

Drivers of *Wilāya*-based Governance from the Perspective of Imam Ali in *Nahj al-Balagha*

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Abstract

Leadership and the administration of societal affairs constitute a process that, in recent centuries, governments have pursued in interaction with the people and civil institutions, referring to this process as *governance*. Various theories of governance have been proposed, most of which are rooted in Western humanistic thought. Among them, the theory of *good governance* has become the prevailing theme of governance research. Defining the governance system within the Islamic school of thought—and modifying its dimensions and aspects—is a necessity that must be pursued for the administration of Islamic societies, particularly Shiite society. This article provides an account of the progressive model of governance in the Shiite school—termed *Wilāya*-based governance. A key aspect of the topic of governance is drivers. Drivers are stimulating and accelerating factors in governance, which are addressed in this article. These drivers play a significant role in advancing the objectives of governance and are highly dependent on the values of each governance system. Therefore, examining the drivers of governance from an Islamic perspective is a serious necessity, as they must align with religious values. On the other hand, the conduct and words of Imam Ali (peace be upon him) offers an unparalleled source for political and managerial thought in society. In this study, the narrative statements (hadiths) of Imam Ali (peace be upon him) have been examined using a descriptive-analytical method. *Nahj al-Balagha* is the most important source referenced in this article. The drivers in this research are categorized and explored within three broad domains: cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. A comprehensive system of governance drivers is presented—one that has no equivalent in conventional research. Additionally, a precise structure of the concept of governance is provided, which serves as the foundation for this study.

Keywords: Governance, Driver, *Wilāya*, Imam Ali.

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1. Introduction

In the late 1990s, an approach to the development of countries emerged known as the "good governance" approach. This approach supplanted the two preceding ones—namely, the big state and the small state. In reality, the most prominent prescription presented for governance by international political and economic actors is under the title of "good governance." From that point onward, the term "governance" gained significant prominence in the political literature of modern or developing societies and acquired a fresh character and appeal. The World Bank was the first institution to introduce the theory of good governance. According to the World Bank's perspective, governance is the method by which power is exercised in managing a country's economic and social resources to achieve development. Naturally, the spirit dominating this theory is materialistic and economy-centered. In this view, even the phenomenon of society is referred to as "social resources," which indicates the prevalence of this economic spirit (Nazemi Ardakani, 2008, p. 107). Moreover, it can be readily understood that one of the serious foundations of this theory is "humanism"—a way of thinking that has deeply penetrated the West for more than two centuries and, in a single sentence, sees everything as being in the service of man. In contrast, the Islamic worldview is "God-centered" and seeks a human being and a society whose heart is attached to God and who, in all dimensions of life, moves not according to personal desires and wishes, but along the path of God's will and desire (Naderi Ghomi, 2011, p. 86). One of the most important topics under the subject of governance concerns the indicators, driving forces, and influential factors that propel society forward and determine the success of governance in achieving its defined goals. Since political governance is the process of administering and steering power within society, and this process essentially constitutes society's movement toward its own objectives, such movement requires "motors" or "driving forces." The intellectual foundations and objectives of any governance theory are precisely what determine these driving forces. In this study, first a new definition of governance from an Islamic perspective will be presented; then, the driving forces of governance within this theory—paying special attention to *Nahj al-Balāgha* of Imam Ali (peace be upon him)—will be explained and carefully examined.

2. Research Background

In recent decades, numerous studies have been conducted in the field of governance. Most of these studies focus on public governance and draw

heavily on Western contributions to this area. For example, the “good governance” model has been the subject of a large number of articles. In recent years, within the domain of Islamic governance, the Shahid Beheshti School of Governance has offered a valuable redefinition of Islamic governance and has compiled research works by religious scholars and researchers in this field. Regarding governance from the perspective of *Nahj al-Balāgha*, researchers such as Ali Torabi Kalateh, Hadi Nahadi and Javad Siahkali, Ali Komijani and Mohammad Rahim Eyvazi, Abolfazl Shahabadi and Ameneh Jame-Bozorgi, Khalilollah Sardarnia and Hamid Shakeri, Seyed Ali Hosseini Tash, and Yusef Sheikh Robat have published articles on the indicators of ideal governance from the viewpoint of Imam Ali (peace be upon him). These works are often drawn from or compared with the World Bank’s “good governance” model. However, in the specific area of governance driving forces, Mohammad Ayoub Meygouni, in an article titled “Determining the Driving Forces of Good Governance Using the Cross-Impact Analysis Approach,” first provides a definition of driving force. He then extracts “desirable governance indicators” from available sources and, after removing duplicates, arrives at a final list of 20 indicators. Subsequently, using the cross-impact analysis method, he identifies 5 of these indicators as the key driving forces of good governance. These driving forces are:

- Competent agents
- Appropriate regulation and quality of laws and rules
- Respect for the law by both people and officials
- Responsibility and accountability
- Participation and legitimacy

Additionally, in a study titled “Approaches and Driving Forces Influencing the Future of Governance,” presented by the Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, the effective driving forces shaping the future of governance are categorized and presented across five broad domains: political, social, economic, technological, and environmental.

