

## **Causal Layered Analysis of Good Governance in Islamic Utopia**

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### **Abstract**

Since ancient times, humankind has aspired to create an ideal society and live in an environment free of problems and difficulties, an utopia with high levels of excellence, bringing him happiness and satisfaction. Great western philosophers and eminent oriental sages have articulated their ideas and revealed their dreams about the characteristics of people and traits of governors of such ideal places. Nowadays, governance is considered the main custodian of the social order and responsible for the comfort and satisfaction of citizens; so that bad governance is being increasingly regarded as one of the root causes of all evil within our societies while good governance is deemed the origin of public prosperity. Hence, this question arises that regarding the religious context of our country, what are the characteristics of Islamic good governance?

Thus, the present study makes an attempt to employ a new approach to explore the requirements of good governance in the utopian perspective of Ali ibn Abi Talib as the first Imam of Shia Muslims. The aim of this paper is to address this main question that what are the requirements of good governance in Imam Ali's point of view in Systems layer, Worldview layer and Myth/Metaphor layer? Therefore, the causal layered analysis (CLA) as a futuristic method has been applied to investigate letter 53 of the Nahj al-Balagha containing his orders to Malik al-Ashtar. Finally, the results have been presented and discussed at different analysis levels.

**Key words:** Good Governance, Islamic Utopia, CLA.

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## **1. Introduction**

One of the major factors influencing the future are the images of the future which people hold and the actions which people take on the basis of those images. Some of these actions are taken specifically with the intention of influencing the future; others are not; but all do influence it (Dator, 1993). Images have always been important in various areas such as politics, warfare and collective perception about the shape and the meaning of the past, present and future. As Fred Polak aptly noticed, “the future lies concealed in today’s images of the future” and it is precisely this time-dimension of the future that is the dynamic force in the workings of all images (Aleksandra & Djuric, 2016).

In the course of history people have always been desirous of an ideal society and have shaped pictures of such a desirable place. Today, it seems that the image of the ideal society has evolved to the concept of good governance. In fact, since the 1980s a new concept has been proposed which is known as the good governance model. After the governments, especially in the late twentieth and twenty first century, faced new big challenges, the good governance model raised as a framework to provide new solutions for getting out of those challenges (Eivazi and Marzban, 2016).

Many authors and official institutions all over the world have proposed their images of ideal governance, and as mentioned these images can strongly play their role in shaping the future of human beings. However, despite some differences in the definition, the idea of good governance has also resonated across a wide political spectrum. For those on the political right, good governance has meant order, rule of law, and the institutional conditions for free markets to flourish. For those on the political left, good governance incorporates notions of equity and fairness, protection for the poor, for minorities, and for women, and a positive role for the state. For many others found along the continuum from right to left, the concept is attractive for its concern about order, decency, justice, and accountability (Grindle, 2010).

Since, Muslim thinkers and policy makers have profoundly been influenced by the teachings of Islam, it is necessary to study the characteristics of good governance and ideal society in Islamic texts. The Nahj al-Balagha is the most famous collection of sermons, letters and narrations attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first Imam of Shia Muslims. Nahj al-Balagha comprises various issues that cover major problems of metaphysics, theology, prophetology, imamah, ethics, social philosophy, politics, administration, civics, rhetoric, etc. The book not only reflects the spirit of early Islam and the teachings of the Qur'an and the prophet Muhammad, but also serves as a guide to traverse toward the future in the light of these teachings.

Imam Ali wrote letter 53 of the Nahj al-Balagha to Maalik al-Ashtar, his famous companion, who was specially taught the principles of administration and jurisprudence. This letter is a précis of the principles of administration and justice as dictated by Islam. It deals with the duties and obligations of rulers, their chief responsibilities, the question of priorities of rights and obligations,

dispensation of justice, control over secretaries and subordinate staff; distribution of work and duties amongst the various branches of administration, their coordination with each other and their cooperation with the centre.

This research attempts to investigate one of the original and fruitful Islamic documents, i.e. letter 53 of the *Nahj al-Balagha*. Thus, a thematic analysis will be applied to the text of Imam Ali's historical command to Malik al-Ashtar in a futuristic framework in order to explore Imam Ali's utopian image to address the requirements of good governance as an influential factor in construction of a desirable society and satisfactory life for people in his opinion. Hence, the main question of this research is: "What are the requirements of good governance in Imam Ali's Islamic Utopia?"

