Applying Futures Studies Methods in Formulating a Model of Global Governance

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Abstract:

In today's complex and rapidly changing world, designing effective models of governance requires the use of modern scientific tools. *Futures studies*—as one of the most important scientific approaches for identifying future trends, opportunities, and threats—can play a pivotal role in shaping a *Mahdavi governance* model. This article, drawing on futures-oriented approaches such as *trend analysis*, the *Delphi method*, and *scenario planning*, seeks to provide a realistic and scholarly picture of the requirements, potentials, and necessities of governance in the era of the *Advent (ẓuhūr)*. The findings indicate that futures studies can serve as a strategic instrument for preparing Muslim societies toward realizing the *New Islamic Civilization* and paving the way for the *Reappearance of Imam al-Mahdi (aj)*.

Keywords:

Futures studies; Mahdavi governance; scenario-based planning; justice-oriented policymaking.

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Introduction

In an age of complexity and accelerated transformation, *futures studies*—as an interdisciplinary field—plays a vital role in the strategic guidance of societies. Through the use of scientific methodologies, this discipline constructs both probable and desirable *future scenarios*, thereby enabling informed decision-making (Salehi Omran, 2019, p. 25).

Within this context, Islamic civilization also requires the utilization of futures-oriented capacities to direct its own social and cultural transformations—especially during the *Occultation (ghaybah)* era, when the believing community faces multiple challenges in realizing a *lifestyle of expectation (maʿīshat al-intiẓār)* and preparing for the *Advent (ẓuhūr)* (Mahdipur, 2023, p. 112).

The doctrine of *Mahdism* does not merely concern a distant future but is equally oriented toward the present—toward how humanity may prepare itself for that promised horizon. From this perspective, *awaiting deliverance (intiẓār al-faraj)* is not a passive state but an active, civilization-building, and future-oriented stance (Javadi Amoli, 2008, p. 15).

Mahdavi futures studies seeks to integrate the strategic concepts of governance with the notion of active expectation. Such an approach, by employing modern futures planning tools, can significantly contribute to articulating a *governance model grounded in Mahdavi teachings* (Institute for Futures Studies of the Islamic World, 2021, p. 45).

The central question of this study is: **How can the methods and tools of futures studies be applied to design and strengthen a Mahdavi model of governance?** The article's hypothesis suggests that by synthesizing *trend analysis*, the *Delphi method*, *scenario writing*, and a *tawḥīdic (monotheistic) perspective on history*, futures studies can lead to a form of governance that is both realistic and idealistic—anchored in a *Mahdavi vision of the future* (Hakimi, 2002, Vol. 3, p. 250).

Theoretical Foundations

1. The Concept of Futures Studies

Futures studies is a *systematic and transdisciplinary* field of knowledge that, through the analysis of past and present trends, provides *alternative scenarios* for the future (Salehi Omran, 2019, p. 47). Unlike prediction, this science seeks to *open up the spectrum of possible, probable, and preferable futures* and employs such methods as *trend analysis*, *foresight mapping*, *scenario building*, the *Delphi*

method, and *Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)*, among others (Institute for Futures Studies of the Islamic World, 2021, p. 56).

2. Governance and Its Indicators

Governance is a comprehensive concept in the macro-management of societies, encompassing modes of *decision-making*, *distribution of power*, *public participation*, *transparency*, *accountability*, *justice*, and *rule of law* (UNDP, 1997).

Within the Islamic discourse, governance not only entails administrative and executive dimensions but is also rooted in *tawḥīdic foundations*, *ʿAlawī justice*, and the *guardianship of the jurist (wilāyat al-faqīh)* (Motahhari, 2008 [1387 SH], p. 84).

3. Mahdism and Mahdavi Governance

Mahdism, grounded in the belief in the ultimate realization of *justice* and the *appearance of the Perfect Human (al-insān al-kāmil)* in history, holds vast potential for *modeling governance structures*. *Mahdavi governance*, as the culmination of monotheistic civilization, is defined by *revelatory rationality (ʿaql waḥyānī)*, *comprehensive justice*, *public participation under the guidance of the infallible Imam*, and *the flourishing of human capacities* (Javadi Amoli, 2008 [1387 SH], p. 289).

