

Islamicate Futures

Knowledge, Ethics, and Muslim Societies

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Islamicate Futures as an Emerging Field: Rethinking Islamic Studies through Knowledge, Ethics, and Global Transformation

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Abstract

This article conceptualizes *Islamicate Futures* as an emerging interdisciplinary field for rethinking Islamic Studies in response to contemporary global transformation. The study begins from the problem that Islamic Studies has developed strong scholarly tools for interpreting texts, traditions, legal schools, institutions, and histories, but remains less equipped to analyze uncertainty, future imaginaries, digital authority, ecological crisis, demographic change, and long-term Muslim social transformation. Using a qualitative conceptual design and critical documentary analysis, the article examines Islamic normative texts, global policy documents, institutional reports, contemporary Muslim public declarations, and relevant theoretical literature in Islamic Studies, Islamicate studies, futures studies, digital religion, and Islamic ethics. The findings show that Islamicate Futures is not a speculative discourse about Islam and the future, but a field-building framework that connects knowledge, ethics, governance, sustainability, digital transformation, and plural Muslim public life. The study identifies four core arguments: Islamic Studies requires an anticipatory epistemic orientation; digital religion and artificial intelligence destabilize conventional forms of Islamic knowledge mediation; Islamic environmental ethics must move beyond symbolic language toward institutional implementation; and Muslim demographic change should be analyzed critically through pluralism, governance, education, law, and social transformation rather than demographic triumphalism. The article contributes theoretically by integrating Islamicate studies, critical Islamic Studies, futures studies, digital religion, and Islamic ethics into a coherent framework for future-oriented Islamic scholarship.

Keywords: Islamicate Futures, Islamic Studies, Digital Religion, Islamic Ethics

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengonseptualisasikan *Islamicate Futures* sebagai bidang interdisipliner yang sedang berkembang untuk memikirkan kembali Studi Islam dalam merespons transformasi global kontemporer. Kajian ini berangkat dari persoalan bahwa Studi Islam telah mengembangkan perangkat keilmuan yang kuat untuk menafsirkan teks, tradisi, mazhab hukum, institusi, dan sejarah, tetapi masih kurang memadai dalam menganalisis ketidakpastian, imajinasi masa depan, otoritas digital, krisis ekologis, perubahan demografis, serta transformasi sosial Muslim dalam jangka panjang. Dengan menggunakan desain konseptual kualitatif dan analisis dokumenter kritis, artikel ini mengkaji teks-teks normatif Islam, dokumen kebijakan global, laporan institusional, deklarasi publik Muslim kontemporer, serta literatur teoretis yang relevan dalam Studi Islam, kajian Islamicate, studi masa depan, agama digital, dan etika Islam. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Islamicate Futures* bukanlah wacana spekulatif tentang Islam dan masa depan, melainkan kerangka pembentukan bidang kajian yang menghubungkan pengetahuan, etika, tata kelola, keberlanjutan, transformasi digital, dan kehidupan publik Muslim yang plural. Kajian ini mengidentifikasi empat argumen utama: Studi Islam memerlukan orientasi epistemik yang antisipatoris; agama digital dan kecerdasan buatan mengguncang bentuk-bentuk konvensional mediasi pengetahuan Islam; etika lingkungan Islam perlu bergerak melampaui bahasa simbolik menuju implementasi institusional; dan perubahan demografis Muslim harus dianalisis secara kritis melalui pluralisme, tata kelola, pendidikan, hukum, dan transformasi sosial, bukan melalui triumfalisme demografis. Artikel ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis dengan mengintegrasikan kajian Islamicate, Studi Islam kritis, studi masa depan, agama digital, dan etika Islam ke dalam kerangka yang koheren bagi pengembangan keilmuan Islam yang berorientasi masa depan.

Kata kunci: *Islamicate Futures*, Studi Islam, Agama Digital, Etika Islam



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Introduction

The twenty-first century has intensified the need to reconsider the intellectual orientation, methodological scope, and ethical responsibility of Islamic Studies. Contemporary Muslim societies are not merely inheritors of religious traditions, textual canons, legal schools, and civilizational memories; they are also situated within rapidly changing global conditions shaped by artificial intelligence, climate disruption, digital religion, demographic transformation, migration, educational reform, legal pluralism, and shifting geopolitical imaginaries. These transformations raise questions that cannot be addressed adequately through a purely retrospective model of scholarship. Islamic Studies has developed sophisticated tools for interpreting texts, reconstructing histories, analyzing legal traditions, and studying Muslim institutions. Yet contemporary global transformation requires an additional mode of inquiry: one capable of examining how Muslim societies imagine, contest, govern, and ethically shape possible futures.

