



**EXAMINING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
THROUGH THE ISLAMIC LENS:
A Glimpse of the Malaysian Experience**

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Abstract: The Malaysian government has undertaken significant efforts to improve public services. However, applying Islamic approaches in the public sector is increasingly wavering today. Internal conflicts and power transitions have also hampered the efficiency of public administration. While Islam is recognized in the federal constitution, governance principles are not confined to Islamic regulations alone. Past policies, such as the Inculcation of Islamic Values and Islam Hadhari, have promoted Islamic values in public service and have been embraced by citizens of all ethnicities. This article provides a transparent review of the actual situation in Malaysia, highlighting that while these concepts are present, their implementation has often fallen short, and public appreciation of these principles needs to be more superficial. This study employed secondary data from past literature on public administration and Islam, relying on an extensive review of existing scholarly works and historical records. Findings reveal that in Malaysia, each leader seems to have their interpretation of Islamic concepts for their premiership, leading to inconsistent application of these principles. However, the Khalifah concept is recommended for Malaysian public administration. By embracing Khalifah, Malaysian leaders can revitalize public administration by prioritizing courtesy and values rooted in the Islamic faith, effectively addressing issues such as abuse of power, corruption, and breaches of trust among civil servants.

Keywords: Public Administration, Public Service, Islamic values, Malaysia, Islam

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Introduction

THE EVOLUTION of public administration in Malaysia has witnessed several reforms since 1957. These continuous efforts have occurred directly and indirectly in response to changing

times. Reflecting on the golden era of the Malay Sultanate of Malacca, the government's effectiveness in establishing vital administrative positions laid the groundwork for Malacca to become one of the great empires in Southeast Asia. However, the arrival of colonizers had a profound impact on the country's administration.

The colonial administrative system significantly impacted the people of Malaya, necessitating the incorporation of Western elements into the existing political structure¹. This transformation shifted the sultan's role from the highest authority to a powerless figurehead in the British colonial administration. This change marked the inception of secularism, with the separation of religion and politics². Following the Federation of Malaya's independence on August 31, 1957, the federal government introduced a series of reforms to shape the nation's unique public administration system.

Public Administration and Islam

Briefly, 'public administration' refers to a system of carrying out tasks or how the government runs a country by enacting specific regulations. For instance, during the pre-colonial era, the Canon of Malacca (*Hukum Kanun Melaka*) and the Maritime Laws of Malacca (*Undang-undang Laut Melaka*) were applied during the reign of Sultan Muzaffar Shah (reigned 1446-1459). However, the influence of Islamic civilization on the early administrative system of Malaya (the Peninsula) predates the glory of the Malay Sultanate of Malacca. This influence is evident in historical discoveries such as the Inscribed Stone of Terengganu or *Prasasti - Batu Bersurat Terengganu* (corresponding to 1303 CE), which

¹ Nazri Muslim, Nik Yusri Musa and Ateerah Abdul Razak, "Perlembagaan persekutuan sebagai tapak integrasi, wahana etika dan peradaban [The Federal Constitution as the basis for integration, ethical and civilisation modes]," in *Penghayatan Etika dan Peradaban [Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization]*, ed. Ateerah Abdul Razak, Nur Azuki Yusuff and Zaleha Embong (Kelantan: Penerbit UMK, 2021).

² Aldiyarova Zhanat, Nurgul Tutinova, Seifullina Galiya, Zatov Kairat, Bagasharov Kudaiberdi and Mussabekov Maxat, "Peculiarities of Kazakhstan and Malaysia given the Relationship between State and Religion," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, no. 1 (2023): 76-88.

records various aspects of Islamic law, including matters related to trade, criminal law, and other administrative affairs. Clearly, since the pre-colonial era, governance in Malaya has been influenced by Islamic regulations, which, to some extent, laid the foundation for the principles of public administration in this country.

Evolution of politics and public administration in Malaysia

Public administration can be described as an organizational system entrusted with the execution of tasks defined by superiors or governing bodies to achieve well-defined objectives. Public administration within a nation is geared towards optimizing governmental affairs, enhancing efficiency, and bolstering effectiveness, all of which contribute to advancing economic, political, and social well-being, ultimately shaping the population's interests.

Basic Concept of Public Administration

When tracing the early history of public administration, Woodrow Wilson emerges as a significant figure who pioneered the scope and epistemology of this field. As early as 1887, his publication 'The Study of Administration' paved the way for new scholars to delve into the dichotomy between politics and administration. With his background as a politician, Wilson strongly advocated treating the bureaucratic system like a business, emphasizing performance, professionalism, and efficiency³. His debates encouraged Americans to adopt a more open-minded approach to electing leaders through the electoral college process as opposed to the practice of popular voting.

Woodrow Wilson's views were supported by Max Weber, a German sociologist who championed the principles of bureaucracy, emphasizing hierarchy and meritocracy. In response to issues arising from leadership patronage, the prevalent practice of self-determination against government decision-making, and civil servant appointments, Weber stressed the significance of bureaucracy, mainly through legislation and the coordination of

³ Jeong Chun Hai and Nor Fadzlina Nawi, *Public administration - An introduction* (Selangor: Karisma Publications Sdn. Bhd., 2007).

government functions based on skills and expertise⁴. Widely recognized as the Father of Sociology, Weber's work centered on the concept of a chain of command rooted in the rational-legal authority perspective.

In response to the calls made by Woodrow Wilson and Max Weber, a growing number of scholars began publishing books and papers that openly discussed the scope of public administration. For instance, scholars such as Luther Gulick and Frederick Taylor expanded on this concept. Gulick's "Notes on the Theory of Organization" (1937) and Taylor's principles of scientific management further developed the theoretical framework for understanding public administration as a discipline separate from politics. These efforts marked the broader dissemination of the concept of public administration, particularly in the post-World War II era.