From this perspective, the duty of the *awaiting society (al-mujtamaʿ al-muntaẓir)* is not passivity but active endeavor toward preparing the ground for such governance (Hakimi, 2002 [1381 SH], Vol. 3, p. 257).

4. The Link Between Futures Studies and Mahdavi Governance

At the *civilizational level*, futures studies can play a complementary role in realizing an *awaiting society*. This discipline, by enabling the analysis of global and domestic trends, identifying opportunities and threats, designing future scenarios, and developing a *strategic roadmap*, provides a powerful instrument for reflection on *strategies that pave the way for the Advent (ẓuhūr)* (Mahdipur, 2023 [1402 SH], p. 118). Mahdavi futures studies thus represents a synthesis between *religious epistemology* and *scientific methodology* in approaching the future.

5. The Delphi Method

Definition:
The *Delphi method* is a futures-oriented technique based on *multi-round surveys of experts* conducted anonymously and iteratively to reach a *relative consensus*

on future developments. It is particularly applied in fields where *empirical data are insufficient* and the future is marked by *high uncertainty*.

Characteristics:
Anonymity of respondents; multi-stage process; iterative feedback to participants in each round; gradual movement toward consensus (Rahbord-e Farhang, 2018 [1397 SH], pp. 115–134).

6. Scenario Planning

Definition:
Scenario planning is a process in which researchers, by considering existing trends and *key uncertainties*, design multiple *possible or probable futures* in the form of *narrative or logical storylines*.

Stages:
Identifying key influencing factors; determining *certain trends* and *critical uncertainties*; and designing a *scenario matrix* (e.g., desirable, warning, moderate, or ideal scenarios) (Islamic Political Studies, 2021 [1400 SH], pp. 125–146).

Research Background

1. Domestic Studies:

1-1. Kazemi, Saeed (2016 [1395 SH]), in his article *"Futures Studies in the New Islamic Civilization,"* examined the role of futures studies in realizing the promised civilization and emphasized the necessity of establishing cultural institutions based on future scenarios.

1-2. Mousavi, Mohammad-Reza (2022 [1401 SH]), in his doctoral dissertation *"The Model of Awaiting Governance in Islamic Civilization,"* explored the principles and components of governance derived from Mahdavi thought and analyzed the role of future-oriented perspectives in preparing the grounds for the Advent (ẓuhūr).

1-3. Rahmani, Elham (2020 [1399 SH]), in her article *"The Application of Futures Studies in Islamic Management,"* analyzed futures-oriented approaches in macro-level Islamic management and examined their connection with Mahdavi principles such as justice, tawḥīd-centeredness, and participatory leadership.
2. Foreign Studies:

2-1. Bell, Wendell (2003). *Foundations of Futures Studies.* This classic work introduces futures studies as a discipline aimed at designing desirable futures and emphasizes the significance of moral and cultural values in the process of future-

making—an insight that can enrich the discourse of Mahdavi futures studies.
2-2. Slaughter, Richard A. (2005). *Futures Beyond Dystopia.* Slaughter emphasizes the role of *normative futures studies* in transcending civilizational crises. This perspective can offer valuable lessons for designing Mahdavi governance, which seeks to build a justice-centered and redemptive civilization.

3. Summary of the Research Background:

Despite the extensive studies conducted in the fields of futures studies and Mahdavi governance, significant challenges remain in linking these two domains, especially on a global scale. Most existing studies have focused primarily on analyzing trends and developing future scenarios without practically presenting governance models grounded in Mahdism. Thus, the synthesis of the research background reveals that although explicit literature on Mahdavi futures studies is still in its early stages, integrating Islamic thought with futures-oriented methodologies holds considerable potential for institutionalization within the sphere of religious policymaking. Consequently, the design of a Mahdavi governance model through a futures studies approach emerges as a pressing research necessity, particularly within Islamic societies.

