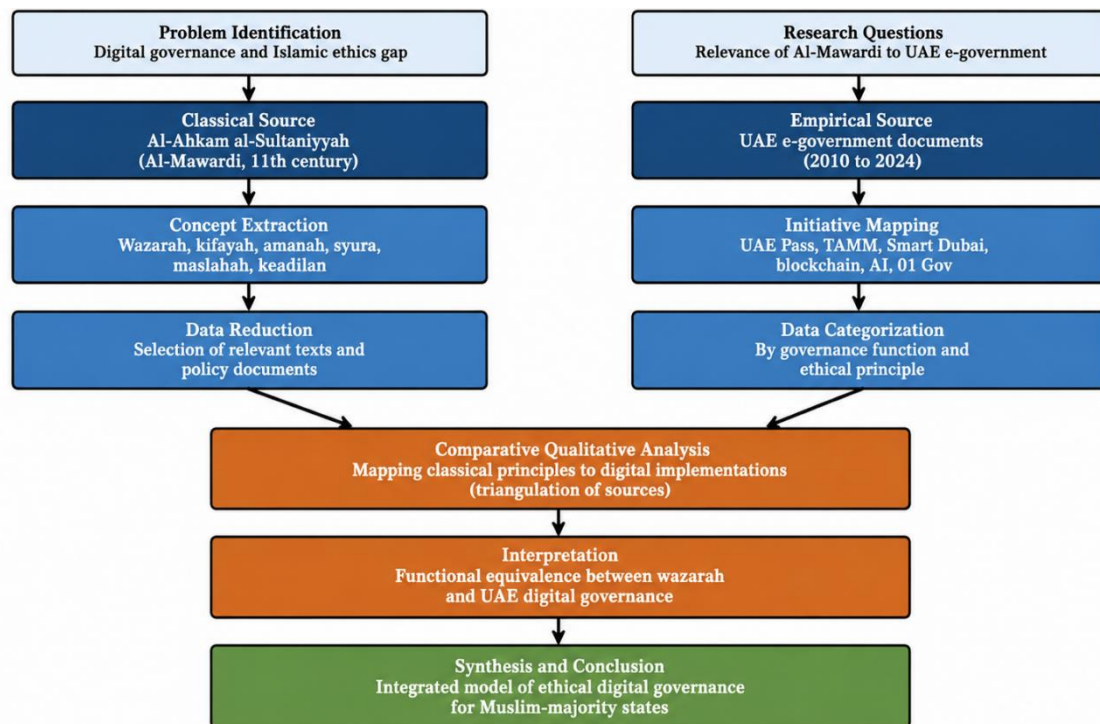


Figure 1. Analytical framework bridging classical wazarah and digital governance

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings

The comparison identifies differentiated rather than uniform correspondence between Al-Mawardi's principles and UAE digital governance. Kifayah shows the clearest functional match where documented investments in administrative capability support integrated service delivery. Amanah, justice, consultation, and public welfare are better classified as partial matches because relevant digital mechanisms coexist with unresolved questions concerning privacy, surveillance, centralisation, inclusiveness, and the binding force of participation. No evidence establishes that the UAE initiatives were historically derived from Al-Mawardi. The findings instead show that classical principles can operate as evaluative criteria for examining both the achievements and the limitations of contemporary digital government. Three findings follow: Al-Mawardi's account remains analytically relevant; UAE practices display varying degrees of functional correspondence; and technical performance does not amount to ethically effective governance unless it is accompanied by normative accountability.

The Relevance of Al-Mawardi's Concept of Official Efficiency

The study finds that Al-Mawardi viewed the success of government as depending not on the number of institutions or the sophistication of administrative systems, but on the quality of the human beings who operate the government. In the concept of wazarah, a public official must satisfy two principal requirements, namely kifayah (professional competence) and amanah (moral integrity), which together ensure that officials are not only technically capable but also ethically responsible (Hakim & Noviyanti, 2024; Rahman & Hamid, 2024). The analysis also shows that Al-Mawardi introduced a division of bureaucratic labor through the distinction between Wazir al-Tafwidh (delegated minister) and Wazir al-Tanfidih (executive minister), a form of work specialization designed to avoid overlapping authority, increase organizational effectiveness, and accelerate decision making. This distinction resembles the modern separation between policy formulation and policy execution. Efficiency in Al-Mawardi's perspective is therefore not measured solely by the speed of service but also by the capacity of government to realize social justice, maintain political stability, and deliver services that favor the public, giving his concept of efficiency both an administrative and a moral dimension.

