



## ISLAMIC WAQF GOVERNANCE: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS FROM THE PROPHETIC ERA TO THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the evolution of waqf governance from the Prophet's era to the Ottoman Empire to derive historical principles relevant for modern Islamic economic institutions. Using qualitative methods based on classical sources, archival records, and contemporary research, the analysis shows that waqf governance developed continuously: starting with ethical stewardship in the Prophet's era, followed by legal codification under the Rashidun, bureaucratic oversight during the Umayyad period, and more systematic diversification in the Abbasid and Mamluk eras. The Ottoman Empire reached the most advanced stage through centralized ministries, *vakfiye* documentation, and cash waqf instruments. Overall, history shows that waqf governance has been adaptive, combining ethical values with institutional and financial innovation. The study recommends that modern waqf institutions strengthen documentation, standardization, asset productivity, and financial innovation to enhance transparency and socio-economic impact.

**Keywords:** Islamic Waqf Governance; Historical Analysis; Institutional Development; Islamic Economics; Ottoman Empire; Prophetic Era

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## INTRODUCTION

In the context of contemporary economic instability, waqf has reemerged as a vital Islamic social financial instrument with significant potential to enhance socio-economic welfare (Elmahgop et al., 2025). Beyond its spiritual value, waqf represents a governance-based economic mechanism that can support education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation when managed through accountable and sustainable frameworks (Judijanto et al., 2025). However, many waqf assets across Muslim societies remain underutilized or limited to ritual functions (*ibadah mahdhah*), often due to weak governance structures, insufficient managerial capacity among *nāẓir*, and a limited understanding of waqf's broader economic role (Caniago & Satibi, 2024; Irma Suryani Lubis & Muslim Marpaung, 2025; Sofiandi, 2019). These challenges highlight the need to revisit historical governance models to derive principles that can strengthen modern waqf institutions.

Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, holds substantial potential to position waqf as a strategic pillar of socio-economic development (Wahyudi et al., 2024). The Directorate of Zakat and Waqf Empowerment reports 387,126 waqf land assets covering more than 51,000 hectares, alongside an estimated IDR 1.38 trillion in annual cash waqf potential (Direktorat Pemberdayaan Zakat dan Wakaf, 2025). Despite this extensive asset base, governance limitations continue to hinder optimal economic contribution (Amrullah et al., 2022). Strengthening waqf governance is therefore essential to transform these assets into sustainable drivers of national development.

Historically, the practice of waqf long predates Islam, although earlier forms differed in purpose and structure (Murat, 1998; Shaikh, 2018). With the advent of Islam, waqf was institutionalized by the Prophet Muhammad as a form of enduring charity (*ṣadaqah jāriyah*), marking a transition from informal philanthropy to structured asset management for communal benefit (Syamsuri et al., 2021). This early institutionalization laid the ethical and administrative foundations that shaped waqf governance across subsequent Islamic eras.

During the classical Islamic period, especially from the Abbasid era onward, waqf became a cornerstone of public finance, supporting educational institutions, healthcare systems, libraries, and urban infrastructure (Kasdi et al., 2022; Majeed & Zanib, 2016). Notably, universities such as Al-Azhar and public facilities across Baghdad operated sustainably through waqf endowments. The Ottoman Empire later advanced the sophistication of waqf governance by codifying legal procedures, establishing ministries dedicated to waqf affairs, and pioneering financial innovations such as cash waqf and standardized *vakfiye* documentation (Iskandar, 2022). This marked the transition of waqf from a community-based mechanism to a bureaucratically regulated and financially integrated institution.

Although previous studies have examined waqf development within particular dynasties or regions, most remain descriptive and do not connect governance evolution across Islamic history (Erie, 2018). Comparative historical analyses that trace the continuity and transformation of waqf governance from the Prophetic era to the Ottoman Empire are still limited (Ayub et al., 2024a). This creates a research gap regarding how historical governance models have shaped institutional development, accountability mechanisms, and financial sustainability in Islamic economics. Bridging this gap is essential for designing modern waqf governance frameworks consistent with Islamic ethical values and contemporary financial management principles.