The political driving forces identified in this research are:

- Decline in the power of governments
- Decentralization of power within the political-administrative system
- Political and social participation of the people
- Crisis of trust in political institutions
- Growth of non-state actors

Notably, it appears that—except for the fourth item—the rest are merely

different readings of the first one and, in reality, all point to the same concept. Overall, it seems that both in the general definition of governance and in the definition of its driving forces, a more comprehensive theory needs to be developed in terms of religious teachings, while clearly distinguishing the position of driving forces from the goals and indicators of governance—an effort that has been made in this article. What has been considered as driving forces in those articles is mostly in the nature of operational and behavioral factors of governance, whereas the insight-based and motivational driving forces are far more important factors that have so far received little attention.

3. Concept of Governance

Governance means ruling, sovereignty, and leadership. In the view of some Western thinkers such as Jean-Pierre, Kai Peters, and Lynn, governance means “guiding and steering society,” and they regard the entity that exercises governance as “government.” Governance consists of: the process (arranging the actors and determining their proportions and relationships) of exercising authority in administrative, political, and economic domains through formal institutions (the state) and informal ones (the private sector) in order to manage society (Gholipour, 2003, p. 3).

3-1. A New Definition of Governance

From the existing definitions of governance, the following can be inferred: First, governance is distinct from government; governance is, in a sense, the process and the “software” of governing. Second, the essence of governance is movement—it is regarded as the interaction between stimulators (driving forces) and the stimulated (actors or agents) that are directed toward the ultimate goal of a moving system. Third, it is concerned with the management and exercise of power within societies. Therefore, one can draw upon the model of motion in philosophy to define governance, conceiving it as the steering of an active and dynamic movement within society. From a philosophical perspective, motion comprises six elements: origin, destination, mover, moved, time, and place. Based on the approach adopted in this research, the structure of governance can be designed according to these six elements of motion. Thus, in general terms, governance can be defined as the steering of power from origin to destination within a specific time and place—a movement that results from the interaction between driving forces and agents. Now, if we wish to define governance within an Islamic framework, since the ultimate purpose is justice and the goodly or pure life (*ḥayāt*

ṭayyiba), and the origin is the guardianship of God (*wilāyat Allāh*) and divine law (Sharia), Islamic governance can be defined as follows: The monotheistic steering of power within a specific time and place in order to realize the goodly life.

4. *Wilāya*-based Governance

As mentioned, governance is the process of managing power in society to achieve a common goal. This process guides and steers the movement of society as if it were a living being. What distinguishes Shia political thought from other Islamic sects is the belief in and heartfelt and practical commitment to the guardianship (*wilāya*) of the appointed divine guardian (*walī*) within the social order. This approach inevitably leads to a more distinctive and elevated model of governance known as “*wilāya*-based governance,” which is the main subject of discussion in this research. Based on what has been said regarding *wilāya* and the *wilāya*-based society, it can be concluded that in *wilāya*-based governance, the origin of all desires, actions, and—in a sense—the origin of society’s movement is Allah and the acceptance of the guardianship of Allah, which manifests in the divine guardian; the legitimate movement of society begins with him. The destination of society’s movement consists of the ideals and goals that God has determined for human life, and the guardian of God strives to realize these ideals. The driving forces and stimulators of this movement are, first and foremost, “insights” and “inclinations” that give rise to “rising for the sake of Allah” under the guardianship of the *walī*; in the next stage, they are the foundational behavioral patterns of governance that accelerate this movement. The agents of this movement, in general, are the actors defined under the Imamate-Umma system. This movement takes shape in every time and place under the guardianship of the Imamate and the legitimate leadership of an Imam in that specific time and place. With these considerations, *wilāya*-based governance can be redefined as follows: “The monotheistic steering of the movement of the Umma along the orbit of the *walī*’s ideals in a specific time and place in order to realize the goodly life.”

5. The Nature of the Driving Forces

Driving forces refer to the major forces or key variables that shape a system. Naturally, driving forces exert their influence indirectly across various domains. They are variables that, on one hand, have a high impact on other variables within the system and, on the other hand, possess the capacity to be changed or manipulated. In other words, elements that cause movement and

transformation in the system and exhibit high sensitivity are called driving forces (Meygouni, 2018, p. 12). Driving forces are those forces, factors, and uncertainties that are influenced by strategic choices and the actions of stakeholders and can profoundly alter the future environment of a given subject. They are the stimulators behind the emergence and appearance of a phenomenon or issue (Nasr Esfehiani & Najafi, 2023, p. 18). According to the perspective of the present research, within the six-dimensional geometry defined for governance, the stimulators of governance are defined as the agents and drivers of society's evolutionary movement in the governance process. Stimulators are those forces that impel an object into motion. These forces can be either internal or external. It appears that the internal stimulators in governance are precisely the "inclinations" of society, which are rooted in "insights." The driving engine of society consists of the internal motivations and inclinations of a society that set it in motion. However, since these motivations are diverse and at times contradictory, there must be actors who steer this movement to prevent it from deviating from the correct path and to guarantee arrival at the intended destination and purpose. This is precisely the flow of "Imamate" or "wilāya" within society. As the Almighty God describes the mission of the prophets as purification and teaching: "He purifies them and teaches them the Book." "He purifies them" refers to the ordering and disciplining of the hearts and inclinations of society, while "teaches them the Book" refers to the ordering and disciplining of insights. In monotheistic *wilāya*-based governance, if the destination is Allah, then governance is a process for realizing "rising for the sake of Allah," and reforming people's motivations and thoughts in the direction of "rising for Allah" constitutes one of the most fundamental functions of this model of governance. Ultimately, the most important and fundamental motivation for the movement of society is participation for the sake of "rising for Allah," just as God instructed His Messenger to make the people understand that the philosophy behind all the laws legislated for them is summed up in one thing: "rising for Allah."¹ But if we wish to examine the stimulators of this movement in greater detail, naturally we must investigate the correct and authentic inclinations of the people within a religious movement as motivational factors, and also examine the correct insights that form the foundation of these motivations as the "insight-based stimulators" of *wilāya*-based governance. Another type of driving force can also be defined: those that result from the interaction

