

ENHANCING GLOBAL LESSONS IN COMPARATIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: KEY INSIGHTS AND STRATEGIES FOR AFGHANISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the potential of comparative public administration (CPA) frameworks as transformative tools for reforming and strengthening Afghanistan's public administrative systems. The research objectives are to identify adaptable lessons and best practices from successful administrative models worldwide, analyze their applicability to Afghanistan's unique socio-political and economic context, and propose actionable reforms to enhance efficiency, responsiveness, and resilience. The study employs a qualitative research method, conducting a comprehensive review of historical and contemporary literature, case studies, and comparative analyses of administrative systems across different nations. The findings reveal that context-specific adaptations of global best practices can significantly improve institutional capacity, accountability, and public trust in Afghanistan. The research highlights the importance of tailored reforms that align with local needs and international insights, underscoring that strengthening governance structures contributes to a more stable, participatory, and prosperous Afghanistan. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform policymakers and stakeholders about effective reform strategies grounded in comparative analysis, thereby advancing institutional development and good governance in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan; Comparative Public Administration; Public Administration Models, Policy Making, Islamic Perspectives on Public Administration, Reform

INTRODUCTION

For decades, Afghanistan has faced prolonged instability, state fragility, and underdeveloped administrative institutions. The state's capacity to deliver services, implement policies, and enforce laws has been persistently undermined by corruption, politicization of the bureaucracy, and an overdependence on external donors (Barfield, 2010; Rubin, 2002). Public administration is a technical exercise and a foundational pillar for peacebuilding, economic recovery, and national legitimacy.

Following 2001, various reform initiatives were launched, including the establishment of the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCS), the implementation

of the Public Administration Reform (PAR) framework, and the introduction of merit-based hiring practices. Although these initiatives aimed to foster a professional civil service and enhance administrative efficiency, they often struggled with a lack of local ownership, were primarily driven by donors, and faced challenges in ensuring sustainability (World Bank, 2017; Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR, 2021).

A significant criticism of Afghanistan's administrative reform has been the gap between centralized initiatives and local conditions. Donor agencies often supported best practices based on Western

administrative systems, frequently clashing with Afghanistan's socio-political context (Lister, 2007). Public administration was typically approached solely from a capacity-building perspective, lacking adequate focus on governance, legitimacy, and accountability. The collapse of the Afghan Republic in 2021 and the resurgence of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) have sparked both a crisis and a pivotal opportunity. Despite the fragile administrative structures and lack of international support, there is an opportunity to rethink governance models grounded in Afghanistan's realities and informed by lessons from other contexts. Comparative Public Administration (CPA) provides an analytical and empirical framework for exploring governance in diverse settings. It enables scholars and practitioners to analyze how various nations have confronted challenges similar to those faced by Afghanistan, thereby extracting lessons that can be adapted to its unique institutional, religious, cultural, and political circumstances (Heady, 2001; Peters, 2021). By concentrating on fostering contextual innovation rather than merely copying existing models, CPA can support the development of a public administration system that is both efficient and legitimate. This paper examines how CPA frameworks and global administrative experiences can address Afghanistan's pressing governance challenges. It argues that creating an effective, accountable, and resilient public administration system is not only possible but also essential for state-building and fostering public trust in Afghanistan in the aftermath of conflict.

This research primarily aims to extract valuable insights from global public administration practices that can be tailored to fit Afghanistan's specific context, particularly in light of the unique challenges that post-conflict and Islamic nations encounter. By examining various models and successful strategies employed in similar settings, this study aims to highlight methods that align with Afghanistan's socio-political context. Furthermore, this research adopts an exploratory approach that integrates policy analysis, case study comparisons, and normative evaluations, offering a comprehensive understanding of the topic. This will facilitate a nuanced examination of public administration that honors local cultures and governance structures while drawing on successful practices observed internationally.

Theoretical Framework

Comparative Public Administration (CPA) has evolved considerably since its emergence in the mid-20th century, integrating classical models of bureaucratic governance with contemporary reform paradigms. The theoretical foundations discussed in this article provide a multidimensional perspective through which administrative challenges in post-conflict and developing states, such as Afghanistan, can be evaluated and addressed.

Islamic Perspectives on Public Administration:

Islamic public administration offers a unique and historically rich framework that is particularly relevant in the contemporary context of Afghanistan. This framework is grounded in the principles of justice ('adl), accountability (Muhasabah), consultation (Shura), and community service (Ummah). In Afghanistan, these principles have gained renewed attention, especially following the transition of power and the urgent need for effective governance that resonates with the values of its people.

Classical Islamic governance strongly emphasized the moral and ethical responsibilities of rulers and administrators to act with integrity and humility, as highlighted by scholars such as Al-Mawardi (1996). In post-conflict Afghanistan, emphasizing these qualities is vital, as the population longs for leadership that values transparency and ethical decision-making in government affairs.