The foundational governance values introduced by the Prophet Muhammad emphasized justice, transparency, and public benefit (Sherrindra Avedta, 2023). These principles were strengthened by the Companions through the institutionalization of waqf for public utilities, education, and poverty relief. Subsequent dynasties expanded waqf





administration by formalizing registries, regulating asset distribution, and appointing *qāḍī* as supervisors (Wagay & Nabi, 2025). This governance trajectory culminated in the Ottoman system, which institutionalized waqf through bureaucratic structures, codified regulations, and innovative financial mechanisms.

Understanding these historical transitions provides important insights into institutional sustainability within Islamic economics. The evolution from ethics-based voluntary charity to legally codified and financially sophisticated governance illustrates the adaptability of waqf as a socio-economic institution (Ayub et al., 2024b). Analyzing these governance patterns enables policymakers, regulators, and *nāẓir* institutions to identify historically tested principles that can enhance transparency, accountability, and managerial efficiency in contemporary waqf management.

Therefore, this study aims to provide a historical analysis of Islamic waqf governance from the Prophetic era to the Ottoman Empire, with a specific focus on institutional development and its relevance to modern Islamic economics. Using a historical-analytical approach, this research seeks to identify governance principles that demonstrate continuity and transformation across Islamic history. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the discourse on Islamic social finance and offer practical insights for strengthening modern waqf governance toward long-term socio-economic sustainability.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature consistently highlights that waqf governance is rooted in ethical principles established during the Prophetic and early Caliphal eras. Core values such as accountability, justice, transparency, documentation, and public benefit are traced to foundational practices including the Prophet's early waqf initiatives and 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's precedent with the Khaibar land (Amrullah et al., 2022; Syamsuri et al., 2021; Tursunov & Khasanov, 2025). Scholars argue that these normative principles formed the conceptual basis for later institutionalization, emphasizing that waqf functioned not merely as charity but as a structured socio-economic mechanism.

A second major theme concerns the evolution of administrative structures supporting waqf governance. Studies show that as Muslim societies expanded, waqf transitioned from private philanthropy into a semi-public, regulated institution. During the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, governance mechanisms such as asset registration, trustee appointments, *qāḍī* supervision, and bureaucratic waqf offices including *Shadr al-Wuqūf* became prominent (Asrohah, 2012; Indah Widya Jaya Putri Nasution, 2024). These developments illustrate how waqf administration adapted to growing socio-economic complexity, enabling systematic allocation of resources to education, infrastructure, and public welfare (Majeed & Zanib, 2016).

Another stream of literature emphasizes legal standardization as a driver of governance refinement. The Mamluk and Ottoman periods exhibit the most advanced forms of legal documentation, including the widespread use of the vakfiye as a standardized legal deed and the establishment of structured supervisory hierarchies (Kasdi et al., 2022; Kayadibi et al., 2017). Codified waqf regulations under the Ottomans strengthened trustee accountability and created predictable administrative procedures, reflecting the role of law in institutional stability.

Research also highlights that waqf governance has historically incorporated financial innovation to enhance asset productivity. Studies show that waqf portfolios expanded to include agricultural land, commercial buildings, public facilities, and later, cash waqf pioneered during the Ottoman era to integrate endowments into broader financial networks





(Kuran, 2001). These innovations are interpreted as adaptive responses to economic pressures, demonstrating waqf’s capacity to function as a proto-welfare system and fiscal stabilizer.