1. "Say, 'I give you just a single advice: that you rise up for Allah's sake, in pairs or singly'" (Quran 34:46).

between stimulators and agents and possess the property of accelerating the movement rather than initiating it. This category of driving forces can be referred to as “accelerating driving forces” or “character-based driving forces,” which shape the overall conduct of governance and maintain a close connection with the indicators of governance. What has been discussed so far in existing governance studies regarding driving forces largely belongs to this latter category. It seems that studies in the field of governance driving forces have been incomplete in this respect, and the present research offers a more comprehensive theory in the domain of governance driving forces. What was mentioned in the definition of driving forces by the Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly consists of two parts: factors influenced by strategic choices point to insight-based and inclinational driving forces, while factors influenced by the actions of stakeholders point to behavioral driving forces.

5-1. Varieties of Driving Forces

Based on what has been said, stimulators either stem from motivations or from thoughts. In this research, accordingly, we divide the stimulating driving forces into two categories: motivational driving forces and insight-based driving forces, each of which also has its own subcategories.

5-1-1. Motivational Driving Forces

Motivational or inclinational stimulators are driving forces that originate from the human heart and include both positive and negative factors. That is, factors toward which a person feels attraction, and factors from which a person recoils due to aversion, fear, or disgust.

5-1-1-1. Positive Factors

Human beings possess two faculties: the appetitive faculty (*shahwa*) and the irascible faculty (*ghaḍab*). The appetitive faculty shapes human inclinations. That is, human beings naturally have inclinations that are common to all of them, such as the desire for eating, drinking, beauty, power, wealth, and the like. They also have inclinations that are not shared by everyone and arise depending on various circumstances—for instance, love for a particular person or attraction to a specific field of study, and similar tendencies. One of the most important functions of religion is to direct and reform these inclinations. In religious governance as well, reforming motivations and directing the inclinations of society can alter the driving forces of societal movement. If motivations stem solely from the animalistic inclinations of society,

governance will take on a satanic orientation. But if spiritual and humane motivations shape the inclinations of both the people and the rulers—as actors in governance—then governance will become *Rahmanic* (divinely merciful). Of course, material motivations are necessary for human life. Every step that all human beings take in their worldly existence is directed toward expanding either their power, wealth, fame, or knowledge. The motivation for governance, in the first instance, is likewise the advancement and expansion of one of these four factors: that is, movement toward a strong and invulnerable society, a wealthy society, a society holding a superior position in global relations, or the elevation of the society’s level of knowledge and awareness. These factors are not inherently evil in themselves; what determines whether governance becomes satanic or *Rahmanic* is their orientation. Yet it is the human and spiritual motivational factors in *wilāya*-based governance that distinguish this model from others. In this section, these positive motivations will be examined.

5-1-1-1-1. Tawallī: Love for God and Love for God’s *Walī*

Tawallī is ancillary doctrine in Islam, which means loving, affirming, following, accepting, and submitting to the guardianship (*wilāya*) of God, the Prophet, and the Imams; in essence, it is loving for the sake of God. The Almighty God states in this regard: “Your guardian is only God and His Messenger and those who have believed—those who establish prayer and give zakat while bowing down” (Quran 5:55). And He also says: “Yet there are some who take others as equals to God and love them as they should love God. But those who have believed are strongest in love for God” (Quran 2:165). Imam al-Baqir (peace be upon him) said to one of his devoted followers named Ziyād al-Aswad: “Is religion anything other than love? The Almighty God has said: ‘He has made faith beloved to you and beautified it in your hearts.’ And He said: ‘If you love God, then follow me so that God will love you.’ And He said: ‘They love those who have migrated to them’” (Kulaynī, 1984, vol. 8, p. 79; Kūfī, n.d., p. 430). In this hadith and in the above Quranic verses, love for God and the Family of God is equated with religion itself, and the place of faith in the hearts of human beings is made clear. This means that people practice their religion with their hearts, and the heart is the center of human motivations and inclinations. Obedience to the guardian of God occurs only through the window of love for God. In other words, “love” is the factor and driving force of the monotheistic movement of society in *wilāya*-based governance. This loving obedience is one of the most important distinguishing features of *wilāya*-based governance compared to other

materialistic forms of governance. Love for God and His guardian is the most important motivational factor for the movement of society on the path of “rising for the sake of Allah.”