Moreover, institutions such as the Diwan (bureaucracy) and Hisbah (market regulation and public morality) exemplify a systematic approach to governance that is deeply rooted in Islamic principles, as discussed by Chapra (2000). These institutions can play a vital role in restoring public trust and fostering a climate of accountability in Afghanistan. As the country navigates the complexities of rebuilding its governance structures, integrating these historic principles can help guide the formation of a more just and equitable society.

To embody the essence of Islamic public administration in Afghanistan, ongoing dialogue within communities promoting Ulema Shura must ensure that citizens' voices are heard in the decision-making processes. This participatory approach is vital for establishing a governance system that reflects the collective will of the Afghan people while remaining true to Islam's fundamental values.

Max Weber's Bureaucratic Model:

Weber's concept of the "ideal type" of bureaucracy is fundamental to administrative theory, especially when analyzing Afghanistan's complex governance and development landscape. This theory advocates for a hierarchical organization characterized by formal regulations, technical expertise, and impersonal interactions, which are essential for ensuring predictability and efficiency in any administrative framework (Weber, 1978).

Implementing such a bureaucratic structure presents unique challenges and opportunities in Afghanistan. After decades of conflict, a robust bureaucratic system is essential for fostering stability and rebuilding trust in governmental institutions. Weber's emphasis on meritocracy and legal authority highlights the importance of qualified individuals in positions of power. This is especially relevant for Afghanistan as it seeks to cultivate a new generation of leaders capable of navigating the complexities of a post-conflict society (Peters, 2010).

Moreover, the emphasis on impersonal decision-making is vital in Afghanistan's diverse cultural landscape, where corruption and favoritism have historically undermined governance. By establishing a framework that separates personal relationships from official duties, Afghanistan can enhance administrative legitimacy and create a more equitable system of governance. This shift is essential for rebuilding the state and ensuring all citizens have equal opportunities and resources regardless of background.

Applying Weber's bureaucratic principles in Afghanistan offers a pathway to creating a more stable and transparent administrative system that will support the country's development goals and provide a foundation for lasting peace and security.

Fred Riggs and the Prismatic Society Model:

Fred W. Riggs introduced the concept of the prismatic society to analyze administrative systems in transitional societies, emphasizing the complexities and contradictions that arise when different societal elements coexist. In such contexts, traditional, transitional, and modern elements coalesce within a heterogeneous and often contradictory administrative environment (Riggs, 1964). This model is particularly relevant to Afghanistan, a nation marked by a unique tapestry of social dynamics. Here, modern formal

government structures, often influenced by international norms, intersect intricately with deeply entrenched tribal customs, patron-client networks, and religious influences. The Afghan society reflects a multifaceted landscape where modern governance systems interact with traditional tribal loyalties that may resist formal institutional frameworks.

For instance, while the Afghan government aims to implement administrative practices and legal reforms, the enduring influence of tribal councils (jirgas) often challenges state authority. This can hinder the execution of these reforms. Additionally, the widespread patron-client networks within Afghan culture complicate the relationship between citizens and the state, where loyalty to individuals frequently takes precedence over adherence to abstract legal systems.

Riggs emphasizes that administrative reforms risk superficiality and eventual failure if they do not acknowledge and integrate these dualities. In Afghanistan, ignoring this integration could result in policies that fail to resonate with the realities of everyday life, ultimately undermining any attempts at stable governance. To achieve meaningful reform, policymakers must navigate these complex intersections, recognizing that success depends on carefully balancing modern administrative structures and traditional practices. This necessity highlights the importance of inclusive governance strategies that respect and incorporate local customs and religious norms while promoting modernity, thus paving the way for a more sustainable administrative landscape in Afghanistan.

New Public Management (NPM):

Originating in the 1980s as a response to critiques of traditional bureaucratic practices, New Public Management (NPM) aims to make public administration resemble business operations by focusing on decentralization, competition, privatization, and performance evaluation (Hood, 1991). This model has been widely adopted in developed nations, where it is often associated with increased efficiency and responsiveness in public services. However, applying NPM principles in fragile or post-conflict countries, particularly Afghanistan, raises complex issues requiring in-depth examination.

In Afghanistan, the post-2021 era witnessed a depletion of international aid alongside a concerted effort to rebuild governance structures. The introduction of NPM in this context aimed to stabilize the country and enhance service delivery. However, Afghanistan's unique socio-political landscape, characterized by traditional power dynamics, corruption, and limited institutional capacity, complicates the effectiveness of NPM. For instance, the push towards decentralization may exacerbate regional inequalities and empower local warlords, undermining the central government's authority and legitimacy.

Furthermore, while NPM emphasizes efficiency, critics argue that this focus can come at the expense of equity and accountability. In Afghanistan, where many citizens remain disenfranchised, prioritizing efficiency risks perpetuating systemic inequities. Public services may be directed towards more affluent urban areas, leaving rural populations underserved and marginalized. These dynamics raise critical questions about the legitimacy of governance and the ethical implications of prioritizing business-like efficiency in a context that requires deep social equity and trust in public institutions.