Current scholarship draws links between classical governance models and modern waqf institution building. Themes such as documentation, centralized oversight, asset productivity, and legal clarity are widely cited as essential for strengthening contemporary waqf management (BI et al., 2018; Pitchay et al., 2024; Zaenurrosyid et al., 2024). In Indonesia, Law No. 41/2004 and emerging digital waqf platforms are viewed as attempts to revive classical best practices while integrating modern financial instruments like cash waqf and waqf-linked investment models (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 41 Tahun 2004 Tentang Wakaf, 2004).

Despite rich historical scholarship, reviewers note that most research remains descriptive or dynasty-specific, lacking integrative cross-era thematic analysis (Ayub et al., 2024b; Erie, 2018). Few studies synthesize recurring governance themes such as institutionalization, accountability, administrative codification, diversification, and innovation across major Islamic eras. This gap supports the need for a consolidated, thematic framework of waqf governance evolution that can inform contemporary Islamic economic policy and strengthen modern waqf institutions.

**Table 1: Thematic Summary of Waqf Governance Evolution Across Islamic Eras**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Prophetic–Rashidun</b>	<b>Umayyad–Abbasid</b>	<b>Mamluk</b>	<b>Ottoman</b>	<b>Modern Implications</b>
Ethical Principles	Trustworthiness and public benefit as foundational norms	Ethics integrated with administrative needs	Ethics underpin administrative hierarchy	Ethical norms codified in formal regulations	Basis for transparency and accountability
Administrative Structure	Simple trustee-based arrangements	Early bureaucratization; qāḍī oversight	Multi-level administrative hierarchy	Centralized Ministry of Awqaf	Standardized and integrated governance
Documentation & Legal Codification	Basic deeds (e.g. ‘Umar’s waqf)	Asset registration and written procedures	Formal documentation of multiple asset types	<i>Vakfiye</i> as standardized legal deed	Digital documentation and comprehensive regulation
Asset Diversification	Primarily land and social facilities	Expansion to commercial properties	Movable assets and market-based endowments	Broad portfolio including schools and markets	Productive asset development
Financial Innovation	-	Early commercial revenue models	Diversified income streams	Cash waqf integrated into financial systems	Cash waqf, sukuk, digital platforms

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative historical research design to analyze the evolution of Islamic waqf governance from the Prophetic era to the Ottoman Empire. The approach combines historical method and descriptive analytical interpretation, enabling the reconstruction of institutional governance practices across different Islamic eras (Hancock et al., 2007; Hapsari & Indri, 2022). The historical method is particularly relevant because waqf, as a long-standing





socio-economic institution, has developed through diverse governance structures shaped by political, legal, and cultural transformations.

Data were collected through documentation techniques, drawing from classical Islamic texts, waqf-related legal documents (such as waqf deeds and *wakfiye* manuscripts), historical chronicles, and contemporary scholarly publications (Kipping et al., 2014). These sources served as the primary materials for examining administrative mechanisms, managerial roles, and regulatory frameworks that characterized waqf governance in each historical period (Sithole, 2024).

Data were analyzed through a combination of descriptive analysis and content analysis (Bazen et al., 2021; Creswell, 2018). Descriptive analysis was used to map governance practices across the Prophetic, Caliphal, Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, and Ottoman periods. The content analysis was conducted with the support of NVivo to ensure a systematic and transparent analytical process. The stages began with data familiarization through an in-depth reading of historical documents, followed by open coding in NVivo to identify key concepts, and then axial coding to organize the codes into more structured categories, ultimately producing themes such as accountability, institutionalization, documentation, legal codification, and financial innovation. The final thematic synthesis enabled the identification of patterns of continuity and change in waqf governance across historical periods, resulting in an analytical framework that is relevant to contemporary Islamic economics.

## FINDINGS

### **Prophetic–Rashidun: Ethical Foundations to Legal Codification**

The findings show that waqf governance originated from strong ethical and administrative foundations established during the Prophet Muhammad’s era. Early waqf practices such as the Quba Mosque, the Prophet’s Mosque, and agricultural endowments were characterized by clear asset designation, preservation of capital, and structured allocation of benefits for public welfare. These practices demonstrate that waqf functioned as an organized system of resource governance from its earliest phase, grounded in principles of justice, accountability, and perpetual benefit.