Research Methodology

1. Type of Research: This study is primarily a descriptive–analytical research. Its main objective is to identify and analyze the applications of futures studies in designing a Mahdavi governance model. Since the research seeks to examine and interpret existing concepts and theoretical perspectives within the relevant literature, a descriptive method is employed. Furthermore, an analytical method is used to assess the applicability of futures studies in Mahdavi governance.
2. Data Collection Method: The data in this study are collected through a library-based approach. Given the theoretical nature of the subject, most of the collected sources include books, peer-reviewed academic articles, scientific reports, and authoritative religious and philosophical references. In addition, credible academic databases such as *Google Scholar*, *JSTOR*, and other scholarly online resources are utilized to extract the most recent studies and articles in this field.
3. Data Analysis Method: The study employs *content analysis* to interpret the collected data. This method is particularly suitable for examining religious and scholarly texts, allowing a careful exploration of concepts and viewpoints to identify similarities, differences, and emerging patterns among various theories. Moreover, through *comparative analysis*, the strengths and weaknesses of different theories and approaches—especially regarding futures studies and Mahdavi governance—are critically examined.

4. Statistical Population and Sampling: Given the conceptual and analytical nature of this research, its statistical population consists of all credible academic and religious texts, books, and articles related to futures studies, Islamic governance, and Mahdism. As the research is conducted qualitatively, there is no need for sampling specific individuals; rather, all available sources within the mentioned domains are reviewed.

5. Research Limitations:

5-1. Limited Accessibility of Sources: Due to the specific and emerging nature of Mahdavi futures studies, some specialized references and research materials in this field may not be readily accessible.

5-2. Time Constraints: As a descriptive–analytical study, the limited research timeframe may restrict comprehensive coverage of all dimensions of the topic.

Explanation and Analysis: Futures Studies in Various Fields:

Futures studies have been widely applied across disciplines such as public policy, economics, environmental studies, and information technology. In the field of public policy, futures-oriented research has focused on designing alternative scenarios to anticipate developments and analyze key trends (Salehi Omran, 2019). In the domain of governance, research has primarily concentrated on methods such as trend analysis, scenario planning, and the Delphi model (Institute for Futures Studies of the Islamic World, 2021, p. 25). These studies demonstrate that futures studies can serve as an effective tool for better understanding and planning the future of governance in different societies.

1. Futures Studies in Religious Studies and Mahdavi Thought: Futures-oriented studies in religious studies and Mahdism have grown significantly, especially in recent decades. Scholars such as Mahdipur (2023 [1402 SH]) and Hakimi (2002 [1381 SH]) have examined the applicability of futures studies within the context of Mahdism and Mahdavi governance. These studies often explore how futures studies methodologies can be applied to analyze social and cultural transformations related to the Advent (ẓuhūr) and emphasize the connection between these transformations and Mahdavi teachings. Likewise, Javadi Amoli (2008 [1387 SH]) in his works has investigated the various dimensions of Mahdavi governance and its prophetic anticipation in human history.

2. The Link Between Futures Studies and Mahdavi Governance: Recent research indicates that futures studies can play a crucial role in designing models

of Mahdavi governance. In this regard, certain scholars—particularly in Iran—have sought to explain the necessary conditions for the realization of a Mahdavi society and the formation of governance based on Mahdavi principles by analyzing current circumstances and developing future scenarios. For instance, the Institute for Futures Studies of the Islamic World, in its research, has examined how futures studies tools can be utilized to design governance models rooted in Islamic and Mahdavi principles. These studies reveal that employing futures studies can contribute to improving governance processes and achieving the objectives of the awaiting society (Institute for Futures Studies of the Islamic World, 2021, p. 25).