The emergence of the New Public Administration (NPA) facilitated detailed analyses of state administration by scholars like Frank Marini and Dwight Waldo, using modern approaches to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of government organizations. Frank Marini's influential work "Toward a New Public Administration" (1971) is central to the NPA movement, advocating for reforms integrating social equity, responsiveness, and effectiveness into public administration practices. Marini emphasizes the necessity of accountable administrative practices that respond to societal needs. Concurrently, Dwight Waldo's seminal work offers foundational insights into public administration ethics and the role of public servants⁵. Together, their contributions underscore the evolution towards more responsive and ethically grounded approaches in managing governmental affairs.

⁴ Mazlan Che Soh and Makmor Tumin, "Meninjau model pentadbiran awam: Dari pentabiran awam tradisional (PAT) ke perkhidmatan awam baru (PeAB) [Surveying public administration models: From traditional public administration to new public administration]," *Journal of Administrative Science* 17, no. 2 (2020): 36-71.

⁵ Jeong Chun Hai and Nor Fadzlina Nawi, *Public administration - An introduction*. (Selangor: Karisma Publications Sdn. Bhd., 2007).

Public administration based on the British colonial system

While the concept of public administration is believed to have coexisted with the development of human civilization, the scarcity of evidence and historical documentation has posed challenges to the effective implementation of administrative systems⁶. Furthermore, territorial conquests and wars have often complicated the documentation of a country's public administration system. Nevertheless, to gain insight into the disruptions in public administration structures in Malaysia, it is imperative to examine the impact of British colonial rule meticulously.

Before Malaysia achieved independence, the region now encompassing Peninsular Malaysia was called the Malay Land or Malaya. This area was known for its legal, cultural, governance, and systematic economic activities within the context of various states. Since the 15th century, the Malay Sultanate of Malacca served as a testament to the success of the Malay-Muslim Nusantara civilization, boasting an organized government system that covered a wide range of administrative aspects. The Malay Sultanate of Malacca arguably laid the foundation for the formation of modern Malaysia. This historical account is documented in 'The History of Malay Kings' (*Sulalatus Salatin*) by Tun Sri Lanang⁷.

An essential facet of Malay history lies in the manifestation of the Malay Government as an Islamic government that adhered to governance and a way of life based on Islamic legislation. The Canon of Malacca and the Maritime Laws of Malacca provide concrete examples of this legislative system being closely aligned

⁶ Nazri Muslim, Nik Yusri Musa and Ateerah Abdul Razak, "Perlembagaan persekutuan sebagai tapak integrasi, wahana etika dan peradaban [The Federal Constitution as the basis for integration, ethical and civilisation modes]," in *Penghayatan Etika dan Peradaban [Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization]*, ed. Ateerah Abdul Razak, Nur Azuki Yusuff and Zaleha Embong (Kelantan: Penerbit UMK, 2021).

⁷ Norazimah Zakaria, Abdul Halim Ali, Azhar Wahid and Ani Omar, "Sejarah Melayu sebagai lambang tradisi akal budi bangsa yang tinggi [Malay history as the emblem of a nation's lofty character]," *Jurnal Melayu Sedunia* 1, no. 1 (2018): 191-209.

with religious elements grounded in Islamic Law⁸. During that era, Islam served not only as the predominant religion of the community but also as the fundamental guiding principle of public administration throughout Malaya.

However, Western colonialization in Malacca led to the spreading of Christianity in the Malay Land. While the arrival of Western colonists was often attributed to the effects of the Industrial Revolution and their quest for economic power in the East, some scholars contend that the true agenda of these colonists revolved around the '3G' concept - 'God, Gold, Glory'⁹. The consequences of these activities, along with the amalgamation of cultures, lifestyles, education systems, legislation, and Western governance, left a lasting impact on the administration of local communities¹⁰.

British colonial actions consequently diminished the power and influence of the sultans, kings, and majesties, resulting in a divided society. Additionally, the position of Islamic law faced increasing threats as Western colonists began to impose English law upon the Malays. English law enforcement in the Malay region commenced with the declaration of the Charter of Justice (1807) and the establishment of the High Court, starting in Penang¹¹.

⁸ Ateerah Abdul Razak and Asma' Lailee Mohd Noor, "Etika dan peradaban dalam masyarakat kepelbagaian [Ethics and civilisation in plural society]," in *Penghayatan Etika dan Peradaban [Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization]*, ed. Ateerah Abdul Razak, Nur Azuki Yusuff and Zaleha Embong (Kelantan: Penerbit UMK, 2021).

⁹ Hashim Haji Musa, "The Evolution of Islamic-Cultural Fusion, Identity, Islamic Resurgence and Current Challenges in the Malay Life," *Jurnal Pengajian Melayu* 20, (2009): 51-81.

¹⁰ Osman Bakar, Ahmad Murad Merican and Wan Ali Wan Mamat, *Colonialism in the Malay Archipelago: civilisational encounters* (Selangor: ISTAC & Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia [Selangor: ISTAC & Malaysian Historical Society], 2020).

¹¹ Mohamad Hafifi Hassim, Ahmad Murshidi Mustapa and Abdul Hakim Baharuddin, "Sejarah pelaksanaan undang-undang Islam di Malaysia: Sorotan terhadap sistem kehakiman Islam di negeri Melaka [History of the Implementation of Islamic Law in Malaysia: An Overview of the Islamic Judicial System in Malacca]," *Journal of Muwafaqat* 2, no. 2 (2019): 59-72.

Following these developments, the Allied Federated Malay States introduced the Civil Law of 1937, which continued the Common Law system and was later extended to the Unfederated Malay States through Civil Law Ordinances (Revised 1951). Consequently, English law indirectly became the cornerstone of the legal system in Malaya, gradually supplanting Islamic-based legislation.

After enduring several episodes of foreign colonial rule, Malaya's political system and public administration gradually evolved from a feudal system to a parliamentary democracy¹². Following the administrative model of Britain, elections were introduced in 1952 for democratic government representation at the local level¹³. This election marked a departure from the influence of the sultans as community leaders. Since gaining independence in 1957, Malaya has consistently held general elections every five years.