Detractors of NPM in Afghanistan contend that the model's implementation often undermines the very values it seeks to promote, particularly in fragile states where institutional weaknesses are prevalent (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007). As the Islamic Emirate grapples with these challenges, the debate surrounding NPM invites policymakers to consider alternative approaches that prioritize efficiency, accountability, and inclusivity, aiming for a more equitable and stable future for all Afghans.

Post-NPM and the Neo-Weberian State:

The post-NPM period introduces the Neo-Weberian State, which combines performance-driven reforms with fundamental bureaucratic principles to address NPM's shortcomings. This model is particularly relevant in Afghanistan, given the country's unique socio-political landscape shaped by decades of conflict and instability. The Neo-Weberian State advocates for modernization within the public sector while emphasizing the importance of public service, legality, and robust institutional structures (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011).

In Afghanistan's post-conflict scenario, where the state is rebuilding its institutions, the hybrid strategy offered by the Neo-Weberian State can facilitate the delicate balance between innovation and continuity. The Islamic Emirate in 2025 can adopt performance-driven reforms that promote efficiency and responsiveness to citizens' needs while firmly rooting these changes within established bureaucratic traditions that respect the country's legal framework and public service ethos.

This approach is particularly vital in Afghanistan, where years of war and corruption have severely undermined public trust in governmental institutions. By integrating modernization efforts with a firm adherence to institutional integrity and public accountability, Afghanistan can foster a more effective governance framework that not only attracts international support but also promotes sustainable development and stability in the long term. Thus, the Neo-Weberian State serves as a promising blueprint for Afghanistan to rebuild its institutions in a manner that respects both progress and its historical legacy.

Brian Levy's Governance Spectrum:

Brian Levy's governance framework provides a nuanced classification of governance regimes, positioning them along a spectrum that ranges from personalized systems, characterized by patronage and individual influence, to rules-based systems, which are meritocratic and institutionalized. Levy argues that any reform initiatives must be aligned with the existing governance context to be effective; he warns that a hasty transition to rules-based systems in environments where personalization is entrenched can lead to adverse and counterproductive outcomes (Levy, 2014). This insight speaks volumes about understanding the political landscape before implementing changes. Furthermore, Levy introduces the concept of "working with the grain," advocating for gradual modifications that are politically feasible rather than radical shifts. This approach is particularly relevant in Afghanistan's complex hybrid political structure, where the intertwining of traditional and modern governance principles demands careful navigation to ensure that reforms are sustainable and embraced by the local political climate.

Institutional Isomorphism and Contextual Adaptation:

Utilizing neo-institutional theory, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describe how organizations, such as governments, tend to adopt comparable structures influenced by coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures. In Afghanistan, reforms frequently mirrored donor-driven isomorphism, lacking sufficient contextual adaptation. CPA scholarship cautions against unreflective policy transfer, promoting indigenous models considering political economy realities and historical legacies (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000).

Overall, the Qur'an and Hadith emphasize the significance of consultation and justice in decision-making (Qur'an 42:38), the ban on corruption

(Qur'an 2:188), and the need for accountability to Allah regarding public responsibilities (Hadith reported in Sahih Bukhari). Modern Islamic scholars propose blending contemporary administrative methods with Islamic ethical principles to enhance effectiveness and legitimacy (Kamali, 2008).

In 2025, integrating Islamic administrative principles with contemporary CPA theories in Afghanistan's socio-religious context could strengthen public trust and institutional legitimacy. This integration demands careful consideration to ensure that core values such as transparency, justice, and collective welfare are incorporated into state structures, all while respecting professional standards and international norms.

Table 1

Key Theoretical Models in Public Administration and Their Relevance to Afghanistan

<i>Theoretical Model</i>	<i>Key Proponents</i>	<i>Core Concepts and Focus</i>	<i>Relevance to Afghanistan</i>
Islamic Public Administration	AlMawardi, Kamali, Chapra et al.	Justice, accountability (muhasabah), consultation (shura), service to ummah	Cultural legitimacy and ethical governance framework
Bureaucratic Model	Max Weber	Hierarchical authority, meritocracy, rules-based operation	Foundation for professionalized civil service
Prismatic Society Theory	Fred W. Riggs	Coexistence of traditional and modern institutions, institutional dualism	Captures Afghanistan's hybrid formal-informal governance
New Public Management (NPM)	Christopher Hood	Efficiency, performance indicators, decentralization, privatization	Potential model for reform, with caution in fragile states
Neo-Weberian State / Post-NPM	Pollitt & Bouckaert	Integrates NPM efficiency with public service ethos and rule of law	Hybrid solution for stability and modernization
Governance Spectrum	Brian Levy	Personalized vs. rules-based systems, working with the grain	Realistic reform path for hybrid governance settings
Institutional Isomorphism	DiMaggio & Powell	External influence on institutional design, policy transfer	Critique of donor-driven reform without contextual adaptation

Note. Theoretical models offer diverse lenses to interpret Afghanistan's administrative challenges and identify context-sensitive reform strategies.