5-1-1-2. God’s Pleasure and Earning Divine Reward

According to Quranic teachings in monotheistic governance, work is done for God, and the goal is to attain God’s pleasure and earn divine reward in the Hereafter.¹ Imam Ali also regards awareness of divine reward and punishment as the driving force and motivator of effort for the believing person: “He who has Paradise and Hell before him is occupied” (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermon 16)—meaning that one who sees Paradise and Hell ahead is set in motion. If any uprising or movement occurs in society, its stimulator has been the seeking of divine pleasure, as Imam Ali would say to his community: “I want you for the sake of God” (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermon 136). And in his letter to the people of Egypt he wrote: “From the servant of God, Ali, Commander of the Faithful, to the people who became angry for the sake of God when others disobeyed Him on His earth and effaced His right” (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Letter 38). Imam Ali would at times direct his agents’ motivations toward work by reminding them of divine reward and recompense. Addressing Mālik al-Ashtar concerning care for the weak in society, he presents gaining honor in God’s presence as a motivation for this task.² And in his instructions to tax collectors he writes: “Know that what you have been charged with is little, yet its reward is great. Even if there were no punishment or chastisement for what God has forbidden—namely oppression and enmity—no excuse would remain for failing to attain the reward of refraining from it” (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Letter 51).

5-1-1-2. Negative Factors

5-1-1-2-1. Tabarrī: Disavowal of the Enemy of God and His Guardian

Tabarrī is an Arabic verbal noun on the pattern of *tafa‘ul*, derived from the root *b-r-*, with its original form being *tabarru*. In linguistic usage, *tabarrī* means distancing oneself from something whose proximity is deemed undesirable (Rāghib al-İṣfahānī, 1992, p. 121). When Imam Ali appointed

1. “Allah has promised the faithful, men and women, gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them [forever], and good dwellings in the Gardens of Eden. Yet Allah’s pleasure is greater [than all these]; that is the great success” (Quran 9:72).

2. Letter 53: “Deal with them in such a way that on the Day you meet your Lord, you may be excused and honored.”

Malik al-Ashtar as governor of Egypt and Malik was martyred en route, the Imam wrote a letter to Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr, who was then the acting governor of Egypt. In that letter he described Malik as follows: “The man whom I had appointed to govern Egypt was a man who was well-wisher and sincere toward us, and harsh and crushing toward our enemies.” In this letter the Imam refers only to this single characteristic of Mālik, which indicates the fundamental importance of *tawallī* and *tabarrī* in the matter of governance. In the system of *wilāya*-based governance, actors and agents must be well-wishers toward the guardian of God and harsh and crushing toward the enemies of the guardian of God. As the Imam continues in the letter, calling Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr to confront the enemy: “Gird yourself for war against whoever fights you; fight whoever fights you.” Disavowal of the enemies of God and the enemies of the guardian of God is a factor that gives direction to the movement of society. Just as love and affection for God and the Family of God serve as a driving engine for the movement of society, disavowal and confrontation with the enemies of God can also provide sublime motivations for movement and rising for the sake of Allah. Many revolutionary movements within the *wilāya*-based society are defined in the context of confrontation with enemies. Imam Ali constantly reminded people of the danger posed by the enemy and called them to recognize the enemy and stand against him.¹ According to the verse “God will never grant the disbelievers a way over the believers,” he instructed his tax collectors: “Do not lash anyone for the sake of collecting a single dirham. Do not lay hands on the property of anyone—whether a praying Muslim or a non-Muslim living under the protection of Islam—unless you find with them a horse or weapon that they intend to use to attack Muslims, for it is not befitting for a Muslim to leave a horse or weapon in the hands of the enemies of Islam, thereby strengthening them against Islam” (Nahj al-Balāgha, Letter 51).

5-1-1-2-2. Avoiding Divine Wrath and Punishment

In a religious governance system, since the ultimate destination of the movement is the Hereafter and resurrection, constant awareness of God’s ever-present supervision and fear of divine retribution serve as a highly active restraining stimulator. This motivator gives direction to society’s movement

1. *Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermon 34: The enemy’s eye never sleeps in its intent to attack you, yet you remain in heedlessness... By God, whoever allows the enemy to gain mastery over his life—so that it devours his flesh, crushes his bones, and tears off his skin—his helplessness is immense, and his heart is exceedingly small and feeble.

and compels governmental agents to remain on the correct path. This motivational stimulator, by its very nature, prevents many forms of corruption in governance, and its continual remembrance can serve as a tool for self-control among both the people and the rulers. Imam Ali wrote in a letter to one of his erring agents: “News has reached me about you that, if true, means you have angered your Lord, disobeyed your Imam, and betrayed the trust placed in you. I have been informed that you have stripped the land of its produce, taken everything under your feet, and consumed the public treasury entrusted to you. Send me your accounts, and know that God’s reckoning is far more severe than the reckoning of people” (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Letter 40). In the concluding part of his reprimand letter to Ibn ‘Abbās, the Imam employed the same approach, saying: “Proceed slowly in this plundering, as though you have already reached death, been buried beneath the earth, and your deeds have been presented before you—in a place where the oppressor cries out in regret and the waster of life begs to return to the world, while that moment is no longer a time of return” (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Letter 41).

5-1-1-3. Insight-Based Driving Forces

It was stated that the second category of stimulators and driving forces of governance, which constitute the fuel for society’s movement, consists of the insights and ideas accepted by society—insights that in many cases also serve as the foundation for motivations and inclinations. Every governance system is based on a worldview and an ideology that forms its intellectual foundation, and every worldview rests on the issue of “knowledge.” If we consider governance as a purposeful movement, then—as Imam Ali has said—every movement requires knowledge for its realization; that is, knowledge is the driving engine of every movement.¹ For the one who acts without awareness is like a traveler on a wrong path: the faster he moves, the farther he strays from his goal. But the one who acts with awareness is like a traveler on a clear road (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermon 154).