Public Administration Post Merdeka

After gaining independence, Malaysia worked diligently to establish a national administration aligned with its values within the framework of parliamentary democracy. It is essential to acknowledge that Malaysia's supreme law is the Federal Constitution, albeit initially influenced by the British. The initial negotiations for drafting the Federal Constitution began in 1948 and concluded in 1957¹⁴. In this regard, Malaysia operates under the administration of a constitutional monarchy, with the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong as the Head of State. However, the Prime Minister

¹² Izairuddin Isnin, Muhamad Nazri Mohamed Noor and Jamaie Haji Kamil, "Kesan demokrasi dan pendemokrasian dalam parti Barisan Nasional [The effects of democracy and democratization on the National Front party]," *e-Bangi: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 19, no. 1 (2022): 111-124.

¹³ Denison Jayasooria, "Role of Parliamentarians in Localising SDGs in Malaysia," *Journal of the Malaysian Parliament* 1, (2021): 137-158.

¹⁴ Wan Ahmad Fauzi Wan Hussain, Anisah Che Ngah, Mohamed Anwar Omar Din and Hanif Md Lateh, "Raja-raja dalam penginstitutionan Perlembagaan Persekutuan Tanah Melayu 1957: Satu kajian sejarah perundangan [Malay rulers in institutionalising the constitution of the federation of Malaya 1957: A study of legal history]," *Journal of Nusantara Studies* 2, no. 1 (2017): 27-39.

wields more significant powers as he is the head of government, overseeing the administration of the Head of State.

The adoption of a parliamentary democracy system in Malaysia includes the division of power into three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. This concept was influenced by Western political philosophers such as John Locke, as outlined in his work "Civil Government" in 1690, and Charles Louis Montesquieu, as presented in "The Spirit of the Laws" in 1748¹⁵. They advocated separating religion from government administration. This shift led to several consequential changes, including the diminishing influence of Islam, the reduction of royal authority, and the emergence of secularism and liberalism in society. The emphasis on the separation of powers, rooted in liberal democratic ideology, has profoundly transformed the political system and public administration in post-independence Malaysia.

Also, the structure of state administration has evolved from a system where monarchs wield power to one centered on the people's interests. This transformation embodies the core of democracy, characterized by its capacity to safeguard the people's mandate and grant them the authority to elect the governing body. In essence, democratic governance places the people's welfare above party or political interests¹⁶, echoing the words of former United States (US) President Abraham Lincoln, who proclaimed, "Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people"¹⁷.

People's election participation is crucial, as the democratic system relies on the majority's vote. In Malaya, the General Elections (*Pilihan Raya Umum* - PRU) were first held in 1955, with

¹⁵ Norsaleha Mohd Salleh, Phayilah Yama@Fadilah Zakaria and Noor Hafizah Mohd. Haridi, "Historiografi liberalisme dalam kalangan masyarakat Barat [The liberalism historiography among the Western society]," *Al-Irsyad: Journal of Islamic And Contemporary Issues* 3, no.1 (2018): 67-79.

¹⁶ Ronald Dworkin, "Equality, democracy, and constitution: We the people in court," *Alberta Law Review* 28, (1989): 324-346.

¹⁷ Richard A. Epstein, "Direct Democracy: Government of the People, by the People, and for the People for the People," *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 34, no. 3 (2011): 819-826.

over a million voters participating¹⁸. Besides successfully introducing democracy, Malaysia fostered cooperation among its people through political parties. It is worth noting that Malaysia's plural society resulted from British policies that introduced Chinese laborers to tin mining and Indians to the rubber industry. Therefore, the transition from a feudal political system to a democratic state is vital for dismantling ethnic hierarchies and addressing inequality¹⁹.

The Narrative of Reforms in Public Administration

Gaining insight into the actual context of the public administration model through a series of historical events in Malaysia reveals the substantial burden and responsibilities that rest on the shoulders of the country's leaders. At that time, Malaysia, as a young independent nation, faced challenges due to the limited presence of intellectuals. However, Malaysia is fortunate to be guided by leaders who are deeply committed to formulating effective strategies and maintaining political stability to drive reforms within the realm of public administration.

As widely acknowledged, public officers are pivotal in executing government plans, public policies, action plans, and government initiatives. Their work reflects the government's dedication to ensuring the seamless operation of the country's administration. Despite changes in leadership resulting from electoral outcomes, the position and authority of public administration remain steadfast and preserved.

Previous leaders recognized the importance of establishing and safeguarding the government's administrative machinery. A notable example of this commitment is the Malaysian Federal

¹⁸ Nazri Muslim, Nik Yusri Musa and Ateerah Abdul Razak, "Perlembagaan persekutuan sebagai tapak integrasi, wahana etika dan peradaban [The Federal Constitution as the basis for integration, ethical and civilisation modes]," in *Penghayatan Etika dan Peradaban [Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization]*, ed. Ateerah Abdul Razak, Nur Azuki Yusuff and Zaleha Embong (Kelantan: Penerbit UMK, 2021).

¹⁹ Jeffrey Hughes, Kevin Orr, and Mazlan Yusoff, "Strategizing for grand challenges: economic development and governance traditions in Malaysian local government," *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 89, no. 2(2023): 363-380.

Constitution, ratified on September 16, 1963, which incorporates Article 132 in the fundamental law governing public services. This provision remains in effect today and is indispensable for initiating all government affairs that support the country's planning and development efforts.

Public Administration Phase I (1965 - 1981)

During Tunku Abdul Rahman's administration, consultants Milton Esman and John D. Montgomery were pivotal in guiding the monitoring of public service quality in Malaysia. Their influence culminated in the Esman-Montgomery final report in 1965, marking the onset of significant public administration reforms. These reforms were characterized by a strategic focus on enhancing governmental effectiveness through structural advancements. For instance, establishing the Development Administration Unit (DAU) in 1966 exemplified a proactive approach to streamline administrative processes and improve service delivery mechanisms. Moreover, the inception of the National Public Administration Institute (INTAN) in 1971 underscored Malaysia's commitment to capacity building and professional development within the public sector. These initiatives signify a shift towards more structured and institutionally supported administrative practices that foster efficiency, expertise, and responsiveness in governmental operations. Such strategic reforms laid the groundwork for Malaysia's evolving administrative landscape, positioning it to effectively tackle emerging challenges and capitalize on new opportunities in governance.