Implementing Kifayah through Digital Government

The findings indicate that various digital policies in the United Arab Emirates reflect the principle of kifayah, defined as the professional capacity of state officials to conduct administrative functions. The most prominent implementation is the use of UAE Pass as a national digital identity that integrates nearly all federal government services, simplifying administrative procedures so that citizens can access multiple services through a single unified system. According to the data used in this study, the United Arab Emirates achieved an E-Government Development Index score of approximately 0.9083 in the 2024 United Nations survey, having digitalized nearly all federal government services. The trajectory of this achievement is displayed in Figure 2, which presents the EGDI, E-Participation Index, and Human Capital Index of the United Arab Emirates from 2010 to 2024.

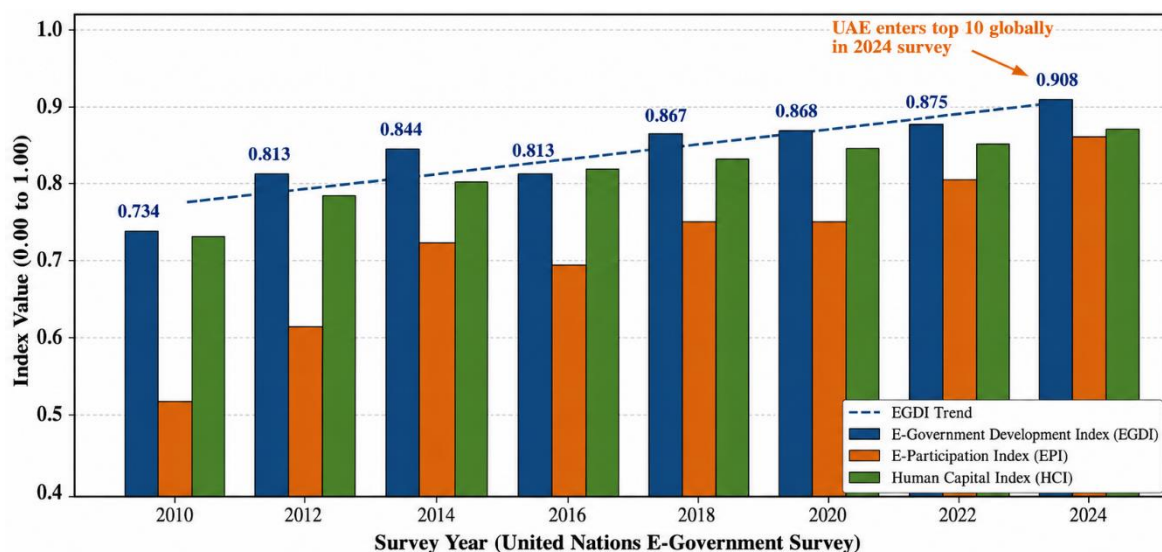


Figure 2. United Arab Emirates E-Government Development Index trajectory, 2010 to 2024

As Figure 2 illustrates, the EGDI of the United Arab Emirates rose from 0.7344 in 2010 to 0.9083 in 2024, a steady upward trajectory that coincided with the launch of major initiatives such as UAE Pass, the Smart Dubai strategy, and the Abu Dhabi TAMM platform. The E-Participation Index grew even more steeply, from 0.5139 in 2010 to 0.8611 in 2024, reflecting the expansion of digital channels for citizen engagement. The Human Capital Index, although already high in 2010, continued to climb, indicating sustained investment in the skills of the Emirati population (Alneyadi et al., 2023; Fadlelmula & Qadhi, 2024). The study also finds that the use of artificial intelligence through the Federal Authority for Government Human Resources platform enables real time performance evaluation of employees, supporting meritocracy because assessments are based on objective performance indicators rather than personal relationships or political considerations. The government provides more than 50,000 hours of digital training each year to enhance the competence of civil servants, confirming that the principle of competence formulated by Al-Mawardi remains relevant in modern government, even as the mechanism of implementation has shifted from manual to data-driven systems (Ayyad et al., 2025; Khalil & Al-Ali, 2025).