Another important issue in this regard is “epistemology” within the governance system: Which epistemic sources are accepted by a given governance system? How are the theoretical and intellectual propositions needed for the movement of a governance system provided, and to what extent are they certain and reliable? All materialist political systems that emerged in the modern era are based on human reason and experience. Accordingly, in the

1. Ibn Shu‘ba al-Ḥarānī, 1363, p. 171: “O Kumayl, there is no movement except that you are in need of knowledge in it.”

West during modernity, “scientism” reached its peak, and Western thinkers refused to accept the intervention of non-empirical teachings in the process of civilization building. After the elapse of modernity and the entry into the postmodern era, some Western scholars concluded that non-empirical teachings could be used in the presuppositions of science and that the “scientist’s motivation” could be involved in the production of knowledge and the attainment of civilization (Piri, 2022, p. 163). But from the Islamic perspective, knowledge is not confined to material affairs; it also encompasses non-material matters. Neither sensation alone nor reason alone can serve as the sole source of knowledge (Javadi Amoli, 2019, pp. 89–91). From the viewpoint of Imami scholars, the authority of reason is not exclusive; that is, reason requires an external factor and guide to awaken it so that it can perform its discovery truly. Discovering reality is the inherent task of reason, but the role of the external factor is one of reminding and awakening. Therefore, the intrinsic authority of reason does not mean that it is separate from or independent of revelation. From the Imami perspective, both reason and revelation are authoritative (Etesami, 2016, p. 112). The words of Imam Ali in the first sermon of *Nahj al-Balāgha* bear witness to this statement. In that passage the Imam says: “God raised His messengers and sent His prophets one after another to the people so that they might fulfill the covenant of divine primordial nature, remind them of God’s forgotten blessings, complete the proof against them by conveying God’s commands, and extract the treasures of their intellect.”

5-1-1-3-1. Sources of Knowledge

One of the most important topics in epistemology is the discussion of sources of knowledge. Ayatollah Mohammadi Reyshahri defines a source as the center and origin from which knowledge springs (Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2015, p.161). Among the most significant sources of knowledge are the senses, reason, and the heart. In addition, religious epistemology recognizes revelation, inspiration, or in a sense “transmission” as another source. This epistemic source consists of God’s speech conveyed through His Messenger or his rightful successor, and it produces certainty.

5-1-1-3-1-1. Sources of Knowledge in *Wilāya*-Based Governance from Imam Ali’s Perspective

If we approach the discussion of epistemic sources from the perspective of political governance, we must identify the sources of knowledge that are approved and applied in the administration of a society. Those insights

and forms of knowledge that serve as the fuel for society's driving engine and propel it along the correct path are the insight-based stimulators of governance. In this section, we seek to identify and examine these stimulators from the viewpoint of Imam Ali.

A) Transmitted or Revelatory Sources

It appears that in *wilāya*-based governance, the most important source of knowledge is the word of God, which is conveyed through revelation or inspiration to the heart of the Prophet or his rightful successor and, in the common terminology, is made available to us in the form of "transmitted or revelatory sources," namely the Book and the Sunnah. Imam Ali repeatedly presents the Book and the Sunnah as the intellectual reference of the Islamic community throughout *Nahj al-Balāgha* and considers the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet to be the sole authoritative interpreters of the true Book and Sunnah of the Messenger of God: "God, the Exalted, has said: 'If you dispute over anything, refer it to God and the Messenger.' Referring a dispute to God means referring it to His Book for judgment, and referring it to the Messenger means adhering to his Sunnah. Therefore, if judgment is given in accordance with the Book of God with truth and sincerity, we are more entitled to that judgment than others; and if judgment is given in accordance with the Sunnah of the Messenger of God, we are more deserving of it than anyone else" (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermon 125). He regards acting upon the Book of God and the Sunnah as the right of the people upon the Imam in *wilāya*-based governance—meaning that the people should expect the ruling authority to make the Book of God and the Sunnah the primary epistemic source of governance: "Your right upon us is that we act upon the Book of God, the Exalted, and the conduct of the Messenger of God, fulfill His right, and uphold His Sunnah" (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermon 169). In Imam Ali's view, the Quran is a comprehensive book that contains the mechanisms for organizing and governing society, yet people cannot extract these on their own. Rather, an Imam such as Ali must stand alongside the Quran to bring it to speech and guide society according to it. In reality, the Quran—as interpreted and recited by the Imam—serves as the book of law and the primary epistemic source in *wilāya*-based governance. For this reason, the verses of the Quran and the narrations of the infallible Imams are regarded as the foremost epistemic source in the Shia system of governance: "This is the Quran—speak to it, but it will never speak. Yet here I am to inform you of its teachings. Be aware that the knowledge of what has passed and what is yet to come, the remedy for your ailments, and the mechanisms for regulating social relations among you

all lie within the Quran” (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermon 158).