During that period, collaboration with universities in the US led to the education and training of many public servants, who were sent abroad for training purposes. As these public servants received their education and training overseas, they acquired valuable knowledge and skills and became acquainted with administrative practices and systems influenced by the US. Upon returning to Malaysia, these officers brought back academic knowledge, practical insights, and approaches from their US experiences. This influence played a significant role in shaping the development of public administration in Malaysia, with elements

of US inspiration and practices making their way into the country's administrative framework.

In other words, beneath the administrative structure that increasingly favored the participation of elite professionals educated in the US, Malaysia had to acknowledge that this was a deliberate strategy. Indirectly, the training provided was influenced by the US system of administration. This recognition was explicitly stated in the Esman-Montgomery report of 1965, where decisions and requirements set by the US shaped the training programs. As a result, this diplomatic cooperation became a significant factor leading to Malaysia's reliance on Western influence, aligning the country with US interests and acknowledging its position within the framework of a significant global power.

Despite Tunku Abdul Rahman's pro-Western perspective, the regional political situation at the time was exceptionally challenging. This event resulted from the country's diplomatic entanglements, including political disputes with Singapore, the Malaysia-Indonesia confrontation, and the claim made by the Philippine government on Sabah. In response, Tunku was compelled to seek international support from Western powers. His political preference significantly impacted the foundation of Malaysian public administration. This practice aligns with the notion that politics is the seed of all government activities, which may sometimes lead to political decisions being made regardless of the broader public good.

In contrast to Tunku's administration, Tun Abdul Razak's leadership adopted a more neutral and pragmatic approach, steering away from exclusive alignment with the West. Tun Abdul Razak was the first to shape public policy without foreign interference. The Five-Year Development Plan (*Rancangan Malaysia - RMK*) and the New Economic Policy (*Dasar Ekonomi Baru - DEB*) served as the cornerstones for nation-building by fostering economic equilibrium, irrespective of racial considerations. The structures of public administration evolved, with greater precision in defining the objectives of people's development, leading to the establishment of government organizations and departments such as the National Operations Council (MAGERAN), the National

Consultative Council (*Majlis Perundangan Negara*), and the National Unity Department (*Jabatan Perpaduan Negara*).

With authority vested in these organizations, the role of the civil service grew significantly. Furthermore, the critical elements for the success and effectiveness of public policies at that time began to rest on the shoulders of the civil service. This transition of power strengthened the framework of the public bureaucracy in Malaysia, allowing it to take the lead in state administration. This contrasted with the previous situation, where the authority and role of civil servants were limited to the implementation of public policies, with policy planning dependent on external powers and political elites alone.

Furthermore, Malaysia's public administration realm experienced further reinforcement following the appointment of Tun Hussein Onn as the nation's third Prime Minister. Widely recognized for his unwavering commitment and determined leadership in carrying out his responsibilities, Tun Hussein Onn played a crucial role in establishing a resilient framework for the inclusion of a diverse, multi-racial population in the sphere of public administration²⁰. Drawing upon his extensive military experience, his leadership remained steadfast, undaunted by domestic and international challenges²¹.

During this period, minimal changes occurred in public administration due to his strong presence in the country's governance. Additionally, Tun Hussein Onn's most significant contribution was the introduction of the National Education Policy, which emphasized the importance of educational services within the public sector. This initiative substantially improved the country's education quality, resulting in an elevated standard of living for the people. With a keen commitment to ensuring Malaysia's independence from neo-colonial influences, Hussein

²⁰ Ho Khai Leong and James Chin, *Mahathir's administration: Performance and crisis in governance*, (Singapore: Times Book International, 2001).

²¹ Johan Saravanamuttu, Eugene Mark and Nawaljeet Singh Rayar, "Malaysia's National Role Conceptions And Transitions of Foreign Policy From Tunku to Mahathir," *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysia Studies* 41, no. 1 (2023): 21-42.

Onn prioritized education as the cornerstone of the nation's progress, freeing it from foreign dominance.

Public Administration Phase II (1982 - 2000)

During Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's first term as Prime Minister (1981-2003), Malaysia underwent significant public administration reforms tailored to the country's needs and the prevailing political landscape. Mahathir's leadership introduced policies to modernize infrastructure and public services, especially in public transportation, communications, and global information technology. These efforts were instrumental in improving transparency in information dissemination and encouraging more active citizen participation in governance. The era also saw a strategic integration of information technology across governmental agencies, which streamlined administrative processes and promoted greater transparency. These reforms demonstrated Malaysia's commitment to enhancing its administrative capabilities in alignment with global advancements, ensuring that government operations became more efficient and responsive to the needs of its citizens.

In alignment with the title of 'Father of Modernisation,' administrative reform during Dr. Mahathir's era was characterized by the modernization of the public service structure. He strongly emphasized pure values and ethical progress, as the government's primary objective at that time was to streamline and eliminate bureaucracy. Dr. Mahathir's contributions to public administration extended beyond the implementation of state policies; he also made significant efforts to reshape the attitudes and conduct of public servants and enhance the professionalism of public services.

Notably, a series of public policy initiatives were introduced with the specific aim of cultivating an exceptional work culture within public administration in Malaysia. Fundamental principles implemented included: *Dasar Bersih, Cekap dan Amanah* (Clean, Efficient, and Trustworthy Policy - 1982), *Dasar Pandang ke Timur* (Look East Policy - 1982), and *Dasar Penerapan Nilai-Nilai Islam*

(Inculcation of Islamic Values Policy - 1985)²². The execution of government activities planned and carried out under these policies vividly demonstrated Dr. Mahathir's comprehensive endeavors and elevated Malaysia's public administration to a prominent position on the global stage.