This problem is not simply practical. It is epistemological. Islamic Studies has historically been shaped by debates over textual authority, legal reasoning, historical reconstruction, Orientalism, post-Orientalist critique, and the plurality of Muslim societies. Said's critique of Orientalism exposed the power/knowledge formations through which Islam and Muslim societies were represented within Western academic discourse.¹ Asad deepened this critique by arguing that Islam should be approached as a discursive tradition rather than as a static essence or merely a cultural object detached from regimes of authority, embodiment, discipline, and practice.² Hodgson's concept of the "Islamicate" offered another important intervention by distinguishing between what is strictly religiously Islamic and the wider cultural, intellectual, artistic, social, and institutional formations historically associated with Muslim societies.³ Ahmed further complicated the field by showing that Islam cannot be reduced to legal normativity alone, since Islamic meaning has historically been produced through tensions among text, interpretation, philosophy, poetry, ambiguity, contradiction, and lived cultural forms.⁴

These debates remain foundational, but they also reveal a persistent limitation. Islamic Studies is stronger in interpreting inherited traditions and diagnosing present configurations of authority than in theorizing possible, probable, and preferable futures. This limitation becomes increasingly consequential in what Sardar describes as "postnormal times," a condition marked by complexity, contradiction, chaos, and uncertainty.⁵ In such a context, Muslim societies face not only familiar questions of law, theology, authority, and identity, but also emerging issues that exceed conventional disciplinary boundaries. Artificial intelligence raises questions about algorithmic religious authority, automated fatwa-like responses, machine-generated Islamic content, and the reliability of digital knowledge infrastructures. Climate change raises questions about ecological justice, intergenerational responsibility, and the ethical limits of

¹ Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978).

² Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

³ Marshall G S Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 1–3 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

⁴ Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

⁵ Ziauddin Sardar, "Welcome to Postnormal Times," *Futures* 42, no. 5 (2010): 435–44, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2009.11.028>.

extractive development. Digital religion reshapes how Muslims learn, teach, perform, debate, and contest religious authority across platforms. Demographic change and migration make Muslim futures increasingly central to global debates on education, governance, law, citizenship, pluralism, and public ethics.⁶

Previous scholarship has addressed important parts of this problem, but these contributions remain dispersed across separate fields. One major trend has examined Islamic Studies as a discipline in transition, especially in relation to Orientalism, religious studies, textual interpretation, history, and the place of Islam within the modern university.⁷ This scholarship has been crucial for exposing the politics of representation and the institutional conditions under which Islam becomes an academic object. However, its dominant orientation remains historical, interpretive, and critical rather than explicitly anticipatory. A second body of scholarship has developed the conceptual vocabulary of Islamicate civilization, Muslim cultural formations, and the plurality of Islamic meaning beyond narrow legal or theological definitions.⁸ This literature broadens the object of Islamic Studies, yet it does not by itself provide a methodological framework for analyzing future transformation.

A third body of scholarship has advanced futures studies, scenario thinking, anticipatory governance, causal layered analysis, postnormal analysis, and futures literacy as tools for analyzing uncertainty and imagining alternative futures.⁹ Recent scholarship has begun to bring this literature into conversation with Islamic Studies. Muzykina, Aljanova, and Yuldashev, for instance, apply the “Three Tomorrows” framework to Islamic contexts and propose “futures ijtihad” as an informed intellectual effort to explore alternative futures.¹⁰ Ali similarly emphasizes futures thinking as a critical capacity for long-term social transformation in Muslim communities, especially in relation to governance, social justice, and technological change.¹¹ These works are important because they show that futures thinking can become more than policy forecasting; it can operate as a critical intellectual tool for religious and social analysis. Nevertheless, the integration of futures studies into Islamic Studies remains emergent and has not yet been consolidated into a field-level conceptual framework.

⁶ International Telecommunication Union, “Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2025” (Geneva: International Telecommunication Union, 2025), <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/facts-figures-2025/>; Pew Research Center, “How the Global Religious Landscape Changed from 2010 to 2020” (Pew Research Center, 2025), <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/06/09/how-the-global-religious-landscape-changed-from-2010-to-2020/>.

⁷ Leon Buskens and Annemarie van Sandwijk, eds., *Islamic Studies in the Twenty-First Century: Transformations and Continuities* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016); Carl W Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*; Said, *Orientalism*.

⁸ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*; Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*.

⁹ Sohail Inayatullah, “Causal Layered Analysis: Poststructuralism as Method,” *Futures* 30, no. 8 (1998): 815–29, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287\(98\)00086-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287(98)00086-X); Sohail Inayatullah, “Six Pillars: Futures Thinking for Transforming,” *Foresight* 10, no. 1 (2008): 4–21, <https://doi.org/10.1108/14636680810855991>; Sardar, “Welcome to Postnormal Times.”

¹⁰ Y V Muzykina, N K Aljanova, and T Yuldashev, “Expanding Islamic Studies Epistemological Apparatus with Futures Studies Tools: The Three Tomorrows,” *Journal of Futures Studies* 28, no. 3 (2024): 31–48, [https://doi.org/10.6531/JFS.202403_28\(3\).0003](https://doi.org/10.6531/JFS.202403_28(3).0003).

¹¹ N M Ali et al., “THE CONCEPTUAL NEXUS BETWEEN ISLAMIC FORESIGHT, ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND THE SHARIAH,” *Malaysian Journal of Syariah and Law* 12, no. 1 (2024): 62–76, <https://doi.org/10.33102/mjssl.vol12no1.524>.