Implementing Amanah through Digital Transparency

The study finds that the principle of amanah is operationalized through the deployment of technologies that enhance governmental transparency and accountability. The use of blockchain in public administration and state budget management reduces opportunities for data manipulation and shrinks the risk of financial abuse, because every transaction can be traced digitally. In the perspective of Al-Mawardi, the management of public wealth is an amanah that must be guarded by state officials, and the immutability of blockchain ledgers provides a technological reinforcement of this moral requirement (Aprianto et al., 2026; Hochstetter et al., 2023). The paperless government strategy implemented through Smart Dubai has saved approximately 4.3 billion Dirham and reduced the use of more than one billion sheets of paper each year, demonstrating that digitalization not only increases administrative efficiency but also supports more responsible management of public resources (Alqodsi, 2024; Faccia et al., 2023). Through such mechanisms, the principle of amanah in Al-Mawardi's thought acquires a new form of implementation through digital technology that enhances bureaucratic transparency.

Table 1 below summarizes the mapping between the principal concepts of Al-Mawardi's wazarah and their corresponding digital implementations in the United Arab Emirates. The mapping is based on the qualitative comparative analysis described in the method section and is grounded in official policy documents and scholarly literature.

Table 1. Mapping of Al-Mawardi's wazarah principles to United Arab Emirates digital initiatives

Al-Mawardi Principle	Classical Definition	UAE Digital Implementation	Functional Equivalence
Kifayah (competence)	Technical and intellectual capacity of officials	AI based performance evaluation via FAHR; 50,000+ annual training hours	Ensures that office holders are genuinely capable

Amanah (integrity)	Moral trustworthiness in managing public wealth	Blockchain ledgers for transactions and budgets; Smart Dubai paperless strategy	Reduces manipulation and reinforces accountability
Syura (consultation)	Consultative decision making with the community	01 Gov digital consultation platform for citizen feedback	Provides communication space between state and society
Keadilan (justice)	Fair and equitable treatment of all citizens	Smart Judicial System with online hearings; 60% reduction in case resolution time	Accelerates access to fair legal process
Maslahah (public welfare)	Promotion of the common good	Integration of 700+ services on UAE Pass and TAMM Abu Dhabi; 90% citizen satisfaction	Simplifies administration and serves the public
Meritocracy	Selection by ability rather than by lineage	Objective data driven indicators for promotion and evaluation	Strengthens merit-based human resource management

Effectiveness of Digital Public Services

The findings show that the digitalization of public services in the United Arab Emirates has significantly improved the quality of government services. Through the TAMM Abu Dhabi platform, more than seven hundred government services are integrated into a single unified service system. This integration has increased citizen satisfaction to approximately ninety percent while reducing direct interaction between citizens and bureaucrats, thereby shrinking the opportunity for bribery or illegal negotiation (Alharmoodi et al., 2024; Thanasi-Boçe & Kulakli, 2023). In the judicial sector, the Smart Judicial System has accelerated case resolution through online hearings, with the average resolution time falling by approximately sixty percent, granting citizens faster and more efficient access to legal services. These findings indicate that the digitalization of public services advances the central aim of state administration as formulated by Al-Mawardi, namely to provide convenience, legal certainty, and fair service to the public (Albab et al., 2025; Rastgar et al., 2023). Table 2 presents the principal quantitative indicators that illustrate the effectiveness of the Emirati digital state across the dimensions of service integration, satisfaction, efficiency gains, and security readiness.