In conclusion, the theories discussed provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by Afghanistan, a country characterized by decades of conflict, political instability, and socio-economic struggles, and the

avenues for effective public administration reform. The context of Afghanistan emphasizes the critical need to pinpoint areas needing reform, delineate the strategies for execution, and establish the essential conditions for successful implementation. This study is underpinned by a strategically cohesive framework that integrates Weberian structure, Riggsian hybridity, NPM flexibility, Levy's political realism, and Islamic ethical governance, thus offering a robust theoretical basis for addressing Afghanistan's public administration challenges within its unique historical and cultural landscape.

Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) approach, grounded in a thorough review of secondary data and a broad theoretical synthesis. Its main goal is to derive valuable insights from global public administration practices, which can be tailored to Afghanistan's context, especially given the specific challenges faced by post-conflict and Islamic nations. The analysis proceeds in three stages:

1- Data Collection and Selection of Cases

Secondary data, such as academic literature, policy reports, and case documentation, were systematically examined. Cases were chosen according to three specific criteria:

- A. Relevance to post-conflict or transitional governance,
- B. Demonstrated success in improving governance, and
- C. Applicability to Afghanistan's socio-political and Islamic context.

D.

2- Comparative Analysis Process:

The selected case studies (e.g., Rwanda, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey) were analyzed through a structured, focused comparison method. Each case was evaluated across a consistent set of analytical dimensions.

- Governance model and decentralization approach,
- Mechanisms of accountability and transparency,
- Degree of local participation,
- Integration of cultural/religious norms in governance, and

- Measurable outcomes in terms of stability and service delivery.

This cross-case comparison enabled the identification of patterns, similarities, and differences that inform lesson extraction.

2- Analytical Tools and Frameworks for Synthesizing Lessons: To synthesize findings, the study applied:

- Thematic content analysis to identify recurring governance strategies,
- Normative evaluation to assess the alignment of these strategies with Afghanistan's cultural and institutional realities, and
- A theoretical lens grounded in both public administration theory and Islamic governance principles to ensure contextual relevance.

Throughout this process, lessons were identified by assessing which governance practices regularly resulted in positive outcomes and under what conditions they could be adjusted for Afghanistan. Additionally, this research is exploratory, integrating policy analysis, case study comparison, and normative evaluation elements to offer a comprehensive understanding of the subject. This approach enables a nuanced examination of public administration that respects local cultures and governance frameworks while drawing insights from successful international practices.

Data Sources:

The primary data sources consist of scholarly literature, international policy reports, government publications, and institutional evaluations. Key references were obtained from the World Bank, UNDP, SIGAR, Integrity Watch Afghanistan, and academic journals focused on public administration and governance.

Analytical Framework:

Several key Comparative Public Administration (CPA) theories influence this study's analytical perspective, encompassing both classical and contemporary views. These theories include Islamic administrative principles that merge ethical and cultural factors into public administration, Weber's model of bureaucracy that highlights a clear organizational hierarchy; Riggs' prismatic society

theory, which addresses the complexities of governance within diverse societies; New Public Management (NPM), emphasizing efficiency and effectiveness in public services; and the Neo-Weberian State model, which reinterprets and adjusts Weberian principles for contemporary governance challenges. This theoretical framework guides the comparative analysis, offering a more nuanced understanding of diverse administrative practices and extracting relevant insights to inform present public management strategies.

Case Selection:

Countries were carefully chosen for case comparison due to their significant relevance to the socio-political and administrative challenges currently faced by Afghanistan. This selection includes a variety of contexts, such as post-conflict nations like Rwanda and Georgia, which have undergone significant transformations and reforms aimed at rebuilding their governance structures. Additionally, the analysis features Islamic-majority states known for their administrative innovations, specifically Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and the United Arab Emirates. These countries have implemented unique strategies to enhance public administration while navigating the complexities of their sociopolitical landscapes. Lastly, hybrid governance systems, exemplified by Turkey, provide another layer of insight, showcasing how different governance models can impact state-building efforts. These cases illustrate diverse yet informative experiences that can contribute to building a capable and legitimate public administration in Afghanistan.

Evaluation Criteria:

Reform success is evaluated across five core dimensions:

1. Administrative capacity and merit-based recruitment
2. Public sector innovation and digital governance
3. Anti-corruption and accountability mechanisms
4. Decentralization and local governance
5. Integration of cultural and religious legitimacy

Limitations:

Due to this study's conceptual nature and reliance on secondary data, limitations include potential biases in

source materials, a lack of access to primary Afghan administrative data, and questions regarding the generalizability of case study lessons. The analysis does not employ statistical methods or fieldwork but remains grounded in an extensive review of literature and policy.

This methodology allows for developing grounded, theoretically informed recommendations that respond to Afghanistan's administrative context's unique challenges.