A fourth body of scholarship has examined Islamic ethics, *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, applied bioethics, environmental ethics, governance, and Muslim responses to science and modernity.¹² More recent contributions have argued that Islamic ethics can engage contemporary questions of sustainable development, governance, biomedical research, public good, and responsibility through the interaction between revelation, reason, and social need.¹³ Topkara further indicates that Islamic ethical thought can be re-examined through dialogue with responsibility ethics and other philosophical traditions.¹⁴ These studies demonstrate the relevance of Islamic ethics for contemporary global problems. However, their limitation lies in the uneven translation of ethical concepts into future-oriented analysis. Normative concepts such as justice, accountability, public welfare, and responsibility are often discussed as principles, but less frequently examined as tools for analyzing technological acceleration, planetary crisis, institutional design, or long-term social transformation.

A fifth trend concerns Islamic knowledge production and educational reform. The transformation of Islamic higher education has generated debates over the integration of religious knowledge with modern sciences, the reform of Islamic universities, and the relationship between traditional religious scholarship and contemporary academic disciplines.¹⁵ Related debates on the Islamization of knowledge critique Western epistemological dominance and seek to integrate Islamic ethics and methodologies into modern fields such as economics, sociology, education, and political science.¹⁶ These debates are significant because they confront the epistemic asymmetries through which modern knowledge has often been institutionalized. Yet they also face unresolved tensions: the risk of reproducing binary oppositions between “Islamic” and “Western” knowledge, the danger of reducing epistemic critique to ideological assertion, and the difficulty of building genuinely interdisciplinary methods that are both academically rigorous and contextually grounded.

Digital religion scholarship adds another important layer to this debate. Studies of digital religion have shown that religious identity, ritual, community,

¹² Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (King's Lyon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), <https://archive.org/details/maqasidalshariah0000auda/page/n5/mode/2up>; Mohammed Ghaly, *Islam and Disability: Perspectives in Theology and Jurisprudence* (London: Routledge, 2010); Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shariah Law: An Introduction* (Oneworld Publications, 2019).

¹³ L Elouazzani, “Human Dignity and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Insights from the Quran,” *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development* 8, no. 12 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v8i12.9129>; N Akhter, “Integrating Islamic Ethical Principles With Innovative Approaches to Address Contemporary Social Research Challenges,” in *Innovative Approaches to Social Research Challenges*, 2026, 255–74, <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-6410-0.ch009>; L Raimi, “Do Islamic Epistemology and Ethics Advance the Understanding and Promotion of Sustainable Development? A Systematic Review Using PRISMA,” *International Journal of Ethics and Systems*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOES-04-2024-0115>.

¹⁴ U Topkara, “On Responsibility: Islamic Ethical Thought Engages with Jewish Ethical Thought,” *Religions* 16, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16030274>.

¹⁵ T Khoir et al., “The Narrowing Spaces for Islamic Knowledge at Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia: Opportunity and Challenge,” *Higher Education* 90, no. 4 (2025): 1145–73, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-024-01370-3>.

¹⁶ A Chande, “Global Politics of Knowledge Production: The Challenges of Islamization of Knowledge in The Light of Tradition Vs Secular Modernity Debate,” *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 2 (2023): 271–89, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v6i2.3502>; H Dzilo, “The Concept of ‘Islamization of Knowledge’ and Its Philosophical Implications,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23, no. 3 (2012): 247–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2012.676779>.

authority, and belonging are increasingly mediated by digital infrastructures.¹⁷ Recent work further shows that virtual environments provide new spaces for religious engagement, identity construction, peacebuilding, interfaith dialogue, and community formation, while also generating risks such as extremism, misinformation, identity fragmentation, and unequal participation.¹⁸ Obadia's discussion of cyber-religions also suggests that digital religion does not merely reproduce traditional religion online; it produces new hybrid forms of religiosity that combine hypermodern media conditions with inherited symbolic repertoires.¹⁹ However, digital religion studies have not yet sufficiently connected these developments to Islamicate civilizational analysis, Islamic ethics, futures methodologies, and the politics of knowledge production. The digital divide also remains a significant barrier to inclusive participation in digital religion and global learning.²⁰

Globalization and modernity further complicate the field. Scholarship on Islamic Studies in a globalized world has emphasized the need for dialogue between Islamic and Western intellectual traditions, especially in relation to identity, cultural exchange, modernity, and social transformation.²¹ Emerging work on "Muslim futures" also frames future-oriented Muslim subjectivity as a socio-ethical and aesthetic project, especially among young Muslims responding to systemic oppression, climate change, inequality, and decolonial struggles.²² These studies are valuable because they connect imagination, ethics, identity, and social critique. Yet they remain insufficiently integrated with the broader disciplinary structure of Islamic Studies. In many cases, discussions of Muslim futures remain cultural, activist, aesthetic, or ethical, while Islamic Studies as a discipline has not

¹⁷ H A Campbell, "Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2012): 64–93, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfr074>; H. A. Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. (Routledge., 2020); Ruth Tsuria et al., "Approaches to Digital Methods in Studies of Digital Religion," *The Communication Review* 20, no. 2 (2017): 73–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2017.1304137>.