Table 2. Key performance indicators of United Arab Emirates e-government

Indicator	Value	Year	Implication for Governance
E-Government Development Index (EGDI)	0.9083	2024	Top ten global ranking; near complete service digitalization

E-Participation Index (EPI)	0.8611	2024	Strong digital channels for civic engagement
Services on TAMM Abu Dhabi	700+	2024	Unified access to government services
Citizen satisfaction (TAMM)	approximately 90%	2024	High public acceptance of digital service delivery
Smart Dubai cost savings	4.3 billion AED	2023	Efficiency gains and resource conservation
Paper reduction (Smart Dubai)	1 billion+ sheets per year	2023	Sustainable and paperless administration
Judicial case resolution time reduction	approximately 60%	2024	Faster and more accessible justice
Annual digital training hours for civil servants	50,000+	2024	Continuous capacity building for kifayah
Global Cybersecurity Index category	Tier 1 (highest)	2024	Robust protection of public data and systems

Strengthening Oversight and Cybersecurity

The study finds that digital transformation in the United Arab Emirates is oriented not only toward efficiency but also toward the strengthening of oversight systems. The establishment of the UAE Cybersecurity Council signals that information security has become an integral part of digital governance, and the country ranks in the highest tier of the Global Cybersecurity Index, indicating a high degree of readiness to protect government and citizen data from cyber threats (Al-Hajri et al., 2024; Haraguchi et al., 2024). In the perspective of Al-Mawardi, the protection of state security is a primary obligation of the ruler, and large scale investment in cybersecurity can therefore be understood as a modern form of the classical duty to preserve stability and safeguard the public interest. The coupling of digitalization with cybersecurity also addresses one of the recurring concerns in the literature on digital governance, namely that the expansion of digital infrastructures can create new vulnerabilities if it is not accompanied by robust oversight mechanisms (Gupta et al., 2024; Pullen et al., 2026).

The findings show that the United Arab Emirates has also developed mechanisms for public participation through the 01 Gov platform, which allows citizens to submit ideas, critiques, and feedback on government policy. Although the political system of the United Arab Emirates does not practise liberal democracy, this digital consultation mechanism shares a functional similarity with the principle of syura in the Islamic political tradition, which provides a communicative space between government and society for the sake of the common good (Ghareeb et al., 2026; Sadat, 2025). The expansion of such participatory channels, as reflected in the rising E-Participation Index shown in Figure 2, suggests that the Emirati model is not a purely top-down technocratic project but incorporates a normative

commitment to consultative governance that resonates with classical Islamic political thought (Elayah, 2025; Shareef & Ahmed, 2024).

Although the implementation of e-government shows many successes, the study also identifies several challenges. The expanding scope of digitalization can intensify state surveillance of the population, raising concerns about privacy, the protection of personal data, and civil liberties. In addition, highly centralized technology can strengthen governmental authority if it is not balanced by adequate oversight mechanisms, and the dependence of citizens on digital platforms can deepen the digital divide if access is not equitable (Abulbasher, 2026; Djatmiko et al., 2025). These findings indicate that technology is not a fully neutral solution. The effectiveness of e-government continues to depend on the moral quality of state officials, as Al-Mawardi emphasized, and on the institutional safeguards that prevent the misuse of digital power (Roehl & Hansen, 2024; Yaghi & Yaghi, 2023).

Table 3 consolidates the main findings of the study, organizing them by thematic dimension and indicating the classical principle, the Emirati implementation, and the principal challenge identified in each dimension. The table is intended to provide a quick reference for readers and to support the discussion that follows.

Table 3. Summary of main findings by thematic dimension

Dimension	Classical Principle	UAE Implementation	Challenge Identified
Competence	Kifayah	AI performance evaluation and digital training	Risk of over-reliance on automated metrics
Integrity	Amanah	Blockchain and paperless government	Need for continuous data security investment
Consultation	Syura	01 Gov participation platform	Limited scope of binding citizen input
Justice	Keadilan	Smart Judicial System	Digital exclusion of vulnerable groups
Public welfare	Maslahah	UAE Pass and TAMM integration	Privacy and surveillance concerns
Oversight	Hisbah (moral supervision)	UAE Cybersecurity Council	Centralization of digital authority
Efficiency	Task specialization (Tafwidh and Tanfidh)	Integrated digital service architecture	Inter-agency coordination complexity