## 2. Utopia

Images of the future are typically divided into utopias and dystopias. In order to signify an imaginary society, Thomas More introduced the term "utopia" in his book *Utopia* in 1516. It literally means "no place". It denotes a nonexistent, perfect society. In other words, it can be seen as an idealistic, fantastic, and unrealistic future society. In contrast, we should consider the concept of utopia. Utopia literally means "good place" and is the name of the imaginary island in More's *Utopia*. It is a "happy land" that can be eminently achieved in the real world (Son, 2013).

Futurist Thomas More coined the phrase utopia to describe a country working hopefully towards the potential for a just and sustainable future, with the full approval of all its citizens (Brown, 2015). Utopian writings are important progenitors of modern futures studies, and some of them have contributed images of the good society and of the future that remain powerful in today's world (Bell, 2009).

When we speak of the road to utopia, meaning the path leading to a place, state, or condition ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions (Braun, 1994). However, today's challenge is how to connect utopian thinking with everyday politics. Utopian thinking does not undermine or discount real reforms. Indeed, it is almost the opposite: practical reforms depend on utopian dreaming.

When coined by Thomas More almost five centuries ago in *Utopia*, he might have used the word to mean no-where or no-place. Today, utopia bounces about on an eddy of semantic confusion. Used in the positive sense, utopian thinking describes human striving for a better or ideal society (Stevenson, 2009).

The vigor of the utopian method lay in the opportunity it gave the idealists to demolish the corruptions of the day and build in their place a truly rational and planned society. To study the history of the utopias is, then, to chart the course of political theories and the growth of social institutions; for the utopias have always responded to the peculiar circumstances of their times (Clarke, 1971).

### 3. Good Governance

Recently the terms “governance” and “good governance” are being increasingly used in development literature. Bad governance is being increasingly regarded as one of the root causes of all evil within our societies. Good governance ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources (World Bank, 2013).

Good governance is supposed to have several major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society (UNESCAP, 2016). Besides, according to Eivazi and Marzban (2016) the good governance in an Islamic society should include the characteristics of the rule of law, public participation, justice, confidence-building and accountability of government to popular demands.

Debates about good governance begin with its definition. Indeed, as the concept has grown in popularity within the development community, the number of ways it has been defined has multiplied. Table 1 presents a sample of recent definitions of governance from official and scholarly sources, and suggests the complexity of the concept. While there are some commonalities across these definitions, they differ significantly in terms of specificity and normativity (Grindle, 2005).

<i>Source</i>	<i>Definition</i>
IMF, 2005	“Ensuring the rule of law, improving the efficiency and accountability of the public sector, and tackling corruption”.
Hyden, Court, and Mease, 2004	Can be measured along five dimensions (“participation, fairness, decency, efficiency, accountability, and transparency”) in each of six arenas (civil society, political society, government, bureaucracy, economic society, and judiciary).
Kaufmann, 2003	Can be measured along six dimensions (voice and external accountability; political stability and lack of violence, crime, and terrorism; government effectiveness; lack of regulatory burden; rule of law; control of corruption).
Hewitt de Alcántara, 1998	Processes through which there is incorporation of more creative and less technical understanding of reform, more dialogue about institutional and

	<p>programmatic change, more concern with the public sphere (state and civil society) and how to strengthen it, more integration of economic policy and institutional reform, more attention to both national and international factors that affect governance.</p>
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Table 1. Definitions of good governance (Grindle, 2005)

### 5. Research method

Causal layered analysis (CLA) is offered as a new futures research method. Its utility is not in predicting the future but in creating transformative spaces for the creation of alternative futures. It is also of use in developing more effective - deeper, inclusive, longer-term- policies. As indicated in Figure 1, causal layered analysis consists of four levels: the litany, social causes, discourse/worldview, and myth/metaphor.