¹⁸ C Borowik, "From Radical Communalism to Virtual Community: The Digital Transformation of the Family International," *Nova Religio* 22, no. 1 (2018): 59–86, <https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2018.22.1.59>; R Liogier, "Identités Globales et Religion à l'ère Digitale : Vers Les Global Identity Studies," *Social Compass* 67, no. 4 (2020): 553–75, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768620953508>; S Zhandossova, N Seitakhmetova, and M Nurov, "Religious Policy of Kazakhstan: Mechanisms for Managing the Islamic Environment amid Post-Soviet Transformation," *Frontiers in Political Science* 7 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2025.1606705>; G Manoharan and S Durai, "Role of Religious Institution in Digital Peacebuilding: A New Frontier," in *Digital Hate Speech, Disinformation, and Peace in Religiously Diverse Regions*, 2026, 297–316, <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-6068-3.ch011>.

¹⁹ L Obadia, "Cyber-Religion," in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 2017, 1–3, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118430873.est0081>.

²⁰ H Simojoki, "Falling Through the Net: The Digital Divide as a Challenge for Public Theology, Global Learning and Religious Education," in *Public Theology Perspectives on Religion and Education*, 2018, 199–210, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429464973-16>.

²¹ N Seitakhmetova et al., "Islamic Studies as Dialogic Project Problems and Prospects," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 17, no. 3 (2021): 171–80, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85110179604&partnerID=40&md5=a7fe1cbe9d3e44463e95b6d1ff8c36ec>; J Meuleman, *Islam in the Era of Globalization: Muslim Attitudes towards Modernity and Identity, Islam in the Era of Globalization: Muslim Attitudes towards Modernity and Identity*, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203988862>.

²² S Bolghiran, "Allahu Akbar: When the Imaginative, the Beautiful and the Ethical Meet in Muslim Futures," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 13, no. 3 (2024): 273–86, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22117954-bja10115>.

yet fully developed a systematic framework for treating futures as an analytical category.

The central gap addressed in this article is therefore conceptual and methodological. Previous scholarship has generated rich debates on Islamic Studies, Islamicate civilization, Islamic ethics, digital religion, Islamic higher education, Islamization of knowledge, Muslim futures, and futures studies. However, these debates remain fragmented. Studies on Islamic ethics often lack futures methodologies. Studies on digital religion often lack a broader Islamicate and ethical horizon. Studies on Islamic higher education often address integration and reform without developing an anticipatory theory of knowledge. Studies on futures thinking rarely engage deeply with Islamic Studies as a historically constituted academic field. As a result, Islamic Studies still lacks an integrated field-level framework capable of analyzing global transformation as a future-oriented object of inquiry.

This article responds to that gap by proposing Islamicate Futures as an emerging interdisciplinary field. The term is used deliberately. “Islamicate” signals that the object of inquiry extends beyond formal doctrine, jurisprudence, or theology. It includes the intellectual, cultural, institutional, technological, aesthetic, ethical, educational, legal, and social formations associated with Muslim societies across history and geography. “Futures,” meanwhile, does not refer to prediction, utopian imagination, or speculative fantasy. It refers to structured anticipatory inquiry into how communities imagine, contest, prepare for, and ethically shape possible futures. Islamicate Futures is therefore not proposed as a replacement for Islamic Studies. It is proposed as a field-building framework that extends Islamic Studies into anticipatory, ethical, and globally engaged modes of scholarship.

The article is guided by three research questions. First, how can Islamicate Futures be conceptualized as an emerging field within contemporary Islamic Studies and Islamicate studies? Second, what epistemological, ethical, and methodological foundations are required to develop Islamicate Futures as a credible academic framework? Third, how can Islamicate Futures contribute to international debates on knowledge production, digital transformation, religious authority, ethics, governance, education, law, and Muslim social change?

The objectives of the article are threefold. First, it aims to define Islamicate Futures as an emerging field rather than as a loose thematic expression about Islam and the future. Second, it seeks to synthesize major theoretical resources from Islamicate studies, critical Islamic Studies, futures studies, Islamic ethics, digital religion, and Muslim social studies. Third, it develops a conceptual argument for why Islamic Studies requires an anticipatory turn in order to engage contemporary global challenges without abandoning textual, historical, ethical, and institutional rigor.

The theoretical framework of the study is constructed from four interrelated perspectives. First, Hodgson’s concept of the Islamicate provides a civilizational and cultural vocabulary for analyzing Muslim-related formations beyond strictly religious categories.²³ Second, post-Orientalist and discursive approaches to Islamic Studies provide a critical lens for examining how Islamic knowledge is historically produced, authorized, translated, institutionalized, and contested.²⁴ Third, futures studies provides methodological tools for analyzing

²³ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*.

²⁴ Said, *Orientalism*; Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*; Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*; Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*.

uncertainty, plurality, alternative scenarios, and the politics of anticipation.²⁵ Fourth, Islamic ethical reasoning, especially *maqāṣid*-oriented approaches, provides a normative vocabulary for evaluating future-oriented questions through justice, dignity, public welfare, ecological responsibility, accountability, and intergenerational concern.²⁶

This theoretical combination is necessary because the future is never a neutral temporal category. Futures are produced through power, imagination, knowledge, technology, institutions, and ethics. Appadurai argues that the future is a cultural fact because communities differ in their capacity to aspire and to imagine alternative possibilities.²⁷ In Muslim contexts, this insight is especially important because futures are often shaped by external projections: security narratives, demographic anxieties, development agendas, technological platforms, geopolitical interests, market logics, and global media representations. *Islamicate Futures* therefore asks not only what may happen to Muslim societies, but also who has the authority to imagine Muslim futures, what epistemologies inform those imaginings, whose interests they serve, and what ethical criteria should guide them.