Discussion

The Relevance of Wazarah to Modern Governance

The results indicate that Al-Mawardi's concept of wazarah retains strong relevance for understanding modern governance. Although the theory was formulated in the eleventh century in the context of classical Islamic government, its principles are universal because they orient toward organizational effectiveness, official professionalism, accountability, and

service to the public. The division of authority between Wazir al-Tafwidh and Wazir al-Tanfidh anticipates the concept of task specialization that remains foundational to modern public administration. In the e-government system of the United Arab Emirates, this specialization is realized through the division of functions among digitally integrated agencies. Although the organizational form differs, the underlying purpose is identical, namely to accelerate administrative processes, reduce overlapping authority, and improve the effectiveness of service delivery (Hanisch et al., 2023; Vigoda-Gadot & Mizrahi, 2024). This finding implies that bureaucratic modernization does not always mean abandoning classical concepts; on the contrary, technology can become a new means of implementing administrative principles articulated by Al-Mawardi centuries ago.

Digitalization as the Implementation of Kifayah

The findings demonstrate that the success of the digital transformation in the United Arab Emirates is driven not only by technological investment but also by capacity building among state officials. This is visible in the use of artificial intelligence to evaluate employee performance, in data driven assessment systems, and in continuous digital training. In the perspective of Al-Mawardi, an official must possess kifayah, namely adequate technical and intellectual capacity to perform governmental duties. The use of artificial intelligence in performance evaluation can therefore be understood not merely as a technological innovation but as an instrument for ensuring that public office is held by genuinely competent individuals (Alshehhi et al., 2024; Khalil & Al-Ali, 2025). The analysis also indicates a transformation in the way meritocracy is applied. Whereas in Al-Mawardi's time competence was judged through personal ability and direct oversight by the ruler, in modern government it is assessed through more objective digital performance indicators. Technology thus does not replace the concept of meritocracy but strengthens its implementation, aligning with broader observations in the literature on artificial intelligence in public administration (Al-Ansi et al., 2024; Fadlelmula & Qadhi, 2024).

Digital Transparency as the Manifestation of Amanah

One of the most important findings of this study is the correspondence between the principle of amanah in Al-Mawardi's thought and the digital transparency system implemented in the United Arab Emirates. The use of blockchain in public administration, the digitalization of transactions, and the automation of service processes reduce opportunities for data manipulation and narrow the space in which corruption can occur. From an analytical standpoint, blockchain is not merely a data storage technology but an institutional mechanism that strengthens public accountability. In Al-Mawardi's framework, amanah requires officials to manage state wealth honestly and responsibly, and blockchain performs a similar function by recording transactions transparently and in a manner that is difficult to manipulate (Hochstetter et al., 2023; Ritonga et al., 2025). This finding indicates that classical Islamic ethical principles can acquire new forms of implementation through digital innovation, with technology functioning as a tool that reinforces moral values rather than replacing them.

Public Service Efficiency and the Goal of Maslahah

The study shows that digital platforms such as UAE Pass, TAMM Abu Dhabi, and the Smart Judicial System have simplified administrative procedures, accelerated public service, increased citizen satisfaction, and expanded access to governmental services. From the

perspective of modern public administration theory, this indicates an improvement in bureaucratic efficiency. When analyzed through the lens of Al-Mawardi, however, this efficiency carries a broader meaning because it is directed toward the achievement of *maslahah*, or the common good. The success of an administrative system is therefore not measured only by the speed of service or the lowering of administrative costs, but also by its capacity to meet the needs of the population in a just manner (Fadhilah et al., 2025; Rastgar et al., 2023). This implies that indicators of e-government success should include improvements in social welfare, equity of access to services, and the protection of citizen rights, in addition to the conventional metrics of time and cost (Alzayed, 2024; Tiika et al., 2024).