Global Lessons in Comparative Public Administration

Examining the trajectories of countries that have effectively navigated the challenges of transitioning from conflict, authoritarianism, or underdevelopment can yield valuable lessons for Afghanistan's administrative capacity development. For instance, countries like Rwanda, which emerged from a devastating civil conflict, focused on rebuilding their institutions through strong leadership, international partnership, and grassroots community engagement. In accommodating the transition from apartheid, South Africa implemented significant reforms to establish an inclusive government framework that addressed historical injustices and promoted national unity and stability (Lodge, 1994; Seekings & Natrass, 2005). These examples illustrate the importance of building resilient institutions that govern effectively and equitably. By analyzing these case studies, Afghanistan can identify strategies and approaches that align with its unique context, thereby enabling a more realistic and actionable pathway towards enhancing its administrative framework. This knowledge can inform policy-making and implementation, ensuring that efforts to strengthen governance are sustainable and reflective of the needs and aspirations of the Afghan people.

Rwanda: After the 1994 genocide, Rwanda implemented centralized performance management through the Imihigo system—an annual contract-based performance plan between the central and local government. Reforms focused on anti-corruption, accountability, and rebuilding trust through the delivery of public services (Golooba-Mutebi & Booth, 2013).

Since the resurgence of the Islamic Emirate in August 2021, Afghanistan has faced immense challenges in governance, characterized by fragmented structures, a

reliance on external aid, and ongoing political turmoil. Efforts to implement reforms, such as initiatives aimed at enhancing merit-based recruitment and institutional effectiveness, have been significantly hampered by entrenched patronage systems, inadequate enforcement of policies, and a marked absence of sustainable political drive. This contrasts sharply with Rwanda's unified and purpose-oriented strategy. Afghanistan grapples with a lack of coordination among government entities, resulting in erratic public service delivery and diminished trust among citizens.

Georgia's transformation post-2003 Rose Revolution starkly contrasts with Afghanistan's ongoing governance and service delivery challenges. After the Rose Revolution, Georgia embraced extensive reforms that not only digitalized public services but also restructured its police force and overhauled its tax system (Smith, 2022). This comprehensive approach was underpinned by a robust political will and a commitment to technocratic leadership, which facilitated a significant reduction in corruption and markedly improved the efficiency of services, as reported by the World Bank in 2012.

In the wake of the U.S. withdrawal in 2021, Afghanistan has faced significant challenges in reform and stability (International Crisis Group, 2021). The abrupt change in governance led to a resurgence of the Islamic Emirate, complicating international efforts for modernization and reform (United Nations, 2021). While there had been prior international support to establish functional institutions and reduce corruption, the current environment is marked by increased conflict and political fragmentation (World Bank, 2022). The intricate tribal dynamics and the lack of international support have severely hindered any attempts to implement effective governance and sustainable reforms in the country.

Furthermore, while Georgia can leverage its clear trajectory toward good governance and a commitment to reform, Afghanistan remains mired in economic instability that hampers its ability to achieve long-term strategic goals. Therefore, the outcomes observed in Georgia underscore the importance of stable governance, political dedication, and public trust in bringing about meaningful change –realities that remain elusive in the Afghan context.

Indonesia: Since 1998, Indonesia has engaged in a deep process of democratic decentralization, giving

power to local governments while retaining some central oversight (World Bank, 2020). The reforms included fiscal decentralization, education service delivery, and civil service reform (ADB, 2019). Success has been uneven but instructive in showing how decentralization must be paired with the financial autonomy necessary to address priorities such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure development (OECD, 2021). However, this provides a foundation for understanding the complexities and outcomes of Indonesia's decentralization process, including both positive results and risks such as corruption (Transparency International, 2022).

Indonesia's experiences highlight the importance of balancing local empowerment with national integrity and oversight. As Afghanistan navigates its path toward decentralization, it must also create a framework for collaboration between local and central governments to ensure that decentralization efforts contribute to national cohesion and development. This will require a commitment to building the capacities of all levels of governance while fostering a political culture that encourages trust and cooperation among governmental entities and the communities they serve.

Malaysia: Malaysia has blended Western administrative practices with Islamic governance principles through the concept of "Islam Hadhari" (civilizational Islam), which emphasizes integrity, transparency, and good governance. This approach can offer insights for Afghanistan, a nation facing ongoing governance challenges. For instance, Afghanistan has struggled with corruption and inefficiency in administrative structures, similar to the issues Malaysia aimed to address through its reforms. In Afghanistan, initiatives such as the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) have sought to improve public financial management and accountability, which could parallel Malaysia's efforts through institutions like the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC). Moreover, the emphasis on good governance in both contexts highlights the necessity for integrity and transparency in administrative practices, fostering trust among citizens (Mansoor, 2012). Afghanistan's public institutions and e-government strategies could benefit from the Malaysian experience, enhancing service delivery and improving citizen engagement in governance processes (World Bank, 2020).

Turkey: Historically, Turkey has built on the Ottoman administrative legacy while incorporating modern republican structures. Its public administration reforms emphasized central planning, professional civil service training, and institutional secularism. In recent years, Turkey's use of digital governance platforms and its centralized approach to disaster management have served as case studies in state capacity (Heper, 2001).