1. Reason

Another source of knowledge endorsed by Islam is reason (*‘aql*). Reason is regarded as the inner proof, standing alongside revelation. “God did not send prophets and messengers to His servants except so that they may reason about God. Thus, those who responded best to the call of the prophets were those who possessed higher knowledge, greater understanding of God’s command, and more complete and sound reason. These attain the highest rank in this world and the Hereafter. God has established two proofs for His servants: an outward proof and an inward proof. The outward proof consists of the prophets, messengers, and Imams, while the inward proof is the intellects of human beings” (Kulaynī, 1984, vol. 1, p. 16). In its linguistic root, *‘aql* means restraint, prohibition, holding back, confinement, and prevention (Jawharī, 1983, vol. 5, p. 1769). Rāghib explains the meaning of *‘aql* as “self-restraint and holding oneself back, like tying a camel with a rope called *‘iqāl*.” Imam Ali, in Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāgha*, draws on this literal sense when speaking of worldly people: “They are like tethered (*ma‘qala*) beasts” (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Letter 31). Reason is one of the faculties of the holy rational soul and is a distinctive feature of human beings, setting them apart from animals. Through the faculty of reason, a person distinguishes right from wrong¹ and places everything in its proper position. Imam Ali states: “The rational person is the one who puts everything in its rightful place” (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Wisdom 235). As mentioned, through reason a person arrives at a correct understanding of himself and the world around him.² This correct understanding stands in opposition to ignorance. Reason is capable of grasping universals and can deduce theoretical issues from self-evident and known premises. From the viewpoint of Imam Ali, reason is the most important blessing that God has bestowed upon humanity and the very feature that distinguishes humans from other creatures. In Islamic psychology, reason is an aspect of the holy rational soul, which is unique to humans and absent in animals. According to a hadith transmitted from Imam al-Sadiq, what differentiates humans from animals is possessing reason, while what differentiates humans from angels is possessing appetite. Animals are driven by a single motivator—appetite—while angels are driven solely by reason.

1. *Nahj al-Balāgha*, Wisdom 421: "It is sufficient for you from your intellect that it has made clear to you the paths of your misguidance from your guidance."

2. Tamīmī Āmidī, 1989, Hadith 6: "Whoever intellects (*‘aql*), comprehends."

But humans are stimulated from two directions—reason and appetite—and must choose one of them through free will. This very capacity for choice is what confers nobility upon humans over other beings (Ibn Bābawayh, 2006, p. 4). In epistemological terminology, reason is the cognitive faculty that perceives general concepts and engages in definition and reasoning. From Imam Ali's perspective as well, reason is not only recognized as a path to acquiring knowledge but is the origin of knowledge and humanity's access to the truths of existence. He states: "It suffices for your reason that it clarifies for you the paths of misguidance from the paths of right guidance" (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Wisdom 421). He regards reason alongside experience as two sources and origins of knowledge, saying: "Wretched indeed is the one deprived of what reason and experience benefit him with" (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Letter 78). In his own system of governance, Imam Ali considered reason a stimulator for the correct movement of actors and referred to it accordingly. In his letter to Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, the governor of Kufa, he wrote: "Therefore, employ your reason, take the reins of your affairs into your own hands, and seize your share" (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Letter 63).

2. Sense and Experience

Another general and important source of knowledge that forms the foundation of insights in the political governance of societies is the utilization of human senses and experience. The first stage of human knowledge of the material world around him occurs through the five senses. Through the senses, sensation and sensory perception take place (Karamad, 2016, p. 33). "Experience" is also considered a consequence of sensation. All experiences and empirical judgments depend on sensory perception. Imam Ali in *Nahj al-Balāgha* regards the use of senses and experience as a path to acquiring knowledge, stating: "The truly insightful person is the one who hears and reflects, looks and truly sees, and benefits from lessons" (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, Sermon 153). Imam Ali considers experience alongside reason as one of the valid sources of knowledge and deems anyone deprived of these two sources of knowledge wretched.¹ He views experience as a factor that enhances reason² and as an origin for the emergence of new sciences: "If experiences did not exist, paths would remain concealed, and it is through experiencing that new knowledge is obtained" (Karājākī, 1989, vol. 1, p. 367). Despite

1. *Nahj al-Balāgha*, Wisdom 421: "Indeed, the wretched one is the one who is deprived of the benefit of what has been granted to him of intellect and experience."

2. Ibn Shu'ba al-Ḥarānī, 1984, p. 448 is: "The intellect is an innate quality that increases with knowledge and experiences."

the importance of the senses and sensory perceptions, reason and rational perceptions hold a superior and higher position in religious epistemology. True knowledge and the real perfection of human beings lie in rational knowledge, and sensory knowledge should be regarded as a prelude to reaching this knowledge. Reason, in order to attain intelligibles and universals, initially requires sensory and particular matters that are preserved in imagination and memory (Karājakī, 1989, vol. 1, p. 35, quoting Ibn Sīnā's *al-Ta'liqāt*). Imam Ali considers reason the origin of knowledge and understanding,¹ describing it as the means to attain the heights of knowledge² and the depths of wisdom.³ In another hadith he states: "Intellects are the leaders of thoughts, thoughts are the leaders of hearts, hearts are the leaders of senses, and senses are the leaders of the limbs" (Karājakī, 1989, vol. 1, p. 200). For a person to perform an action with his limbs and organs, he requires correct knowledge and understanding of it. This knowledge either comes through the senses (sensory and experiential knowledge), through the heart (heart-based knowledge), or through thought and reasoning whose origin is reason or intellect. In this statement, the term "leaders" used by the Imam is employed because one person leads another and commands him in matters. Here too, reason leads thought, thought leads the heart, the heart leads the senses, and the senses lead to action. According to this saying, rational knowledge is the origin or influencer of all other non-revelatory forms of knowledge, and hence, reason is regarded as the primary origin and source of knowledge and science.