Technology Cannot Replace Moral Integrity

The analysis shows that the success of a digital system continues to depend on the quality of the human beings who manage it. Although the United Arab Emirates possesses a highly advanced e-government system, the study also identifies challenges related to the potential misuse of digital surveillance, privacy issues, and the possible centralization of power. These findings reinforce the view of Al-Mawardi that the moral quality of leaders remains the decisive factor in government. A sophisticated digital system does not automatically produce just governance if public officials lack integrity (Pullen et al., 2026; Yaghi & Yaghi, 2023). The study therefore rejects the view that digital transformation is a single solution to bureaucratic problems. Technology can improve administrative efficiency, but justice, *amanah*, and accountability continue to depend on human behavior, a position consistent with recent scholarship on the ethics of digital transformation (Hassouni & Mellor, 2025; Yas et al., 2025).

Integrating Islamic Ethics and Digital Governance

The comparison indicates functional correspondences, but not simple equivalence, between Al-Mawardi's thought and UAE e-government. *Kifayah* has its strongest counterpart in capability-building and data-informed administration. Blockchain-based traceability can support *amanah*, consultation platforms can support *syura*, digital courts can support justice, and integrated services can support *maslahah*. These are conditional relationships: the technology provides a mechanism through which a principle may be advanced, but ethical alignment depends on implementation, outcomes, access, oversight, and safeguards. Privacy risks, centralised authority, limited binding participation, and possible digital exclusion therefore qualify several correspondences as partial matches rather than complete matches (Azam et al., 2026; Sati et al., 2025). Figure 3 presents this conceptual synthesis as an evaluative relationship between classical principles, digital mechanisms, and the combined requirements of technical capacity and normative accountability.

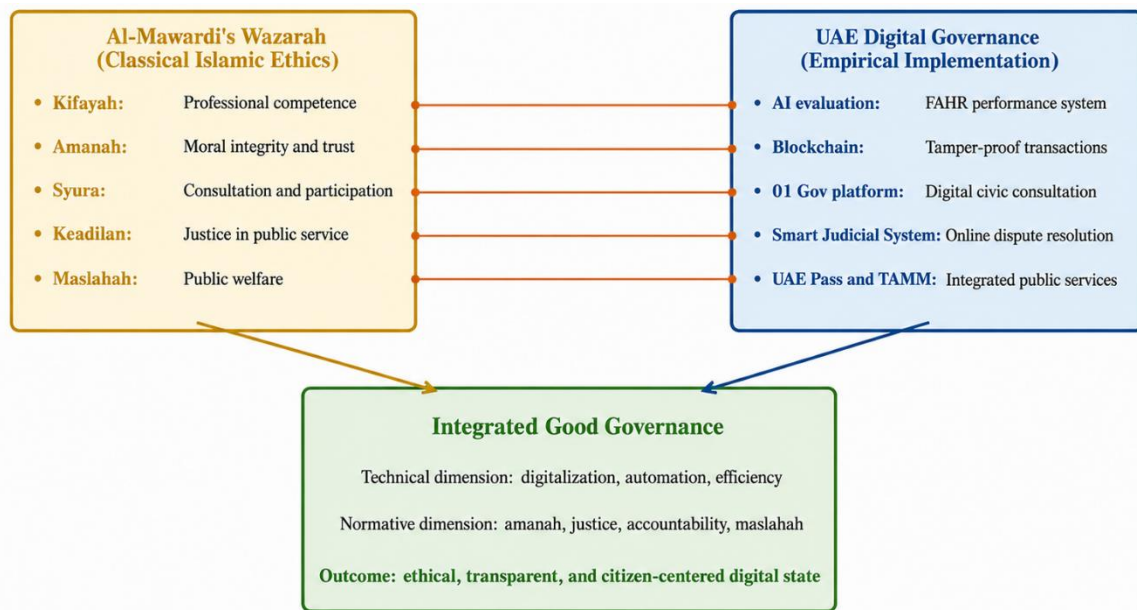


Figure 3. Conceptual synthesis integrating Islamic ethics and digital governance

Implications for Good Governance Theory

The central conceptual contribution is an Islamic Digital Governance Framework that integrates two dimensions which must be assessed simultaneously: technical-administrative capacity and normative accountability. The first concerns whether digital systems deliver competent, secure, integrated, accessible, and efficient administration. The second concerns whether the exercise of digital authority is trustworthy, just, consultative, and directed towards public welfare. The framework therefore advances the following proposition: digital governance effectiveness should be evaluated through the simultaneous integration of technical-administrative capacity and normative accountability, with competence (kifayah), integrity (amanah), justice (keadilan), consultation (syura), and public welfare (maslahah) functioning as complementary evaluative dimensions. High technical performance without normative accountability constitutes administratively capable but ethically deficient governance; strong ethical commitments without adequate capacity constitute normatively desirable but operationally weak governance. Effective Islamic digital governance requires both dimensions (Hanisch et al., 2023; Ongaro & Tantardini, 2023).