In contrast, Afghanistan's administrative evolution has faced considerable challenges, particularly since the onset of decades-long conflict and instability. Unlike Turkey, which has successfully integrated aspects of its historical legacy into a contemporary governance model, Afghanistan's political landscape has been frequently upheaved by civil strife, leading to a lack of consistent governance practices. Efforts to establish a cohesive public administration have been hampered by the influence of various factions and a lack of extensive civil service infrastructure.

While Turkey has leveraged digital governance to improve state capacity and citizen engagement, Afghanistan has struggled with implementing such technologies, primarily due to issues related to security, infrastructure, and access to education. Turkey's approach to disaster management, characterized by centralized coordination and resource allocation, starkly contrasts with Afghanistan's fragmented response mechanisms, often exacerbated by geopolitical tensions and limited government capacity. As a result, the lessons gleaned from Turkey's successes in public administration reform could offer valuable insights for Afghanistan as it seeks to establish more effective governance structures in the wake of ongoing challenges (Heper, 2001; Zubair, 2023).

United Arab Emirates (UAE): The UAE has demonstrated a successful hybrid approach to public sector innovation, blending Islamic values with cutting-edge administrative practices (Al Abed & Hellyer, 2001). This strategic amalgamation has allowed for rapid advancements in governance, particularly through initiatives like the UAE Vision 2021, which focuses on innovative government reforms to enhance efficiency, promote innovation, and deliver citizen-centric services within a culturally rooted framework (Al Abed & Hellyer, 2001). The leadership-driven nature of these reforms has played a crucial role in fostering an environment that supports

traditional values and modern administrative capabilities.

In contrast, Afghanistan faces significant challenges in its public sector innovation due to prolonged political instability, economic hardship, and socio-cultural barriers (World Bank, 2020). While Afghanistan also recognizes the importance of Islamic values, applying these principles in governance has often been hindered by conflict and lack of institutional continuity (Khan, 2019). The absence of a coherent vision akin to the UAE Vision 2021 has resulted in fragmented government initiatives, with insufficient emphasis on leadership-driven reforms or citizen engagement.

Moreover, Afghanistan's limited resources and infrastructure impede the adoption of advanced administrative practices that could facilitate better governance (International Crisis Group, 2021). Innovations that have worked effectively in the UAE, such as e-governance and digital services, are much less prevalent in Afghanistan, where traditional bureaucratic processes often dominate (UNDP, 2018). Consequently, while the UAE exemplifies a successful blend of tradition and modernity in its governance strategies, Afghanistan's public sector innovation struggles to find a path that fosters similar levels of efficiency and citizen involvement, mainly due to its challenging context and lack of capacity.

Saudi Arabia: Through Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia is reforming its public sector by enhancing transparency, diversifying the economy, and digitizing services. Initiatives such as the National Transformation Program (NTP) promote accountability, performance management, and reduction of bureaucratic inefficiencies while aligning governance structures that promote transparency and accountability. The move towards digitizing services can be especially relevant, as it could improve efficiency in public service delivery and foster trust among citizens. (Saudi Vision 2030, National Transformation Program)

Furthermore, as Saudi Arabia aligns its governance reforms with Islamic and national values, Afghanistan can similarly work to embed its own cultural and religious principles into governance frameworks. By rebuilding its institutions, developing a diverse economy, and implementing robust public sector reforms, Afghanistan can create a more stable and prosperous future for its people, mirroring some of the aspirations laid out in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

Utilizing the experiences and initiatives from Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan may find pathways to achieve

effective governance and sustainable economic development.

Table 2

Comparative Public Administration (CPA) Case Studies and Their Relevance to Afghanistan.

Country	Reform Focus	Key Strategies / Institutions	Relevance to Afghanistan
Rwanda	Post-conflict recovery & anti-corruption	Imihigo performance contracts, central monitoring	Model for performance-based planning
Georgia	Governance modernization	Police reform, e-taxation, service digitization	Anti-corruption and digital service delivery
Indonesia	Decentralization and participatory governance	Democratic local elections, community budgeting	Provincial empowerment & local participation
Malaysia	Hybrid Islamic-modern governance	MAMPU, Islam Hadhari, e-Government	Islamic ethics in modern public admin
Saudi Arabia	Bureaucratic transformation via Vision 2030	NTP, digital portals, KPI-based evaluation	Strategic vision with Islamic alignment
UAE	Innovation and top-down modernization	Smart Government, centralized innovation agenda	ICT integration and leadership-driven reform
Turkey	Ottoman legacy and modernization	E-Government Gateway, professional civil service recruitment	Tradition-modernization balance

Note. These case studies highlight diverse yet applicable governance innovations that can inform Afghanistan's administrative reform trajectory.

The conclusion reveals that institutional transformation is contingent upon a dual approach integrating technocratic expertise with steadfast political commitment. Islamic-majority countries provide significant lessons on how Islamic ethical frameworks can harmoniously align with contemporary governance practices. Afghanistan, with its rich Islamic heritage, has the potential to benefit substantially by thoughtfully adapting and merging these models to fit its unique sociopolitical and cultural landscape.