3. Intuition (Heart)

Another source of human knowledge is the heart, which serves as the origin of inner revelation and intuition. In epistemology, alongside the senses and reason, reference is made to a source known as "intuition and unveiling." This epistemic source allows for the direct, immediate grasp of certain truths. Presential knowledge, despite being personal in nature, is divided into two categories: universal and non-universal. The universal presentational knowledge that all human beings can attain without ascetic discipline includes: knowledge of oneself, one's faculties and inner states; knowledge of one's direct heart-based acts such as willing, judging, thinking, and attending; knowledge of mental concepts and forms; and knowledge of one's own origin

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1. Tamīmī Āmidī, 1989, p. 53: "The intellect is the root of knowledge and the caller to understanding."
 2. Mohammadi Reyshahri, 2015, p. 37, quoting Ibn Ṭalḥa, *Maṭālib al-Su'ūl*, p. 49: "Through intellects, you will attain the heights of knowledge."
 3. Tamīmī Āmidī, 1989, p. 297: "Through intellect, the depth of wisdom is extracted."

(Mohammadi and Shaker, 2020, p. 93). Non-universal presential knowledge occurs in certain individuals at particular moments through practice, ascetic discipline, or purification of the heart—such as spiritual unveilings, direct intuitions, and heart-inspired illuminations experienced by sincere mystics and wayfarers. Of course, all human beings benefit from the heart in completing their knowledge. Intuitive knowledge sometimes complements other forms of knowledge acquired through reason or experience. A person may gain a truth through experience or transmission and accept it rationally, yet not embrace it wholeheartedly. But when the heart also accepts it, that knowledge reaches its completion. For this reason, in religious governance a comprehensive set of epistemic sources—including reason, transmission, experience, and intuition—is both endorsed and effective. Such a package elevates governance to a transcendent level. Imam Ali refers to this epistemic package in wise sayings: “The heart of the intelligent person is an eye through which he beholds his ultimate end” (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 154). “Then He granted him a retentive heart, a speaking tongue, and a seeing eye so that he might understand and take heed” (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 83). Recognizing that the heart grasps truths in a presential manner reveals the epistemic value of such knowledge, for truths obtained through this source are free from the mediation of forms and concepts, and therefore immune to error (Hosseinzadeh, 2014, p. 109).

5-1-1-4. Character-Based Driving Forces

If we define the insights and inclinations of society as equivalent to the “values of society” and consider them the basis for law-making in that society, then the values of society become the motivational drivers of society. Now, if we wish to regard the factors and variables that play an accelerating role within the governance system as “accelerating drivers,” we must pay attention to the agents—or actors—and the manner of their interactions. Undoubtedly, the selection of competent actors, the way they interact with one another, and the way they interact with the law are three crucial factors. These can either serve as driving forces in governance or slow down and halt society’s movement. These factors are primarily operational in nature and reflect the overall conduct of governance. For example, in a society where meritocracy forms the basis for selecting officials, these competent individuals themselves become drivers propelling society forward. Likewise, when interactions among the actors of society are proper and grounded in correct legal principles, society’s movement becomes faster and more effective.

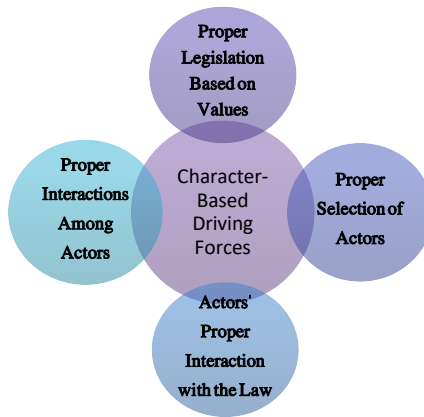


Figure 1. Character-based (Performance) Driving Forces

In the six-dimensional geometry defined for governance in this article, these issues—since they primarily relate to the actors of governance—are addressed in the section on the agents of governance, where a separate chapter is devoted to these topics. Since we consider the primary driving forces of governance to be its stimulators, and the stimulators are precisely the insight-based and inclinational ones, in this article we only refer to the main headings of behavioral driving forces and briefly discuss them.

Table 1. Components and Strategies of Character-Based Driving Forces in Wilāya-based Governance

Component	Strategy (Indicator)	Transmitted Evidence from <i>Nahj al-Balāgha</i>
Proper Legislation Based on Values	Legislation based on the Book, the Sunnah, and the custom of the believers, adapted to the conditions of the time	Sermon 125: And God, the Exalted, has said: “And if you disagree over anything, refer it to God and the Messenger.” Sermon 205: ... So when the matter was referred to me, I looked into the Book of God and what He has laid down for us and commanded us to judge by; I followed it. And I followed what the Prophet—peace and blessings be upon him and his family—had established as precedent. Wisdom 17: Adapting the law to the changing conditions of the time
Proper Selection of Actors	Meritocracy	Sermon 173: The most entitled of all people to this authority is the one who is strongest in upholding it and most knowledgeable of God’s command concerning it. Letter 53: Criteria for merit-based selection of officials: Then examine the affairs of your agents and appoint them only after testing them, and do not appoint them out of favoritism ... Sermon 131: Characteristics of a worthy leader: And you know well that it is not fitting for a governor to be in charge of people’s honor, blood, spoils, judgments, and the leadership of the Muslims ...