Public Administration Phase III (2001 - 2022)

Malaysia has diligently crafted an efficient governance system, transcending various assumptions and challenges while shaping its public administration structure. Drawing inspiration from the legacies of past leaders, Malaysia's public administration in the 21st century is firmly oriented toward seeking global recognition and active participation. Dr. Mahathir's distinguished leadership, widely regarded as a spokesman for developing nations, has permanently impacted Malaysia's international standing. On the global stage, Malaysia's voice resonates significantly within the United Nations and across international forums. Dr. Mahathir's influence reverberates on contemporary global issues, including the ongoing struggle for justice in Palestine and the dynamics of global influence. To elucidate, Malaysia's influence within the United Nations was significantly propelled by Dr. Mahathir's involvement in certain controversies, such as highlighting Israeli oppression of Palestine as a fundamental cause of Islamic terrorism and making assertions regarding the global influence of the Jewish community through their proxies²³.

Stepping into office at the end of 2003, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who also held the Minister of Foreign Affairs position, ushered in a more conciliatory approach towards the Western world. This shift in policy was prompted by the aftermath of the tragic terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon building in Washington on September 11, 2001, which had sowed the seeds of Islamophobia and led to the perception of Islam being synonymous with terrorism. In response

²² Diane K. Mauzy and R. S. Milne, "The Mahathir administration in Malaysia: Discipline through Islam," *Pacific Affairs* 56, no. 4 (1983): 617-648.

²³ CNN 2003, Mahathir attack on Jews condemned, CNN International Edition, accessed October 20, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/10/16/oic.mahathir>.

to these challenges, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's administration introduced the concept of Islam Hadhari, championing an ideology firmly rooted in the rejection of religious extremism while emphasizing Islam's pivotal role in building a human civilization founded on scientific principles²⁴. This approach garnered widespread support from the global Islamic community and international partners.

The success of this approach was vividly demonstrated in the 11th General Election in 2004 when *Barisan Nasional* (BN)-secured an impressive victory, clinching over 90 percent of Parliament seats and enjoying the backing of a resounding 64 percent of the popular vote²⁵. On the global stage, with the support of George W. Bush's administration in the US, Malaysia positioned itself as a crucial hub in the fight against the Global War on Terror. This was achieved by hosting the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counterterrorism (SEARCCT). This institution remains operational today under the purview of Wisma Putra, a division of the Malaysian Foreign Ministry²⁶.

Internally, within the realm of public administration, Islam Hadhari strongly emphasizes instilling values to nurture well-rounded individuals in the ongoing battle against corruption and the abuse of power within the government. Guided by the motto "Work with me, not for me," Abdullah Ahmad Badawi embodied a leadership style characterized by a profound connection with the people²⁷. The Islamic principles put into practice transcend religious boundaries, encompassing all strata of Malaysia's diverse

²⁴ Johan Saravanamuttu, Eugene Mark and Nawaljeet Singh Rayar, "Malaysia's National Role Conceptions And Transitions of Foreign Policy From Tunku to Mahathir," *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysia Studies* 41, no. 1 (2023): 21-42.

²⁵ Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "The UMNO-PAS Struggle: Analysis of PAS's Defeat in 2004" in *Malaysia: Recent Trends and Challenges*, ed. (Saw Swee-Hock and K. Kesavapany (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006).

²⁶ SEARCCT 2023, Official portal Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counterterrorism - Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, accessed October 23, 2023, <https://www.searcct.gov.my/en/>.

²⁷ Perdana Digital 2008, Koleksi Arkib Ucapan Ketua Eksekutif [Executive Chief's Speech Archive Collection], accessed October 23, 2023, <https://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p&p=paklah&id=2945>.

society. The establishment of the Institute of Integrity Malaysia and the strengthening of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) during his tenure underscored the government's sincere commitment to enhancing the efficiency and transparency of public administration²⁸.

To rebuild public trust in the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) and address concerns related to corruption within its ranks, a series of administrative reforms were implemented. These reforms encompassed restructuring the police service, establishing new positions, acquiring additional equipment and personnel, and elevating police ranks and salaries. These changes brought positive developments for PDRM personnel, underscoring Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's genuine care for public servants. As a result, these endeavors significantly enhanced the quality of PDRM services, ultimately bolstering public confidence in the government.

Furthermore, during Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's administration, a Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) was established, leading to the initiation of the Commission for the Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCRC) during the government of Pakatan Harapan (PH) under the leadership of Dr. Mahathir in Phase 2 (2018-2020)²⁹. This crucial initiative continued its implementation during the tenure of the National Alliance (*Perikatan Nasional*) government, led successively by former Prime Ministers Mahiaddin@Muhyiddin Yassin (2020-2021) and Ismail Sabri Yaakob (2021-2022).

During Najib Razak's tenure as the Prime Minister from 2009 to 2018, Malaysia's public administration underwent significant strengthening through the implementation of the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) and the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP). These policies aimed to bolster the economy and prioritize the people's well-being. A key focus

²⁸ Jon S. T. Quah, "Leadership and culture in combating corruption: a comparative analysis," *Public Administration and Policy* 25, no. 2 (2022): 193-207.

²⁹ Mohd Izzuddin Nazaruddin and Muhammad Agus Yusoff, "Parliamentary institutional reforms in Malaysia: The Case of the Pakatan Harapan Era, 2018-2020," *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysia Studies* 41, no. 2 (2022): 21-41.

was placed on the New Economic Model (NEM), which replaced the New Economic Policy introduced by his father, the late Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak, during the Second Malaysian Plan (1971-1990). The central tenet of NEM was to propel Malaysia into high-income nations, stimulate sustainable economic growth, and stress the importance of inclusion based on human capital productivity.