Afghanistan's Administrative Landscape

As of 2025, Afghanistan's public administration continues to be marked by fragmentation and weak

institutions, exacerbated by the ongoing challenges of transitioning from a historically troubled governance framework (World Bank, 2023). Following the resurgence of the IEA in 2021, the dynamics of formal and informal power structures have shifted significantly, leading to an environment where state authority is increasingly challenged (International Crisis Group, 2023). While the international community's previous state-building efforts aimed to create a cohesive administrative framework, these initiatives now face heightened obstacles due to limited engagement and support, primarily influenced by geopolitical considerations. The lack of contextual sensitivity and effective coordination remains a critical impediment to meaningful governance reform. Furthermore, there is a growing recognition of the importance of local governance structures and community-led initiatives, which could play a vital role

in overcoming some of the entrenched issues within Afghan public administration (Rubin, 2002; Lister, 2007).

The core characteristics of Afghanistan's administrative landscape include:

Fragmented Authority: Ministries and public agencies continue to operate in silos, facing challenges such as overlapping mandates, inadequate communication, and a lack of cohesive planning. Although there have been advancements in governance structures at the provincial and district levels, empowerment remains inconsistent, often leaning on informal patronage networks rather than strengthening institutional authority (World Bank, 2023).

Patronage and Political Interference Post-2021: Since the revival of the Islamic Emirate in 2021, recruitment and promotion within the civil service have increasingly been influenced by ethnic, political, or personal affiliations rather than individual merit. The prioritization of political loyalty in public office has further eroded the professionalism and neutrality of the bureaucracy, raising concerns about governance and effectiveness in the current administration (Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 2023).

Donor Dependency and Parallel Systems: Donor funding constituted a significant part of the government budget, leading to the creation of parallel administrative systems—project implementation units (PIUs), external consultants, and donor-led reform initiatives—that weakened state ownership and institutional learning (SIGAR, 2021).

Legal Ambiguity and Weak Rule of Law Post-2021: The inconsistent application of laws and overlapping jurisdictions between the judiciary and executive continue to create administrative confusion. Furthermore, the lack of effective administrative courts has exacerbated issues related to grievance redress and bureaucratic accountability in the current context (Barfield, 2023).

Ongoing Challenges in Monitoring and Evaluation: Following 2021, many ministries continue to face significant gaps in their internal monitoring mechanisms and performance-based appraisal systems. While public financial management reforms have made progress, key areas such as auditing, evaluation, and results-based planning continue to lag, hindering the effective implementation of governance and accountability measures. Recent assessments indicate that without an enhanced focus on these components, the overall efficacy of reforms will likely remain limited (World Bank, 2023).

Influence of Informal Institutions: Following the 2021 political changes, traditional structures such as local jirgas, tribal councils, and religious networks have become increasingly significant in governance, particularly in rural areas. With formal state institutions facing challenges, these actors have assumed greater responsibilities in mediating administrative functions, particularly in dispute resolution, land management, and security coordination (Giustozzi, 2023). Their influence reflects a shift towards localized power dynamics, as communities navigate the implications of the shifting political landscape.

Table 3
Core Characteristics of Afghanistan's Administrative Landscape

Characteristic	Description
Fragmented Authority	Ministries and agencies operate in silos with overlapping mandates and poor interagency coordination.
Patronage and Political Interference	Recruitment and appointments based on political, ethnic, or personal affiliations.
Donor Dependency and Parallel Systems	Heavy reliance on foreign aid created parallel structures that undermined state ownership.
Legal Ambiguity and Weak Rule of Law	Overlapping legal systems and poor enforcement led to administrative uncertainty.
Limited Monitoring and Evaluation	Lack of performance-based assessments and institutional accountability frameworks.

Influence of Informal Institutions	Strong role of tribal, religious, and customary actors in governance, especially in rural areas.
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Note. These characteristics reflect systemic challenges that have historically hindered administrative cohesion and reform implementation in Afghanistan. Despite these challenges, Afghanistan did experience pockets of reform. The IARCSC introduced merit-based recruitment frameworks and standardized testing. The Ministry of Finance made gains in budgeting and fiscal transparency. However, these successes were often not scaled or institutionalized. With the resurgence of the IEA in 2021, Afghanistan faces an uncertain administrative future and a potential opportunity to reconstruct governance in a more grounded and internally driven manner.

Recommendations for Reform

Based on comparative and contextual analysis, the following strategic recommendations are proposed to establish a more effective and legitimate public administration in Afghanistan:

- 1. Institutionalize Meritocracy and Professionalism:** In the wake of the 2021 developments, it is critical to further strengthen and depoliticize the civil service by reinforcing the mandate of an independent Public Service Commission. Recruitment and promotion should now reflect a more transparent and competitive process, incorporating technology to enhance efficiency, and ensuring robust oversight from civil society and media watchdogs. This adaptation meets the current demands for accountability and integrity, aligning with contemporary governance standards (UNDP, 2023).
- 2. Develop an Integrated Digital Governance Framework:** Create a unified national e-governance platform to manage civil service records, improve service delivery, oversee public procurement, and facilitate citizen feedback. Emphasizing mobile technology in rural areas is essential for enhancing accessibility and building trust among citizens, particularly in the current socio-political climate (World Bank, 2022).
- 3. Adopt a Phased and Contextualized Decentralization Strategy:** Empower provinces through conditional fiscal transfers, administrative authority, and strong capacity-

building programs. Local Ulema councils (Shuras) should be formally integrated into decision-making structures.