Component	Strategy (Indicator)	Transmitted Evidence from <i>Nahj al-Balāgha</i>
Actors' Proper Interaction With Each Other	Unity and solidarity of the Ummah around <i>wilāya</i>	<p>Sermon 216: But among the obligatory rights of God upon His servants is offering sincere counsel to the utmost of their ability and cooperating with one another in establishing the truth among themselves.</p> <p>Sermon 127: And beware of division.</p> <p>Sermon 25: By God, I truly believe that these people will soon gain the upper hand over you because they are united upon their falsehood while you are divided over your truth, and because you disobey your leader in what is right while they obey their leader in what is false.</p>
	Obedience to the <i>Walī</i>	<p>Sermon 169: And indeed, in God's authority lies protection for your affairs, so give Him your obedience without blame or compulsion.</p> <p>Letter 50: And obedience is due to me from you, and that you do not shrink back from any summons.</p> <p>Letter 2: ... You have heard and obeyed, you were called and you responded.</p> <p>Letter 33: ... the follower of his authority, obedient to his Imam.</p> <p>Sermon 182: Trust in the leader and follow him.</p> <p>Sermon 156: If you obey me, then—God willing—I shall carry you upon the path to Paradise.</p>
	Interaction based on love, good opinion, and benevolence	<p>Sermon 216: The right of the ruler over the subjects and the right of the subjects over the ruler is a duty that God, the Exalted, has made obligatory upon each toward the other, and He has made it the bond that unites them.</p> <p>Letter 53: Let your heart feel mercy toward the subjects, love for them, and gentleness with them.</p> <p>Letter 53: Know that nothing is more conducive to a ruler's good opinion of his subjects than his doing good to them ... Therefore, let your conduct in this matter be such that it gathers for you the good opinion of your subjects, for good opinion spares you much hardship.</p> <p>Sermon 34: As for your right over me, it is sincere counsel for you ... As for my right over you, it is loyalty to the pledge of allegiance and sincere counsel in both public and private.</p>
	Public, Maximal Participation	<p>Sermon 173: If the Imamate could not be established until all the people were present for it, then there would be no way to achieve that ...</p> <p>Letter 53: The displeasure of the general public outweighs the satisfaction of the elite, whereas the displeasure of the elite can be overlooked when the general public is satisfied.</p> <p>Letter 53: The pillar of the religion, the unity of the Muslims, and the strength against enemies lie in the general masses of the community. Therefore, let your inclination and your leaning be toward them.</p> <p>Letter 53: Know that the subjects are of different classes; none of them can prosper without the others, and none is independent of the others.</p>

Component	Strategy (Indicator)	Transmitted Evidence from <i>Nahj al-Balāgha</i>
Actors' Proper Interaction with the Law	Unconditional Commitment of Everyone to the Law	Sermon 215: Addressing Aqil regarding not distinguishing between him and others in disbursing from the public treasury.

6. Conclusion

In the definition of *wilāya*-based governance, it was stated that governance consists of “the monotheistic steering of the movement of the Umma along the orbit of the *walī*'s ideals in a specific time and place in order to realize the goodly life.” This movement is defined within a six-dimensional geometry. The six components of this movement are: origin, destination, stimulators, agents, time, and place. In this article, the driving forces of this movement have been examined. “Stimulators” are the driving forces, factors, and reasons for the movement and functioning of the system; they are divided into two main categories: motivational and epistemic.

A third category of driving forces can also be defined. These are not the initiators of movement but can play an accelerating role and make a significant contribution to advancing the movement of society. These are operational components that largely result from the interaction of the agents and shape the overall conduct of governance. For this reason, they have been termed behavioral driving forces.

These factors are summarized in the table below:

Driving Forces in <i>Wilāya</i> -Based Governance		
Advancement and expansion of the four factors: power, wealth, fame, and awareness (knowledge)	Positive Factors	Motivational Driving Forces
Tawallī: love for God and the guardian of God		
Seeking God's pleasure and earning divine reward and recompense		
Tabarrī: disavowal of the enemy of God and the guardian of God	Negative Factors	
Avoidance of God's wrath and divine punishment		
- Transmitted or revelatory sources - Reason - Senses and experience - Intuition (the heart)	Sources of Knowledge	Insight-Based Driving Forces
Legislation based on the Book, the Sunnah, and the custom of the believers, adapted to the conditions of the time	Proper Legislation Based on Values	
Meritocracy	Proper Selection of Actors	

Driving Forces in <i>Wilāya</i>-Based Governance		
Unity and solidarity of the Ummah around <i>wilāya</i>	Proper Interactions of Actors with Each Other	Character-Based Driving Forces
Obedience to the guardian		
Interaction based on love, good opinion, and benevolence		
Maximum and general participation		
Unconditional adherence of all to the law	Actors' Proper Interactions with the Law	

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