One of the critical factors that enhances the quality of public services is the incentivization of higher education. In addition to the Public Service Department (JPA), the People's Trust Council (MARA), and the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN), Najib Razak introduced the MyBrain15 Scholarship Programme to support graduate and doctoral studies for contractual, part-time, or temporary government employees. Consequently, public sector service delivery quality has significantly improved, aligning with human capital development.

Next, Tun Mahathir Mohamad returned for a second term as Malaysia's seventh Prime Minister in 2016. In this round, Tun resumed his commitment to public service in which he led reforms that aimed to overhaul outdated government policies and programs that had drifted from their original objectives.

One significant action the PH government took involved drastically terming 50,000 contract civil servants. The aim was to streamline public administration to address state debt, but this decision was met with strong criticism and widespread discontent among the affected public servants. Additionally, Tun Mahathir's administration needed to assess the capabilities of his newly appointed ministers in managing public affairs. However, these challenges were further compounded by prevailing assumptions about political issues tied to ethnoreligious identities³⁰. These

³⁰ Abdul Muqit Muhammad, Awang Azman Awang Pawi and Mohammad Tawfik Yaakub, "Analisis isu-isu keterancaman Melayu terpilih era pentadbiran Pakatan Harapan [An Analysis of selected 'threat to Malays' issues during the Pakatan Harapan administration]," *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 7, no. 10 (2022): 1-23.

factors ultimately contributed to the premature downfall of the Pakatan Harapan administration after a mere 22 months³¹.

The sudden shift in governance paved the way for a power struggle that led the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to authorize the appointment of Mahiaddin@Muhyiddin Yassin. He (Mahiaddin@Muhyiddin Yassin) faced an immense challenge as the nation grappled with political instability and the escalating threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. During his 17-month tenure, the government's primary focus was containing the spread of the pandemic, which had claimed the lives of more than 35,000 Malaysians. Understandably, given the uncertainties of the time, only minor changes were introduced in the Malaysian public administration. There was a heightened emphasis on the significant roles and functions of the National Security Council (*Majlis Keselamatan Negara* - MKN) and the remarkable efforts of the Chief Health Officer, Tan Sri Dr. Noor Hisham Abdullah. These efforts proved successful, as the government managed to earn the trust of Malaysians by dealing with the pandemic in a more composed manner compared to many other countries.

Nevertheless, Mahiaddin@Muhyiddin's term was short-lived. Numerous internal government conflicts led to his resignation on August 16, 2021. Shortly after that, United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) Vice President Ismail Sabri Yaakob took over the country's administration with the support of most members of the Parliament. Under his rule, Ismail Sabri - who formerly served as the Defence Minister and subsequently as Deputy Prime Minister under Mahiaddin@Muhyiddin, also addressed the country's political stability. This prompted him to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Pakatan Harapan (the opposition bloc at the time), guaranteeing support for his administration through several institutional reforms.

The reforms included the anti-hosting law and the official recognition of the post of opposition chief, which was not recognized previously. Undeniably, reforms in public administration were not very significant during this period, as the

³¹ Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "Is Maqasid al-Shari'a Sufficient? Reflections on Islam in Contemporary Malaysia," *Ulumuna* 24, no. 2: (2020): 205-231.

government's primary focus was on the country's recovery efforts, which COVID-19 had severely hampered.

Based on the provided narratives, it is evident that establishing and upholding standards in public administration is of paramount importance. Before gaining independence, the Islamic-based governance laid a solid foundation for the state administration structure. However, considering the frequent and haphazard changes in leadership – notably the Sheraton Move, which resulted in the downfall of the Pakatan Harapan government in late February 2020 – the leaders of Pakatan Harapan Malaysia faced challenges in innovation. They appeared to lack the creativity necessary to drive the country's public administration mechanism. It has become clear that political stability is a crucial determinant of effective public administration. Additionally, the infusion of Islamic values into public administration is seen as a means to enhance integrity among public servants and further elevate the standard of governance.

Challenges of Public Administration

Beyond the laudable achievements concerning public administration development in Malaysia, unsavory incidents have taken place behind closed doors. Historically, there have been issues of corruption that were unfortunately 'accepted and tolerated' within the political sphere. Such thinking is hazardous because the issue of corruption should be eradicated to the core rather than the corrupt wrongdoers being celebrated as officers³². Also, the global COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted public administration, particularly with the widespread adoption of remote work practices like Work from Home (WFH). This shift has posed challenges in auditing and monitoring governmental activities, potentially exposing vulnerabilities to misuse of power and corruption. With in-person oversight limited, the reliance on online platforms for document handling and decision-making

³² Azam Baki, "SPRM kena selalu 'muda', ikut zaman - Azam Baki [MACC needs to stay 'youthful' and adapt to the times - Azam Baki]," *Berita Harian*, accessed October 12, 2023, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2022/10/1006716/sprm-kena-selalu-muda-ikut-zaman-azam-baki>.

processes has heightened concerns about transparency and accountability in governance.

Throughout this period, the administration of public services has been significantly influenced by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which leverages technology across various domains. Upon closer inspection, these global challenges may lead public administration to move further away from religious influences as it strives to meet increasingly pressing global demands. The concept of secularism is becoming more prevalent, and its resurgence in the country's public administration system requires coordinated efforts from various stakeholders.

Government Resilience Post-Pandemic

Amid the COVID-19 outbreak, the nation's administrative landscape faced challenging times, characterized by the swift turnover of multiple governments within a short span. Simultaneously, these changes impacted public administration and left many citizens disheartened by the nation's leadership. Nevertheless, Malaysia was not the only country affected by these disruptions, as the repercussions of COVID-19 cast a global shadow, affecting systems worldwide regarding economic, social, political, and environmental security.

From an administrative perspective, the changes in public service became apparent through adopting a flexible working approach, primarily the WFH arrangement. The pandemic compelled employers and all stakeholders to meet their obligations, even as the government implemented Movement Control Orders (MCO) from 2020 to 2021. In the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak, Malaysians exhibited heightened attention and compliance with government directives, driven by growing concerns about the novel and deadly disease. However, after two years of stringent measures to curb the pandemic's spread, Malaysians began expressing restlessness and dissatisfaction, yearning to return to the ways before COVID-19.