The Rashidun period further advanced these foundations into more formalized structures. Abu Bakr’s preservation of the Prophet’s waqf assets and ‘Umar’s establishment of the Khaibar land waqf marked a significant shift from value-driven stewardship to legal codification. The introduction of written waqf deeds and explicit rules regarding asset perpetuity, beneficiary specification, and revenue allocation reflected a growing emphasis on administrative clarity and managerial accountability. This period represents a transition from ethical norms to deliberate institutionalization, positioning waqf as a structured mechanism for managing public economic resources.

### **Umayyad–Abbasid: Bureaucratization to Centralized Codification**

Findings indicate that under the Umayyads, waqf governance evolved into a more bureaucratic system. The establishment of state-supervised waqf offices such as those in Egypt and Basrah under Judge Tāubah ibn Namr, introduced standardized procedures for registration, documentation, revenue monitoring, and judicial oversight. These developments show that waqf assets had become significant enough to require systematic administrative mechanisms, marking the beginning of formal bureaucracy in waqf management.





The Abbasid era brought further institutional refinement through centralized administrative codification. The creation of *Shadr al-Wuqūf* formalized waqf management with clear procedures for staff appointment, asset documentation, financial auditing, and regulatory supervision. Waqf revenues were systematically allocated to schools, hospitals, libraries, and public infrastructure, reflecting its integration into broader state fiscal planning. Compared to the Umayyad model, which relied primarily on judicial oversight, the Abbasid system represented a more professional, codified, and centralized governance framework capable of managing increasingly complex waqf portfolios.

### **Mamluk–Ottoman: Diversification to Financial Integration**

The findings reveal that the Mamluk era expanded waqf governance through asset diversification and administrative specialization. Waqf portfolios increasingly included movable assets, commercial buildings, agricultural estates, and market-based revenue sources, reflecting an adaptive response to urban expansion, demographic growth, and fluctuations in agricultural productivity. The Mamluks also introduced hierarchical administrative layers and stricter regulations on asset maintenance, benefit distribution, and legal documentation, resulting in a more specialized and functionally differentiated governance system.

The Ottoman era represents the peak of waqf's institutional maturity. Governance structures became highly centralized with the establishment of the Ministry of Awqaf, the standardization of *vakfiye* documents, and extensive legal codification. The development and widespread adoption of cash waqf constituted the most significant financial innovation in waqf history, enabling liquidity mobilization and expanding waqf's role in socioeconomic development. Under the Ottomans, waqf operated as a quasi-public sector institution capable of financing education, healthcare, infrastructure, and urban development, integrating ethical, legal, administrative, and financial dimensions into a coherent governance system.

Comparative analysis across eras shows a consistent pattern of governance enhancement, moving from value-based stewardship (Prophetic era) to legal institutionalization (Rashidun), bureaucratization (Umayyads), codification (Abbasids), diversification (Mamluks), and financial integration (Ottomans). Despite these transformations, a clear continuity persists: the principle of preserving capital for perpetual benefit. This unbroken thread indicates that Islamic governance historically aligned with both ethical mandates and pragmatic administrative needs, adapting continuously to different political, economic, and social contexts.

The synthesis of findings suggests a multi-dimensional governance model characterized by evolution in institutional complexity, legal refinement, administrative specialization, and financial innovation. Each era contributed foundational elements that shaped waqf into one of the most resilient socio-economic institutions of Islamic civilization. The cumulative historical trajectory underscores that effective waqf governance requires a balance between ethical principles, regulatory structure, administrative capacity, and financial adaptability. These insights form the basis for understanding how historical governance lessons can inform contemporary waqf policy and institutional strengthening.