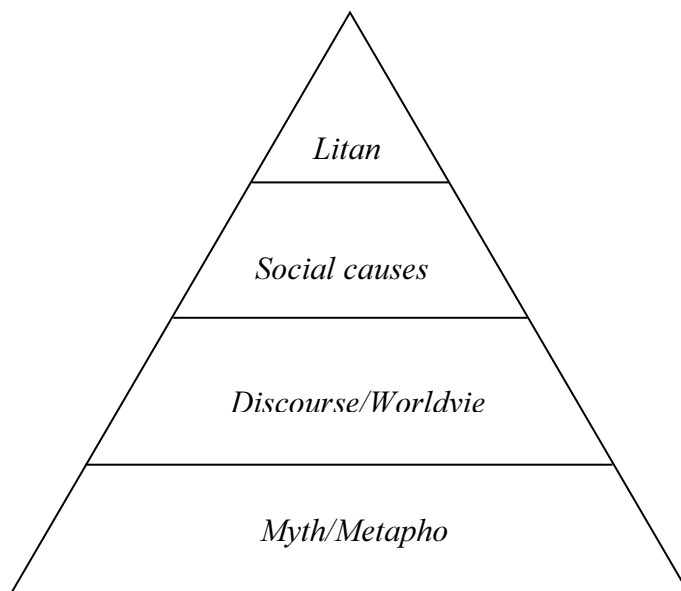


Figure 1. CLA methodology framework (Inayatullah, 1998).

*Litany*: this level comprises quantitative trends, problems, events, issues, etc. usually presented by the news media.

*Social causes*: this level includes economic, cultural, political, and historical factors. Interpretation is given to quantitative data. This type of analysis is usually articulated by policy institutes and published as editorial pieces in newspapers or in not-quite academic journals. The role of the state and other actors and interests is often explored at this level.

*Discourse/Worldview*: this level is concerned with structure and the ideology that supports and legitimates it. The task is to find deeper social, linguistic,

cultural structure. Discerning deeper assumptions behind the issue is crucial here as are efforts to develop a new vision of the problem. At this stage, one can explore how different discourses (the economic, the religious, and the cultural, for example) do more than cause or mediate the issue but constitute it. It investigates how the discourse we use to understand is complicit in our framing of the issue.

*Myth/Metaphor*: These are the deep stories, the collective archetypes, the unconscious and often emotive dimensions of the problem or the paradox. This level provides a gut/emotional level experience to the worldview under inquiry. The language used is less specific, more concerned with evoking visual images, with touching the heart instead of reading the head (Inayatullah, 1998).

## 6. Results

Since theories are built upon concepts, a mechanism should be devised to identify the concepts and to determine the relationships between them. In the present study, this mechanism is based on the coding process.

Hence, in the first step in order to become familiar with the data the text of the letter was studied several times. Then, after a rough analysis of textual data, initial codes were generated. These codes were fairly close to the raw data and the interpretation of them was avoided.

When all data was initially coded, a long list of the different codes was identified across the data set. After refocusing the analysis at the broader level and sorting the different codes into potential themes, all the relevant coded data extracts were collated within the identified themes. Then, the collection of candidate themes and subthemes was reviewed and refined.

Finally, the themes were defined and named based on the essence of what each theme was about. Besides, the overarching themes were clustered according to the CLA framework, indicated in Table 2.

<i>Layers</i>	<i>Themes</i>
<i>Litany</i>	good governance
<i>Social System</i>	moderation, justice, attention to economics, public trust, meritocracy, supervision, responsibility, accountability, freedom of expression, people's satisfaction
<i>Worldview/Discourse</i>	Islamic worldview, justice-oriented discourse, avoidance of tyranny
<i>Myth/Metaphor</i>	the holy Messenger of Allah as an ideal model, metaphor of parents, metaphor of predatory animal

Table 2. CLA results

## 7. Discussion

As seen in Table 2, in the first layer a definition of the research subject is considered. In his order, Imam Ali states his purpose of delegating Malik al-Ashtar to govern Egypt, creating economic welfare in the cities, securing the land and making social reform. He then claims a good governance is that it does not impose itself on people, but they willfully rely on the governors to carry out their affairs.

In his view, people would gather around good governance, and would not consider it an unbearable burden on their heads and not secretly wish it comes to an end. However, the underlying causes for such a government should be searched in the lower layers of analysis.

At the systems level important themes include moderation, justice, attention to economics, public trust, meritocracy, supervision, responsibility, accountability, freedom of expression and people's satisfaction.

The ideal governance delineated by Imam Ali, administers the societal affairs in a moderate manner. Thus, the government's treatment with everyone is decent as well as proportionately considering various micro and macro issues. The other important feature of good governance in his view is to set up justice in society, exemplified by cutting relatives' abuses, removing discrimination between the specific and the laity, observance of fairness among all people, prevention of cruelty and oppression to the community and also supporting the poor and needy people.

Another characteristic of good governance in the opinion of Imam Ali is heeding and building up the lands and cities, as well as creating the conditions for fair trade in accordance with the principles of justice, and totally turning the wheels of the economy and taking notice of the community's sustenance and welfare. Because if the rulers spend their efforts on private accumulation of wealth rather than the prosperity of the cities, poverty of people and insecurity of the governance will be provided.