The novelty of this article lies in its attempt to formulate *Islamicate Futures* as a coherent field-building framework. Rather than treating futures studies as an external tool added to Islamic Studies, the article argues that futures-oriented inquiry can become an internal expansion of Islamic Studies itself, particularly when grounded in *Islamicate* plurality, epistemic critique, ethical reasoning, and institutional analysis. The article contributes to international scholarship by offering a conceptual framework through which Islamic Studies can engage global transformation not only as an object of analysis, but also as a site of ethical imagination, methodological renewal, and scholarly intervention. In doing so, it advances existing debates in Islamic Studies, religious studies, *Islamicate* studies, digital religion, ethics, and Muslim social studies, making the article relevant for a reputable Scopus-indexed international journal concerned with the future of religion, knowledge, and global society.

Method

This study employs a qualitative conceptual design using critical documentary analysis. This approach is appropriate because the article does not seek to measure attitudes, test statistical relationships, or produce ethnographic description, but to develop a conceptual framework for understanding *Islamicate Futures* as an emerging field within contemporary Islamic and *Islamicate* studies. In line with qualitative research principles, the study treats texts, policy documents, institutional reports, and scholarly works as interpretive materials through which meanings, assumptions, authority claims, and social imaginaries can be critically examined.²⁸

²⁵ Inayatullah, “Causal Layered Analysis: Poststructuralism as Method”; Sardar, “Welcome to Postnormal Times”; Ziauddin Sardar and John A Sweeney, “The Three Tomorrows of Postnormal Times,” *Futures* 75 (2016): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2015.10.004>; Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (London: Verso, 2013).

²⁶ Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach*; Kamali, *Shariah Law: An Introduction*.

²⁷ Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*.

²⁸ John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Sage, 2018); Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 6th ed. (SAGE Publications, 2018), <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/an-introduction-to-qualitative-research/book261109>.

The primary documentary corpus consists of three main categories. The first is Islamic normative material, particularly Qur'anic passages concerning stewardship, accountability, verification, ecological balance, corruption, wastefulness, human dignity, and social plurality. The second consists of global institutional and policy documents, including UNESCO documents on futures literacy and artificial intelligence ethics, the IPCC Sixth Assessment Synthesis Report, International Telecommunication Union reports on digital connectivity, and Pew Research Center reports on global religious demography. The third consists of contemporary Muslim public documents, including the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change, the Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Muslim-Majority Lands, and the Charter of Makkah. Foundational works in Islamic Studies, Islamicate studies, futures studies, digital religion, and Islamic ethics were used as secondary analytical literature to situate the findings within existing scholarship.

Document selection was guided by relevance, credibility, and analytical contribution. Each source had to address at least one of the article's central categories: Islamic knowledge, ethics, digital transformation, sustainability, religious authority, public policy, pluralism, or Muslim social change. The selected documents also had to be institutionally or academically credible, accessible, and verifiable. Following Scott's criteria for documentary analysis, the study considered the authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning of documents rather than treating them as neutral containers of information.²⁹ Prior's view of documents as active social facts also informs the analysis, since the documents examined here do not merely report realities but participate in shaping knowledge, authority, and public discourse.³⁰

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, the documents were identified and classified into normative Islamic texts, global policy documents, Muslim public declarations, and theoretical-academic literature. Second, the materials were coded thematically based on recurring concepts and tensions, including epistemic renewal, anticipatory reasoning, algorithmic authority, verification, digital inequality, ecological responsibility, symbolic environmentalism, demographic change, pluralism, and institutional mediation. This coding process follows the logic of qualitative data analysis as developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña.³¹ Third, the coded materials were interpreted through qualitative content analysis and conceptual comparison. Following Krippendorff, content analysis was used to generate valid inferences from texts in relation to their contexts of use, but the analysis remained qualitative rather than quantitative.³²

The study adopts a critical interpretive stance. Islamic texts and Muslim public documents are not read apologetically as ready-made solutions to contemporary problems. Instead, they are analyzed in relation to institutional weakness, implementation gaps, unequal power, technological mediation, ecological crisis, and global transformation. This critical orientation enables the article to distinguish between normative potential and institutional realization. It also prevents the discussion from reducing Islamic ethics to abstract moral

²⁹ John Scott, *A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources in Social Research* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

³⁰ Lindsay Prior, *Using Documents in Social Research* (London: SAGE Publications, 2003).

³¹ Matthew B Miles, A Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. (Sage, 2014).

³² Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Sage Publications, 2018).

language without examining how such ethics become socially, legally, and politically operative.