Amidst historical failures in addressing national security and integrity issues, public confidence in government has markedly declined. Concerns regarding corruption, abuse of power, and inefficiencies in government assistance delivery have intensified,

exacerbated by a pervasive culture of indifference among public administrators. This apathy has facilitated an environment where public administrators entrusted with implementing policies and distributing aid may exploit loopholes for personal gain or neglect their duties.

Such behaviors undermine the effectiveness of public administration and perpetuate a perception of institutional corruption and unfair treatment. Consequently, these systemic issues have become deeply ingrained, significantly tarnishing the government's reputation and eroding public trust in the integrity and competence of its administrative framework³³.

From a positive perspective, the Malaysian population is becoming increasingly mature and better prepared to respond to the country's governance shifts. In previous years, people were more inclined to take on the role of 'audience', passively observing and adapting to government decisions. However, the growing pressures of life have made the public more discerning when electing their leaders. This phenomenon demonstrates a society progressively responsive to national political changes, albeit unintentionally. Consequently, this heightened awareness leads to a greater sense of responsibility for the country's political processes, strengthening democratic accountability in Malaysia.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) presents a significant challenge and opportunity for public administration, particularly when viewed through Islamic influences. Originating conceptually in Germany around 2011, Malaysia formalized its framework nearly a decade later, officially launching it in 2021. This revolution encompasses automation technology, robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT), collectively reshaping global digital landscapes and governance practices.

³³ Ahmad Suhael Adnan and Irwan Shafrizan Ismail, "Kes rasuah skala besar meningkat ketika pandemik - SPRM [The large-scale corruption cases has increased during the pandemic - SPRM]," (Berita Harian, 2021) accessed October 12, 2023, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2021/04/805662/kes-rasuah-skala-besar-meningkat-ketika-pandemik-sprm>.

Looking ahead, the integration of 4IR technologies raises profound implications, including potential job displacement and ethical dilemmas. As automation and technology redefine how public services are delivered, upholding Islamic principles prioritising human dignity and ethical conduct becomes imperative. Islamic teachings emphasize the fair distribution of resources, moral integrity, and societal welfare, guiding policymaking amidst technological advancements.

It is estimated that by 2030, the world's future will be impacted by increasingly pressing challenges related to volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, often referred to as VUCA³⁴. As a result, changes in how public administration operates have also been influenced by this revolution, compelling public servants to adapt promptly.

Looking from another angle, using applications and technology in government operations raises concerns about potential misuse.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Malaysia's public sector swiftly transitioned to online systems to ensure operational continuity, demonstrating resilience amidst the crisis. Regrettably, several public administrators have exploited this opportunity to profit by selling fake vaccination certificates. Furthermore, there are allegations of the government leaking personal data of *MySejahtera*³⁵ users to interested parties. These challenges underscore the pressing need for ethical governance rooted in Islamic justice, transparency, and accountability values.

On a serious note, public administration is poised to significantly impact diminishing job opportunities within the public service sector. The rise of automation machines, supercomputers, driverless vehicles, intelligent robots, and similar technological advancements is set to transform the landscape of

³⁴ Oscar Mauricio Covarrubias Moreno, "Coordinated Governance in the VUCA Scenario," *Administrative Modernisation* 21, no.3 (2021): 393-422.

³⁵ The Government of Malaysia has developed a mobile application called *MySejahtera* to manage COVID-19 outbreaks in the country. Users can monitor their health condition and trace infection areas near their homes. This application requires users to enter their details, raising concerns about data privacy and security.

public service delivery. The reduction in the size of public services poses a substantial challenge, as it will lead to a sudden increase in unemployment among the younger generation. Even more concerning is that future job requirements are expected to align with the demands of an increasingly complex modern technology and digital industry.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) profoundly impacts public administration by integrating automation, AI, and advanced technologies, raising critical ethical considerations. As these technologies become central to governance, questions about human worth, moral integrity, and ethical decision-making based on personal values and religious beliefs grow more complex. Despite these advancements, administrators need help uphold Islamic principles of justice, transparency, and accountability. Data privacy, algorithmic fairness, and the ethical use of AI systems necessitate careful management to ensure equitable public service delivery. Additionally, the transformation in job roles within the public sector highlights concerns about socioeconomic equity and ethical implications. Balancing technological progress with ethical responsibilities rooted in Islamic values is crucial to maintaining fairness and societal welfare in governance practices.

Secularism in Public Administration

The divide between morality and religion has grown to a point where it stands on the brink of the industrial revolution. Examining the early history of public administration in Malaysia, it becomes evident that Western imperialists emphasized secularism significantly³⁶. They relied solely on elements of fact and science in the government, excluding the elements of divinity, faith, and humanity. This approach reflects the influence of British colonialism, which introduced the concept of the nation-state

³⁶ Aldiyarova Zhanat, Nurgul Tutinova, Seifullina Galiya, Zatov Kairat, Bagasharov Kudaiberdi, and Mussabekov Maxat, "Peculiarities of Kazakhstan and Malaysia given the Relationship between State and Religion," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13 no. 1 (2023): 76-88.

based on European models³⁷. During this period, political power derived from religious sources was rejected, and the significance of religious knowledge was downplayed as it was perceived as not contributing to human progress.

Within the specific context of public administration, secularism gained prominence as Western scholars at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution considered advancements in digital technology as a measure of modernization. The role of religion was marginalized, and an organization's success was assessed based on its capacity to undergo digital transformation without compromising the spiritual balance in life. History repeated as Malaysia transitioned from a feudal system to a working democracy. However, the democratic system also marginalized religious influence in government. It is crucial to note that democracy and religion are distinct entities. Religion represents a belief system encompassing all aspects of life, while democracy is just one form of governance. An Islamic government can be established under a monarchy or within a democratic framework that upholds the rights of minorities and marginalized groups.