3. Futures Studies as a Planning Tool in Mahdavi Governance: One of the key findings of this research is the identification of futures studies as an effective instrument for planning and designing Mahdavi governance. Given the complex challenges faced by contemporary societies, futures studies can aid in analyzing social, political, economic, and cultural trends, simulating different developmental pathways, and envisioning the progression toward a Mahdavi society. In fact, analyzing future trends that emerge from both Islamic teachings and empirical evidence helps governance designers develop multiple future scenarios. For example, futures-oriented analyses can contribute to the development of a comprehensive governance model founded on justice, freedom, human rights, and public participation. Such a model can be designed in accordance with current societal conditions and potential future transformations, thereby supporting the establishment of Mahdavi governance that ensures justice and public welfare (Qadiri Abyaneh, 2016 [1395 SH], p. 77).

4. Utilizing Futures Studies Tools to Simulate Mahdavi Governance: The analyses indicate that the use of specific futures studies tools—such as the Delphi model, trend analysis, and scenario planning—can effectively assist in simulating the prospective conditions of Mahdavi governance. These tools enable analysts to account for existing trends and simulate various social and political variables to forecast different potential futures. For instance, by applying the Delphi model, groups of experts and scholars can forecast which characteristics and conditions are essential for Mahdavi governance in the future. Similarly, through trend analysis, key trajectories within the Islamic world and the broader global context can be modeled and compared with Mahdavi governance principles to identify optimal strategies for achieving this governance (Salehi Omran, 2019 [1398 SH], p. 45).

5. The Connection Between Futures Studies and Mahdavi Teachings: This study also highlights the close interrelation between futures studies and Mahdavi

religious teachings. Applying futures studies in the context of Mahdavi governance not only helps to create favorable conditions for the Reappearance of Imam al-Mahdi (ʿajjal Allāhu farajahu al-sharīf) but also deepens the understanding of religious concepts. Religious teachings such as justice, freedom, and merit-based leadership, which characterize Mahdavi governance, can play a significant role in developing futures scenarios. In effect, the application of futures studies in this context is essential not only for simulating the conditions of Mahdavi governance in the modern world but also for helping Muslims gain a more profound understanding of key religious concepts such as *intizār* (active expectation) and the Mahdavi society. In other words, futures studies can render religious concepts more practical and applicable in today's world (Javadi Amoli, 2008 [1387 SH], pp. 340–355).

6. Mahdavi Governance and Social Justice: The analyses of this study show that one of the core pillars of Mahdavi governance is social justice. Within this framework, futures studies can assist in simulating various scenarios to gain a clearer understanding of how justice might be actualized in the future. By employing futures studies tools, researchers can examine different scenarios for reducing inequality, promoting human rights, and enhancing public welfare, with special attention to the centrality of justice in Mahdavi governance. A key concept in Mahdavi governance is the emphasis on equality and economic justice, which this study explores in detail. Futures studies can simulate conditions under which economic and social justice are realized on a global scale. This process not only helps analyze the current state of affairs but also facilitates planning for achieving justice in the future (ibid.).

7. Challenges in Implementing Mahdavi Governance: Although the application of futures studies can assist in designing a Mahdavi governance model, several important challenges require special attention. One such challenge is the limitation of available data and information. Accurate and up-to-date simulation of governance-related scenarios demands comprehensive and reliable data, which are not yet fully accessible (ibid., pp. 265–270).

Comparative and In-Depth Analysis of Futures Studies

1. Futures Studies as a Bridge Between the Present and the Promised Governance:

One of the key functions of futures studies lies in its capacity to map the transition from the current condition to the desired state. In Mahdavi governance, this transition signifies a movement from contemporary systems dominated by

materialistic and power-centered structures toward a system founded upon monotheism, absolute justice, public participation, and divine guardianship. Futures studies—through tools such as trend analysis, scenario planning, and the simulation of possible futures—can render this transition rational, program-based, and grounded in empirical data (Dator, 2009).

2. Comparative Analysis of Western-Centered Governance and Mahdavi Governance: In liberal democratic systems, future forecasting is often directed toward economic or geopolitical interests; however, in Mahdavi governance, futures studies are not merely technical but are value-oriented, purposive, and human-centered. For instance, while global scenarios such as "The Future of Digital Capitalism" or "Artificial Intelligence in the Global Order" focus on technological supremacy, Mahdavi governance envisions scenarios rooted in principles such as *global justice*, *the eradication of systemic oppression*, and *divine guidance*.