To strengthen analytical rigor, the study uses source triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and transparent analytical procedures. Source triangulation is applied by comparing Islamic texts, international policy documents, Muslim declarations, and academic literature. Theoretical triangulation is applied by combining Islamicate studies, critical Islamic Studies, futures studies, digital religion studies, and Islamic ethics. The study also considers limiting evidence, especially the gap between ethical claims and institutional practice. Its limitation is that it does not provide interview, survey, ethnographic, or statistical data. Its contribution is therefore conceptual and documentary rather than empirically generalizable. This limitation is consistent with the article's aim: to formulate *Islamicate Futures* as a critical, future-oriented framework for analyzing how Islamic and Islamicate knowledge traditions engage knowledge, ethics, and global transformation.

Results and Discussion

Islamicate Futures and the Limits of Retrospective Islamic Studies

The most fundamental finding of this study is that *Islamicate Futures* emerges from a structural limitation within Islamic Studies: the field has developed sophisticated tools for interpreting inherited texts, traditions, institutions, and histories, but remains less equipped to analyze uncertainty, future imaginaries, and long-term transformation. This finding does not imply that Islamic Studies lacks intellectual depth. Rather, it indicates that the field's dominant academic orientation has been shaped by retrospective questions: how Islamic texts were interpreted, how legal schools developed, how religious authority was institutionalized, how Muslim societies changed historically, and how Islam was represented within modern academic discourse. These questions remain indispensable for the discipline. However, they are insufficient for a period marked by artificial intelligence, ecological disruption, demographic restructuring, algorithmic religious authority, educational transformation, and geopolitical uncertainty.

The primary textual evidence suggests that Islamic sources themselves contain temporal categories that exceed the mere preservation of the past. The Qur'an repeatedly connects human action with future accountability. The command to consider what one has "sent ahead for tomorrow" establishes a moral grammar of anticipatory responsibility rather than a purely retrospective model of piety (The Qur'an, n.d., Q. 59:18). The Qur'anic description of human beings as *khalifah* on earth also implies responsibility for worldly order rather than passive reception of inherited structures (The Qur'an, n.d., Q. 2:30). Similarly, Qur'anic historical narratives are presented not simply as sacred memory, but as material for reflection, moral learning, and social correction (The Qur'an, n.d., Q. 12:111). These textual references do not automatically produce a future-oriented Islamic Studies, but they show that the Islamic textual tradition contains conceptual resources for thinking about accountability, agency, and consequence.

The analytical issue, therefore, is not whether Islamic sources contain future-oriented motifs. The more important question is how such motifs are translated into academic method, institutional practice, and social analysis. Islamic epistemology has long integrated revelation, reason, intuition, and empirical observation as sources of knowledge, making knowledge both an

intellectual and ethical pursuit.³³ The concept of *tawhīd* has also been interpreted not merely as a theological claim but as an epistemological and ethical framework that shapes moral agency and the interpretation of lived experience.³⁴ Yet these epistemological resources require critical reconstruction if they are to address contemporary problems such as technological governance, climate risk, social inequality, and the restructuring of religious authority.

This finding also requires a more careful use of the term “Islamicate.” Hodgson’s concept of the Islamicate enables scholars to distinguish between what is strictly religiously Islamic and the wider cultural, intellectual, artistic, political, social, and institutional formations associated with Muslim societies.³⁵ This distinction is indispensable for future-oriented inquiry because the future of Muslim societies cannot be analyzed through doctrine, law, or theology alone. It also involves infrastructures, universities, media systems, digital platforms, public policies, legal institutions, urban forms, economic structures, and civilizational imaginaries. However, the concept is theoretically risky if it is used as a civilizational shorthand that treats Muslim societies as coherent, homogeneous, or morally unified. A critical Islamicate Futures framework must therefore attend to internal plurality, sectarian difference, gendered experience, class formation, state power, colonial histories, uneven institutional capacities, and unequal access to knowledge.

This is where Asad’s account of Islam as a discursive tradition becomes analytically important. Asad argues that Islam should not be understood as a fixed essence, but as a historically transmitted discursive tradition that authorizes particular practices, forms of reasoning, and modes of embodied life.³⁶ Islamicate Futures accepts this insight but extends it by asking how Islamic discursive traditions authorize, constrain, or contest future possibilities. Traditions do not merely preserve memory; they also regulate imagination. They shape what Muslim communities consider legitimate, thinkable, desirable, dangerous, or impossible. This temporal dimension is often underdeveloped in Islamic Studies, where the dominant analytical labor remains directed toward the reconstruction of textual authority, legal history, institutional formation, or contemporary practice.

Previous scholarship has already problematized the discipline’s relationship with power and representation. Said’s critique of Orientalism exposed how Islam and Muslim societies were produced through colonial and academic regimes of knowledge.³⁷ Ahmed later challenged reductionist accounts of Islam by arguing that Islamic meaning has historically been produced not only through law, but also through philosophy, poetry, aesthetics, ambiguity, contradiction, and lived cultural forms.³⁸ These interventions remain foundational because they prevent Islamic Studies from treating Islam as a stable doctrinal object. Yet they still operate largely within historical, conceptual, and interpretive reconstruction. Islamicate Futures shifts the analytical question: Islamic Studies must examine not only what Islam has been, how it has been represented, and how it is practiced,

³³ Elouazzani, “Human Dignity and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Insights from the Quran”; A S Mohamed Azmi et al., “Synthesizing the Maqasid Al-Syariah for the Waqf Property Development,” in *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, vol. 385, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/385/1/012051>.