This proposition converts the article's three contributions into one evaluative framework. First, it extends Al-Mawardi's concepts beyond historical description by specifying how they can interrogate the purposes, mechanisms, and outcomes of digital administration. Second, it offers a complementary perspective to Western governance theories, not a wholesale substitute for them: conventional indicators of efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and participation remain necessary, while the Islamic dimensions make the moral direction and public purpose of digital power explicit (Tskhadadze, 2024; Zou et al., 2023). Third, it broadens evaluation from whether a service works to whether it is administered competently, entrusted and reviewable, distributively just, open to meaningful consultation, and demonstrably oriented towards public welfare (Almulhim & Yigitcanlar,

2025; Ghareeb et al., 2026). The framework is thus portable as a set of analytical questions, although its indicators and thresholds require empirical validation beyond the UAE case.

The framework has practical implications for states pursuing digital transformation. Assessment should not stop at infrastructure, transaction speed, service integration, or adoption rates. It should also examine professional competence and institutional capacity under *kifayah*; traceability, responsibility, privacy, and safeguards against abuse under *amanah*; equitable access and protection from discriminatory outcomes under justice; meaningful opportunities to influence decisions under *syura*; and demonstrable collective benefit under *maslahah*. The UAE case illustrates how these dimensions can be applied, but it also reveals why a digital tool cannot be assigned an ethical value automatically. Blockchain may improve traceability without guaranteeing integrity, artificial intelligence may improve capacity while creating opacity or bias, and integrated platforms may increase convenience while raising privacy and centralisation risks (Alharmoodi et al., 2024; Badi et al., 2023). Accordingly, the framework evaluates institutional design, implementation, outcomes, and safeguards together rather than pairing each technology with a virtue by assertion. The study also contributes to ongoing debates on digital governance in developing contexts by highlighting the importance of contextually grounded ethical frameworks (Haraguchi et al., 2024; Jobe et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the relevance of Imam Al-Mawardi's classical theory of *wazarah* to the contemporary e-government system of the United Arab Emirates, using a qualitative descriptive approach with comparative analysis. The findings indicate that the principles of *kifayah*, *amanah*, *syura*, *keadilan*, and *maslahah* formulated nearly a millennium ago retain functional relevance in the digital era and are operationally reflected in the digital policies of the Emirati state. Artificial intelligence based performance evaluation embodies *kifayah*; blockchain ledgers and the paperless strategy embody *amanah*; the 01 Gov platform embodies *syura*; the Smart Judicial System embodies *keadilan*; and the integration of services through UAE Pass and TAMM Abu Dhabi embodies *maslahah*. These correspondences demonstrate that classical Islamic governance principles are not historical relics but living normative resources that can inform the design and evaluation of modern digital government.

The study concludes that ethical digital governance requires the simultaneous integration of technical-administrative capacity and normative accountability. It therefore proposes an Islamic Digital Governance Framework in which *kifayah*, *amanah*, justice, *syura*, and *maslahah* complement conventional measures of efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and participation. Technology can enhance administrative speed, reduce some opportunities for corruption, and broaden access, but it cannot by itself establish just or accountable governance. Nor does functional correspondence prove that UAE policies were historically derived from Al-Mawardi. The contribution is instead an evaluative proposition: digital government is effective in the fuller sense only when operational capacity is joined to trustworthy authority, equitable treatment, meaningful consultation, and demonstrable public welfare. Future research should operationalise these dimensions, test them with stakeholder and outcome data, compare multiple jurisdictions, and examine cases in which technical capacity and normative accountability conflict.

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