Good governance ought to provide people's peace of mind through justice and tolerance, and create optimism with good behavior and avoidance of coercion and compulsion, and attract their confidence to build a strong anchor upon. However, people might not trust the governance unless transparency is created in the governing system. Thus, when people suspect that the rulers are away from the path of righteousness, the rulers have to enclose their excuses with the public in order to lessen their suspicion.

Such a system should be based on merit, and its officials be chosen through competence and become employed after being put to the test. Good governance in Imam Ali's opinion should monitor the activities of its agents and never neglect their violations. Also, such a system must commit itself to fulfill its pledges. Because the habit of breaking promises is disliked both by Allah and by man. The Merciful Allah says, "It is most hateful in the sight of Allah, to say something and not to practice it" [Qur'an, 61:3]. Therefore, accountability and

control are in this standpoint of the most important characteristics of good governance.

Governors should not cut themselves off from the public but have to periodically meet the oppressed and the lowly in open conferences in order to hear them and pay attention to their grievances. Also, people must enjoy the freedom of expression to fearlessly state their complaints. The creation of such an occasion where people can freely and without any flattery or fear speak with government officials is the duty of the good governance.

Finally, in a system with such characteristics, public's consent is of the most priority and nothing more than welfare and happiness of people is important to the governance. That is why Imam Ali claims the most divine thing is what leads to people's pleasure and welfare done with honest intentions. Thus, good governance at the social systems level must act in a manner that meets people's satisfaction.

As indicated in Table 2, at the worldview/discourse level, key themes such as the Islamic worldview, justice-oriented discourse and avoidance of tyranny are quite remarkable.

It is inferred from Imam Ali's statements that good governance in the Islamic worldview should fulfill both the consent of God and satisfaction of people and consider governance as a divine test. From the perspective of the Islamic worldview, the masses form the religion pillar, and administration activities should be in line with their comfort and happiness. It is noteworthy that Imam Ali recognizes people's judgment about the governance as "what Allah has destined to receive from them" and presents it as a criterion for distinction between good and evil.

The justice-oriented discourse is the dominant discourse in this ideal society, where policies are based upon equity and are neither too severe nor too lenient. A society with governors apart from tyranny who do not disregard the noble traditions set by the forbearers, frequently consult with the learned and the wise, and prepare the occasion for them to express their opinions and offer their advice.

As shown at the deepest level, Imam Ali on several occasions, citing the words of the prophet Muhammad and inviting to follow him, introduces the holy messenger of Allah as an ideal model for good governance.

In addition, he employs the metaphors of "parents" and "predatory animal" and attributes fatherly and motherly character to the good governance. In Imam Ali's ideal society, the governors treat people kindly and sympathetically. They would care for people with the tenderness with which parents care for their children. However, such a good governance never behaves towards people like a voracious beast as if its success lies in devouring them.

According to Imam Ali's narrative in his orders to Malik al-Ashtar, citizens of the state are of two categories, "those who have the same religion as you have; they are brothers to you, and those who have religions other than that of yours, they are human beings like you." Hence, the governors should develop in



their hearts the feeling of love for their people and let it be the source of kindness and blessing to them. They also must avoid the oppression and bloodshed, for, building the strength of the state on blood ultimately weakens the state and passes it on to other hands, since God listens to the voice of the oppressed and waylays the oppressor.

## **8. Conclusion**

About 14 centuries ago, Imam Ali delegated Malik al-Ashtar as governor of the land of Egypt and delineated the necessary guidelines for good governance in his orders. Malik due to the malice of his enemies failed to arrive in Egypt and the expected utopian society was never constructed. But those great commands and ideas are available today and can be studied and analyzed from different aspects. In this study, it was attempted to review them from a new perspective and to analyze them with a futuristic method. Hence, the causal layered analysis was applied to the text of Imam Ali's orders, in order to find out the requirements of good governance in his desirable vision.

In summary, the results indicate that from Imam Ali's standpoint, in connection with people good governance gives the priority to people's satisfaction, makes efforts to fulfill their consent and provides their welfare and comfort by setting up justice. There should be accountability and responsibility in such a system, which deals with people's livelihood, gains their trust through tolerance and charity and creates optimism in their minds. Such a governance is built upon Islamic worldview, is in line with equity and justice, recognizes the holy Prophet as its perfect model, and behaves with people like affectionate parents with kindness and compassion.

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