³⁴ A M S Putra et al., “Post-Divorce Spirituality and the Renewal of Tawhīd Among Muslim Women in Pekanbaru, Indonesia: A Path to a Contextual Theology of Islamic Family Law,” *Juris: Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah* 24, no. 2 (2025): 219–31, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v24i2.15986>.

³⁵ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*.

³⁶ Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*.

³⁷ Said, *Orientalism*.

³⁸ Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*.

but also how Muslim societies imagine, govern, institutionalize, and contest possible futures.

The need for this shift is reinforced by debates on Islamic epistemology and the Islamization of knowledge. The Islamization of knowledge project emerged as an attempt to challenge colonial and secular epistemic dominance by integrating Islamic principles into modern disciplines.³⁹ Dzilo shows that this project has been one of the most influential attempts to rethink the relationship between Islamic knowledge and modern academic disciplines.⁴⁰ However, the project has also faced serious criticism for sometimes becoming ideological, binary, or insufficiently attentive to the diversity of Islamic intellectual traditions.⁴¹ Islamicate Futures can learn from this debate, but it should not merely reproduce it. Its task is not to declare an alternative Islamic knowledge system in opposition to “Western” knowledge, but to develop a critical and future-oriented framework capable of analyzing how knowledge is produced, authorized, contested, and institutionalized under contemporary global conditions.

The distinction between Islamic and Western epistemologies is also relevant, but it must be handled carefully. Islamic epistemology is often described as deeply rooted in the Qur’anic worldview and as maintaining a close relationship between knowledge, spirituality, and moral responsibility.⁴² By contrast, dominant Western academic traditions are often associated with secular rationalism, disciplinary specialization, and universalist claims. Yet a critical approach must avoid a simplistic binary. Western knowledge traditions are internally diverse, and Islamic intellectual traditions have historically absorbed, contested, and transformed external philosophical resources. Ottoman debates on Avicennan philosophy, for instance, show that Islamic intellectual history cannot be reduced to decline, closure, or repetition; it involved dynamic synthesis, disputation, and conceptual adaptation.⁴³ Recent critiques of reductionist narratives concerning the alleged decline of Islamic philosophy after al-Ghazālī further support this point by demonstrating the continued vitality of Islamic intellectual traditions across later periods.⁴⁴

This historical dynamism is important for Islamicate Futures because it challenges two weak positions at once. The first is the secular developmental

³⁹ B M Nur, “Politics of Epistemology in Postcolonial Africa: The Islamisation of Knowledge in the Sudan,” *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 23, no. 4 (2022): 475–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2022.2139688>; Chande, “Global Politics of Knowledge Production: The Challenges of Islamization of Knowledge in The Light of Tradition Vs Secular Modernity Debate”; M Laabdi, “Islamization of Knowledge as a ‘Muslim Question’: The Critique of Islāmiyyat Al-Ma‘rifah Between Universality, Cultural Locality, and the Rhetoric of the Crisis of Islam,” *Islamic Studies* 63, no. 3 (2024): 277–99, <https://doi.org/10.52541/isiri.v63i3.3318>.

⁴⁰ Dzilo, “The Concept of ‘Islamization of Knowledge’ and Its Philosophical Implications.”

⁴¹ M Laabdi, “‘Ilm Al-Ikhtilāf in Modern Western and Muslim Studies of Juristic Disagreement—A Critical Analysis1,” *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies* 42, no. 2 (2024): 185–210, <https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2024.0389>.

⁴² I Diallo, “‘Every Little Tree Has Its Own Bit of Shade’: Qur’an-Based Literacy of the Peul Fuuta Community,” *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning* 7, no. 3 (2012): 227–38, <https://doi.org/10.5172/ijpl.2012.7.3.227>; J E B Lumbard, “Islam, Coloniality, and the Pedagogy of Cognitive Liberation in Higher Education,” *Teaching in Higher Education* 30, no. 6 (2025): 1409–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2025.2468974>.

⁴³ E M Balıkcıoğlu, “Verifying the Truth on Their Own Terms Ottoman Philosophical Culture and the Court Debate Between Zeyrek (d. 903/1497-98 [?]) And Hocazāde (d. 893/1488),” *Knowledge Hegemonies in the Early Modern World 2* (2023): 1–234, <https://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-643-5>.

⁴⁴ K M A Haris and R Febrian, “POST-GHAZALI ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY IN THE SUNNI AND SHI’ITE TRADITIONS,” *Afkar* 25, no. 2 (2023): 459–98, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol25no2.14>.

assumption that Islamic knowledge must become modern by abandoning its own epistemic foundations. The second is the apologetic assumption that Islamic tradition already contains complete answers to contemporary problems. Both positions are inadequate. The stronger academic claim is that Islamic knowledge traditions contain resources, tensions, methods, and ethical vocabularies that can be critically reworked for future-oriented inquiry. However, such reworking requires methodological discipline, institutional mediation, and engagement with empirical realities.