## DISCUSSION

### **Prophetic–Rashidun: Ethical Foundations to Legal Codification**

The historical trajectory shows that the earliest waqf practices were anchored in ethical norms that functioned as proto-governance mechanisms. Under the Prophet Muhammad, principles such as trustworthiness, justice, and perpetual public benefit operated as normative governance controls, ensuring that endowed assets were managed responsibly despite the absence of formal bureaucratic structures (Jamal et al., 2023; Shaikh, 2018). These ethical foundations demonstrate that the genesis of waqf governance emerged from moral imperatives that shaped administrative behavior, aligning with Kahf’s (2000) argument that early Islamic institutions evolved from ethical frameworks before becoming formal systems (Kahf, 2000).

The Rashidun era confirms this transition by transforming ethical norms into legally binding governance instruments (Amrullah et al., 2022). The introduction of written deeds, explicit conditions of benefit allocation, and rules regarding asset perpetuity reflect rising administrative needs in an expanding political and economic environment (Syamsuri et al., 2021). As the Muslim polity grew, waqf became intertwined with public finance, particularly in the management of conquered lands allocated for communal welfare (Nor, 2015; Ramlah et al., 2025). Legal codification thus emerged as a pragmatic response to governance risks such as disputes over trusteeship and asset misuse. This period illustrates that governance reforms in early Islamic institutions were primarily driven by socio-economic complexity rather than theological reinterpretation.

### **Umayyad–Abbasid: Bureaucratization to Centralized Codification**

The Umayyad period marks a pivotal shift in which waqf governance began to mirror state administrative structures. The establishment of *qāḍī*-supervised waqf offices reflects the growing importance of standardized documentation and oversight as waqf assets expanded across regions (Asrohah, 2012). This bureaucratization aligns with the broader political trend of increased centralization under the Umayyads, indicating that waqf governance evolved in step with state consolidation. Contemporary governance theory similarly observes that third-sector institutions formalize when their asset base grows and the surrounding political environment centralizes (Ayub et al., 2024b).

The Abbasid era strengthened these foundations through centralized codification and administrative specialization (Kasdi et al., 2022; Majeed & Zanib, 2016). Institutions such as *Shadr al-Wuqūf* provided clearer procedural governance, where asset registration, audits, and managerial appointments were regulated systematically (Muhammad & Suar, 2024). This reflects Kuran’s (2001) view of waqf as a “parallel public sector,” especially as Abbasid waqf revenues supported education, healthcare, libraries, and infrastructure (Kuran, 2001). The expansion of waqf into urban and intellectual life demonstrates that waqf governance adapted to fill public service gaps in a rapidly evolving socio-economic environment. Thus, the Abbasid period institutionalized a governance model that balanced legal codification with administrative professionalism.

### **Mamluk–Ottoman: Diversification to Financial Integration**

The Mamluk period illustrates how governance systems evolve when socio-economic complexity intensifies. Growing populations, expanding trade networks, and political instability stimulated the diversification of waqf assets beyond agricultural lands to include





movable assets, commercial properties, and market revenues (Bungkes, 2021; Syahputra & Taufiq, 2022). This diversification was not merely economic but institutional, as the Mamluks introduced hierarchical management structures and stricter documentation standards to ensure continuity and financial sustainability. Scholars argue that such diversification is a historical precedent for today's productive waqf models (Pitchay et al., 2024).

The Ottoman era marks the height of financial and administrative sophistication in waqf governance. The establishment of the Ministry of Awqaf, systematic *wakfiye* documentation, and codified regulations created a highly structured governance framework (Iskandar, 2022; Mukhsin, 2009). The most transformative innovation cash waqf addressed liquidity challenges found in land-based waqf and enabled broader public financing capacities, functioning as an early form of Islamic social finance (Aam & Mi'raj, 2022; Muna & Yasdi, 2023). This integration of financial and administrative systems reflects the Ottomans' need to govern vast territories with complex fiscal demands. The historical trajectory confirms that waqf governance has always adapted to evolving socio-economic contexts, contradicting assumptions that waqf is inherently static (Al-Haddad & Suleman, 2021; Erie, 2018).