- 4. Build Human Capital through Public Sector Training:** Re-establish a National Institute for Public Administration to train mid- and senior-level officials in planning, leadership, Islamic ethics, and modern governance principles. Create exchange programs with successful countries like Indonesia or Malaysia.
 - 5. Strengthen Oversight and Anti-Corruption Institutions:** Reinforce bodies such as the Supreme Audit Office and the Anti-Corruption Commission by ensuring they have adequate financial independence and legal authority to operate effectively. Introduce annual integrity reviews and transparent public reporting mechanisms to enhance accountability and build public trust in these institutions, fostering a culture of integrity and governance. These measures are critical to addressing the current political and economic challenges (SIGAR, 2021).
 - 6. Promote Inclusive Governance:** Ensure equitable representation of ethnic minorities and marginalized groups in public administration. Implement hiring quotas and workplace policies.
 - 7. Integrate Islamic Governance Principles:** Infuse public administration ethics with Islamic values of justice, consultation (Shura), and accountability. Institutions such as the Economy Ministry or community ombudsperson offices can be modernized and repurposed for oversight roles.
 - 8. Establish a Unified Policy Coordination Mechanism:** Create a Cabinet-level Strategic Reform Unit to harmonize policy development across ministries, monitor implementation, and liaise with regional and international partners.
- Drawing on comparative and contextual analysis, the subsequent strategic recommendations seek to create a more efficient and credible public administration system in Afghanistan. Each recommendation outlines its goals and strategic focus.

Table 4
Strategic Reform Actions in Public Administration

Reform Area	Strategic Action	Supporting Institutions / Examples
Meritocracy & Professionalism	Strengthen and depoliticize civil service via independent Public Service Commission; merit-based recruitment.	UNDP (2023), Civil Society, Media Watchdogs
Integrated Digital Governance	Create a national e-governance platform; use mobile tech for rural access.	World Bank (2022)
Decentralization Strategy	Phase-wise devolution of fiscal and administrative powers; integrate local shuras.	Local Councils, Capacity Building Programs
Public Sector Training	Rebuild National Institute for Public Administration; promote regional exchanges.	Indonesia, Malaysia Models
Oversight & Anti-Corruption	Reinforce audit bodies and anti-corruption commissions; conduct annual integrity reviews.	SIGAR (2021), Supreme Audit Office
Inclusive Governance	Ensure representation of women and minorities; apply gender-sensitive policies.	Workplace Quotas, Diversity Policies
Islamic Governance Principles	Promote justice, consultation, accountability through Islamic frameworks like Hisbah.	Islamic Ethics, Community Ombudsperson
Policy Coordination	Establish a Cabinet-level Strategic Reform Unit to align and monitor reforms.	Strategic Reform Unit, Regional Partners

Note. Strategic reform actions are based on comparative governance models and aligned with international best practices in public administration. These reforms must be tailored to the specific context, politically achievable, and locally supported. A participatory national consultation process involving religious scholars, tribal elders, civil society, women, and youth groups will be essential to ensure legitimacy and buy-in.

Conclusion

In the quest for a revitalized public administration, Afghanistan must prioritize establishing a governance framework grounded in legitimacy and public trust. This foundation is essential to strengthen the relationship between the state and its citizens,

fostering a sense of ownership and participation among the populace. Ensuring that the voices of diverse communities are heard can bridge gaps and foster cooperation, making governance a top-down approach that is inclusive and integrative. By involving citizens in decision-making processes, Afghanistan can create a system that truly reflects the aspirations and needs of its people, thereby enhancing the overall efficacy of its administrative functions. Furthermore, using digital tools and technologies effectively can drive administrative reform. In an era increasingly defined by innovation, Afghanistan can leverage digital platforms to improve transparency, share information, and enhance service delivery. Using tools like e-governance and digital public services will simplify processes and empower citizens

by giving them accessible ways to voice concerns and hold public servants accountable. This move toward a technology-focused public administration can greatly boost trust and interaction between the government and its people, leading to a more informed and engaged population.

Finally, the road to rebuilding Afghanistan's public administration must be underpinned by continuous learning and adaptation. The global landscape is ever-evolving, and so are the challenges that arise within it. Engaging in a culture of learning, through training, knowledge exchange, and partnerships with international organizations, can help cultivate a skilled workforce dedicated to ethical governance practices. Emphasizing ongoing professional development not only fosters individual growth but also enhances the collective capacity of the administration. With this approach, Afghanistan can sustain its reform efforts, ensuring it is resilient and equipped to meet future challenges while promoting national values and regional stability.

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