3. The Role of Futures Studies in Civilizational Readiness for the Advent: If the *Advent (ẓuhūr)* is regarded as the apex of a civilizational transformation, futures studies—as an instrument of religious rationality—can prepare the awaiting society for its realization. This preparedness can be analyzed at two levels:

Individual level: enhancing foresight, future-oriented spirituality, and the lifestyle of expectation.

Structural level: institutional building, reconfiguration of religious policymaking, and training of the awaiting human capital (Asadi & Shariʿat, 2021 [1400 SH], p. 93).

4. Relative Experiences of Futures Studies in the Islamic World: Countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia have, in recent decades, attempted to integrate futures studies with Islamic culture. For example, the *Malaysia 2050 Project* sought to present a vision of Islamic civilization in the future through the participation of Muslim intellectuals. Although such models remain distinct from the Mahdavi paradigm, they demonstrate the potential for harmonizing futures studies with religious and civilizational identity.

Presenting a Conceptual Model of Mahdavi Governance Based on Futures Studies:

Designing a Mahdavi governance model requires linking revelatory teachings with modern futures-management tools. In this regard, futures studies can act as

an active intermediary, bridging faith-based convictions with the processes of religious policymaking (Izadi Yazdanabadi, 2020 [1399], pp. 82–178).

Key Components of the Proposed Model:

1- **The Promised Ideal (Ultimate Objective):** The emergence of Imam al-Hujjah (may God hasten his reappearance), the establishment of global justice, the abolition of domination, and the establishment of divine sovereignty (Motahhari, 2008 [1387], p. 62)

2- **Epistemic and Value Foundations:** Tawḥīd, justice, imamate, submission to wilāyah, rationality, and ethics-centeredness (Javadi Amoli, 2015 [1394], p. 77; Shojaie Far, 2019 [1398], p. 33)

3- **Futures-Studies Instruments:** Trend analysis, scenario writing, simulation, the Delphi method, and strategic roadmapping (Taheri, 2021 [1400], p. 101)

4- **Governance Domains:** Politics, culture, economy, science and technology, security, and media (Nasrallahī, 2021 [1400], p. 115)

5- **Indicators of the Awaiting Society:** Public participation, accountability, readiness to accept justice, historical awareness, and civilizational insight (Rahimpour Azghadi, 2012 [1391], p. 88)

6- **Realization Process:**

Preparation for the Advent

Policy-making based on futures studies

Production of Mahdavi knowledge

Training of committed and specialized human resources

Mahdavi institutionalization (Shojaie Far, 2019 [1398], p. 47)

Characteristics of the Proposed Model:

1- Based on religious values and Mahdavi traditions

2- Compatible with modern decision-making tools

3- Flexible in the face of shifting global scenarios

4- Applicable to policy, cultural, and civilizational research

Applications and Political Recommendations:

Futures studies, beyond being a forecasting tool, are used as a method for "designing desirable futures." In the Mahdavi discourse—which emphasizes

global justice, human awakening, and divine guidance—futures studies can play a strategic role in macro-level cultural and political management (Izadi Yazdanabadi, 2020 [1399], p. 90).

1- **Future-Oriented Cultural Policy:** Strengthen future-focused narratives derived from Mahdavi thought across media, arts, and education (ibid., p. 179) Design educational programs to cultivate the "awaiting human who builds the future." (Nasrallahī, 2021 [1400], p. 112) Expand future literacy in higher education with a Mahdavi approach (Future-Literacy) Model exemplary leadership and strategies of Imam al-Zaman (may God hasten his reappearance) in confronting future challenges. (Shojaie Far, 2019 [1398], p. 35)