### Cross-Period Synthesis and Contemporary Relevance

Across these three historical phases, the analysis demonstrates a consistent developmental pattern in waqf governance. Ethical norms initially formed the core governance foundation during the Prophetic and Rashidun eras, establishing values such as justice, accountability, and capital preservation. These principles later evolved into structured legal mechanisms, bureaucratic oversight, administrative centralization, asset diversification, and financial innovation in subsequent periods. This trajectory reveals a governance system that continuously adapted to changing socio-political and economic contexts while maintaining the principle of preserving endowed capital for perpetual benefit (Erie, 2018; Kayadibi et al., 2017).

Persistent contemporary issues such as weak documentation practices, limited trustee professionalism, low asset productivity, and fragmented regulatory frameworks mirror earlier governance challenges and indicate that the roots of modern inefficiencies often stem from delayed institutional adjustments. These parallels suggest that governance capacity, rather than the size or quantity of waqf assets, remains the decisive factor determining waqf performance. Historical patterns reinforce the argument that mismanagement and regulatory gaps, rather than resource scarcity, are the primary obstacles facing waqf institutions today (Caniago & Satibi, 2024; Irma Suryani Lubis & Muslim Marpaung, 2025).

Historical evidence also provides a practical blueprint for modern reform. Classical governance principles such as transparency, documentation, accountability, and asset preservation remain relevant and can be strengthened through contemporary financial and regulatory instruments. The use of cash waqf, sukuk, and digital waqf platforms exemplifies how historical values can be operationalized through modern tools to enhance liquidity, documentation accuracy, and institutional oversight. These instruments demonstrate that governance evolution in the past was driven by socio-economic necessity, a pattern that continues to hold true in the present (BI et al., 2018; Fatimatuz Zahra & Maulida, 2024).

Furthermore, the institutional maturity achieved during the Abbasid and Ottoman periods provides strong historical support for contemporary policy frameworks. Centralized governance models, standardized documentation, and codified regulations from these eras resonate with modern initiatives such as Indonesia's Law No. 41/2004 and SIWAK digital documentation systems. These parallels show that successful waqf governance has always depended on the strength of regulatory structures and administrative capacity, reinforcing the





importance of comprehensive, coordinated reforms in the modern era (Direktorat Pemberdayaan Zakat dan Wakaf, 2025; Indonesia, 2007).

Overall, the cumulative historical trajectory underscores that effective waqf governance requires a balanced integration of ethical integrity, legal clarity, administrative specialization, asset diversification, and financial innovation. This synthesis reflects the findings of earlier scholars who emphasize that continuous adaptation is essential for ensuring waqf sustainability and relevance in changing environments (Djunaid, 2006; Hapsari & Indri, 2022). As contemporary policymakers and *nāzir* seek to strengthen waqf governance, historical lessons offer valuable guidance for constructing institutions that are transparent, resilient, professionally managed, and capable of delivering long-term socio-economic impact (Judijanto et al., 2025; Wagay & Nabi, 2025).

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that waqf governance progressed from ethical stewardship in the Prophetic era to complex administrative and financial systems under later dynasties, revealing enduring principles such as accountability, transparency, documentation, managerial professionalism, and asset productivity. These historically sustained elements remain directly relevant for addressing contemporary governance gaps, indicating that institutional capacity rather than asset size determines waqf performance. Modern policymakers and *nāzir* are therefore encouraged to strengthen documentation, integrate oversight mechanisms, adopt productive asset strategies, and utilize financial innovations such as cash waqf and digital platforms to enhance transparency and sustainability. Future research may further examine comparative governance frameworks, measure the impact of reform initiatives, and explore the potential of emerging technologies to translate historical governance principles into effective modern waqf management.

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