In the context of public administration, the relationship with democratic principles is profound. Public administration functions based on accountability and transparency, ensuring that administrative decisions are subject to public scrutiny and that administrators are held accountable for their actions. Citizen participation is encouraged through public consultations and participatory processes, enabling direct engagement in policymaking and governance. Upholding the rule of law ensures that public administrators operate within legal frameworks and respect constitutional rights. Public administration plays a pivotal role in translating democratic mandates into practical policies, ensuring equity and inclusiveness in implementation. Checks and balances, overseen by legislative bodies and independent institutions, safeguard against abuses of power and uphold the integrity of administrative processes. Thus, in democratic contexts,

³⁷ Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "The Impact of British Colonialism on Malaysian Islam: An Interpretive Account," *Islam and the Modern Age* XXXV, no. 2 (2004): 21-46.

public administration is committed to effective, accountable, and responsive governance, guided by ethical standards that serve the public interest.

The concept of democracy does not conflict with the teachings of Islam. Recent studies have discussed the definition of the division of powers since the reign of Saidina 'Umar al-Khattab³⁸. During his reign, the political system was divided into three entities: *al-Sultah al-Tasyri'iyyah* (legislative), *al-Sultah Al-Tanfidhiyyah* (executive/government), and *al-Sultah al-Qada'iyyah* (judiciary). In this context, the role of *Khalifah* or the leader is significant in determining the direction of an administration. Indeed, leaders who firmly adhere to religious teachings are shown to manage their responsibilities with confidence and integrity.

Moreover, understanding democracy outlines different explanations according to Western and Islamic perspectives. For example, the main element of democracy, in general, is the people's vote in elections. Without disregarding the importance of the people's voice in determining the fate of the country (through the electoral system), doubts arise about the purpose of this context because the people are not a single bloc; what is born as the "people's voices" is dominated by a majority group that unhealthy elements may support. For example, the very democracy that emerged with a fascist government like Hitler's in Germany participated in the ethnic cleansing of Jews. The loudest voice does not promise the emergence of the best leaders, much less with the disease of apathy widespread in all countries that practice democracy. Western political thinkers themselves, such as Alexis de Tocqueville³⁹ (1805-1859) of France and John Stuart Mill⁴⁰ (1806-1873) of Britain have expressed their concerns about the

³⁸ Bharuddin Che Pa and Farizah Zulkafli, "Pengasingan kuasa menurut perspektif barat dan Islam: Amalannya di Malaysia [Separation of powers according to Western and Islamic perspectives: The Malaysian practice]," *Jurnal Syariah* 22, no. 1 (2014), 21-56.

³⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and two essays on America* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

⁴⁰ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and other essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

possibility of democracy displaying its lousy face in the form of tyranny of the majority.

On the other hand, democracy, as viewed from an Islamic perspective, theoretically embraces all peoples regardless of their geographical location, race, or lineage. The Islamic concept of democracy is comprehensive and universal, in contrast to the observed practices in the Malaysian public service, where signs of favoritism, cronyism, and nepotism have appeared in the allocation of government projects. Paradoxically, Muslim-majority countries are among those where corrupt practices are widespread. In Malaysia, Malay-Muslim politicians have not prioritized combating corruption in their political agendas despite the universally acknowledged wrongness of this act⁴¹.

In the face of the evolving realities driven by digital progress in Malaysia, leaders should prioritize the welfare and interests of the people. They should establish an administrative system that distinguishes the secular roles from the spiritual aspects of life, particularly the role of religion in individual lives. Humans require religion to guide their conduct and lead lives that balance the material and spiritual dimensions. This human need also encompasses the concept of divinity, considerations of sin, and rewards that transcend personal interests and focus on spiritual growth.

Conclusion

While Malaysia has achieved independence, the struggle remains to find a middle ground in state conflicts. Technological revolutions have made the elements of separating religion from the world increasingly apparent. It is worth noting that Islam has never rejected the advancement of knowledge. Knowledge is highly valued in Islam as the key to success in this world and the hereafter. However, Islam does not endorse technological progress that entirely dismisses religious approaches in daily life. Heavy

⁴¹ Mohd Ridzuan Abu Hassan, "Hadi perjelas perbandingan hukuman arak, rasuah [Hadi clarifies the comparison between alcohol punishment and corruption]," (Sinar Harian, 2020) accessed October 10, 2023, <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/article/112642/berita/nasional/hadi-perjelas-perbandingan-hukuman-arak-rasuah>.

reliance on technology that supersedes human roles challenges the natural norms of human beings, which inherently require social relationships and interactions.

Public administration should align with the rapidly evolving world and work towards holistic development that addresses the people's physical, economic, and spiritual needs. From a macro perspective, the administrative system needs refinement, with leaders prioritizing the public's welfare over personal gain. While finding such leaders may pose a challenge, it is not impossible if religious values become the foundation of a leader's principles. It is essential to emphasize that national change at the macro level should focus on enhancing the knowledge and competencies of public servants. Acquiring new knowledge should extend beyond their core responsibilities to encompass current developments at both national and global levels.

In conclusion, the analysis of evolutionary transitions and challenges faced by public administration in Malaysia is expected to shed light on the extent to which Islam underpins the country's governance journey. Despite frequent changes in government, public administration in this nation has consistently managed to fulfill its essential functions in governing the country. Rebuilding public trust is a straightforward endeavor; as long as the government's intention remains focused on ensuring economic, political, and social stability in the country, the support of the people is inevitable. Economic, political, and social stability represents the aspiration of all responsible governments, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. However, the distribution of economic resources and political power should align with the principles of security and justice, mirroring the practical political conduct of the Prophet Muhammad SAW⁴². Public officials must prioritize the welfare of the people as the paramount objective at every level of state administration.

⁴² Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid and Shaik Abdullah Hassan Mydin, "The Prophet (peace be on him) as a Model for Universal Peace and Justice," *Insights: Quarterly Focused on Faith Studies* 2, no. 2-3 (2009): 153-178.

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