2- **Strategic Planning in Governance Institutions:** Establish a "Center for Mahdavi Civilizational Foresight" to monitor global developments and analyze scenarios. (Izadi Yazdanabadi, 2020 [1399], p. 102) Design a step-by-step roadmap to strengthen the prerequisites of the Advent (prioritizing justice expansion, combating poverty and corruption, and enhancing social rationality). (Nasrallahī, 2021 [1400], p. 118) Develop a participatory governance model based on Mahdavi values at local, national, and international levels. (Shojaie Far, 2019 [1398], p. 41)

3- **Research and Institutional Recommendations:** Support master's theses and doctoral dissertations on Islamic and Mahdavi futures studies Establish theoretical chairs on "Religious Governance in the Horizon of the Advent." (Nasrallahī, 2021 [1400], p. 120) Promote futures-studies methodology in seminaries and Islamic humanities centers Link futures studies with the discourse of resistance, the New Islamic Civilization, and the state that prepares the ground (Izadi Yazdanabadi, 2020 [1399], p. 108)

Practical Summary:

To realize the Mahdavi discourse, a form of futures studies rooted in faith, rationality, and responsibility is required. Such futures studies not only help visualize a better future but also provide a foundation for nurturing *awaiting managers* and *policy-makers*.

This research has examined the role and significance of futures studies in designing a Mahdavi governance model. From the analysis of data and various sources, several key findings have emerged, summarized as follows:

Futures Studies as an Effective Tool: The research demonstrated that futures studies can serve as a vital instrument for designing and implementing Mahdavi

governance models. Through tools such as trend analysis, scenario planning, and the Delphi method, it is possible to forecast future developments and design precise strategies for realizing Mahdavi governance—developing models founded on justice, freedom, and public participation within the awaiting society.

Integration of Futures Studies and Religious Teachings: Findings showed that futures studies can effectively operationalize religious concepts in designing Mahdavi governance. This approach can help Muslims engage more scientifically and consciously in achieving Mahdavi objectives and preparing for the Reappearance of Imam al-Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance).

Mahdavi Governance and Social Justice: One of the fundamental pillars of Mahdavi governance is social justice. The study revealed that futures studies can aid in designing various scenarios to achieve economic and social justice, assisting Muslims in attaining a system of governance based on justice, public welfare, and transparency.

Emerging Challenges: Despite its advantages, the use of futures studies faces challenges such as limited data and social resistance to large-scale transformations. These issues require careful attention, and the application of futures studies can help analyze these challenges and develop strategies to address them.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes that futures studies can serve as a key instrument in the process of designing Mahdavi governance and in realizing Mahdavi goals in the contemporary world. By employing this tool, it becomes possible to simulate multiple scenarios for achieving justice, freedom, social welfare, and righteous governance in the Mahdavi community—thus more effectively preparing the grounds for the Reappearance of Imam al-Mahdi (ʿajjal Allāhu taʿālā farajahu al-sharīf).

Final Conclusion:

The doctrine of Mahdism, as the ultimate horizon of human existence in Shi'i Islam, possesses strategic potential for civilizational reconstruction and for redefining a future-oriented system of governance. In this regard, futures studies—beyond being a technical science—can function as a *civilization-building and discourse-generating methodology* contributing to the formation of institutions that prepare the way for the Advent.

The proposed model of this article demonstrated that combining *normative futures studies* with *Mahdavi principles* such as justice, imamate, participation, and tawḥīd can yield a conceptual framework for governance that aligns with

religious teachings while remaining compatible with contemporary scientific methodologies.

A comparative study between Western approaches to futures studies and the religious–Mahdavi perspective revealed that while the West often perceives the future as a domain of threat or economic utility, the Mahdavi discourse envisions the future as a realm of divine hope, human dignity, and moral purpose. This fundamental difference in foundation, orientation, and objective necessitates distinct designs in policymaking, human resource development, and social organization.

Ultimately, the theoretical development of *Mahdavi futures studies* requires further scholarly work, the establishment of specialized institutions, and a deeper integration between religious epistemology and strategic sciences. It appears that one of the key strategies for transitioning from the current state of Islamic civilization toward a Mahdavi civilization is the institutionalization of futures studies grounded in faith, ethics, and religious wisdom.

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