The internal tensions of Islamic Studies further clarify this point. The field is marked by debates between textual and sociological approaches, between insider and outsider perspectives, and between traditional religious authority and modern academic institutions.⁴⁵ Epistemic authority in Islamic Studies remains contested because traditional scholars, university-based researchers, state institutions, digital publics, and transnational actors often produce competing interpretations of Islamic knowledge.⁴⁶ *Islamicate Futures* does not dissolve these tensions. Instead, it treats them as part of the field's analytical object. Future-oriented Islamic Studies must examine how competing authorities shape the future of Islamic knowledge, education, governance, and public life.

The engagement with futures studies is therefore methodological, not decorative. Inayatullah's causal layered analysis shows that futures are not neutral projections but layered constructions involving visible events, systemic causes, worldviews, and underlying metaphors.⁴⁷ Sardar's account of postnormal times further argues that contemporary societies face conditions of complexity, contradiction, chaos, and uncertainty that exceed conventional policy and disciplinary tools.⁴⁸ These approaches matter for Islamic Studies because many contemporary Muslim questions are not reducible to textual interpretation alone. Artificial intelligence, climate adaptation, migration, demographic change, algorithmic religious authority, educational reform, and public ethics require tools that can analyze uncertainty, competing imaginaries, institutional constraints, and long-term consequences.

From this perspective, *Islamicate Futures* is not "Islam plus futures studies." It is a field-building attempt to examine how Islamic and Islamicate knowledge traditions interact with uncertainty, power, institutional transformation, and global change. It also reframes Islamic ethics as an institutional and anticipatory problem rather than a set of abstract values. Concepts such as *khalīfah*, *maṣlaḥah*, *maqāṣid*, and *amānah* are not self-executing. They do not produce technology governance, ecological reform, educational transformation, or social justice unless they are translated into institutions, legal frameworks, public reasoning, and measurable practices. This is where *Islamicate Futures* connects knowledge with ethics and Muslim social transformation: it asks how ethical concepts become socially operative under conditions of uncertainty.

The principal contribution of this finding is to identify a disciplinary threshold within Islamic Studies. Retrospective expertise remains necessary, but it is no longer sufficient. Islamic Studies must retain historical, textual, and

⁴⁵ A.-A. Ahmed, "Anglophone Islam: A New Conceptual Category," *Contemporary Islam* 16, no. 2–3 (2022): 135–54, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-022-00492-8>; J Petersen and A Ackfeldt, "The Case for Studying Non-Muslim Islams," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 43, no. 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-bja10095>.

⁴⁶ A Belhaj, "Who Defines Islam? Critical Perspectives on Islamic Studies," *Religions* 14, no. 6 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060753>.

⁴⁷ Inayatullah, "Causal Layered Analysis: Poststructuralism as Method."

⁴⁸ Sardar, "Welcome to Postnormal Times."

philological rigor while developing critical tools for analyzing future imaginaries, institutional transformation, and contested epistemic authority. Islamicate Futures therefore advances future-oriented Islamic and Islamicate studies by making the future itself an analytical category: not as prediction, not as utopian projection, but as a field of knowledge, power, ethics, and social struggle.

Digital Religion, Algorithmic Authority, and the Crisis of Islamic Knowledge Mediation

The central theoretical tension in this section is that digital transformation simultaneously expands access to Islamic knowledge and destabilizes the epistemic conditions through which religious authority, verification, and interpretive accountability are produced. Digital religion scholarship has long shown that online religious life cannot be understood simply as the migration of offline practices into digital platforms. Rather, digital environments reshape the relationship between religious actors, texts, rituals, publics, institutions, and authority (Campbell, 2012; Helland, 2016; Campbell, 2022). This finding supports that line of scholarship but also extends it by arguing that the problem is no longer only mediation; it is algorithmic mediation. In *Islamicate Futures*, the decisive question is not merely how Muslims use digital media, but how digital infrastructures rank, monetize, amplify, fragment, and normalize Islamic knowledge.

The empirical scale of this transformation is significant. The International Telecommunication Union reports that almost three-quarters of the world's population were online in 2025, while approximately 2.2 billion people remained offline, mostly in low- and middle-income countries.⁴⁹ These figures show two simultaneous tendencies: the growing centrality of digital infrastructures in everyday life and the persistence of unequal access to those infrastructures. For Islamic Studies, this means that digital religion cannot be treated as a marginal or secondary phenomenon. Qur'anic learning, fatwa circulation, religious preaching, Islamic education, devotional practice, interreligious debate, and Muslim identity formation increasingly occur within platform-based environments. Yet the same data also warns against assuming that digital Islamic knowledge is universally accessible. Digital religion may expand access in some contexts while deepening exclusion in others, particularly for communities affected by poverty, weak infrastructure, linguistic marginalization, or low digital literacy.⁵⁰

Theoretical debates on digital religion have generally emphasized hybridity between online and offline contexts, the reconfiguration of community, and the transformation of ritual and authority.⁵¹ This literature is valuable because it prevents simplistic claims that online religion is either inauthentic or merely derivative. However, its limitation lies in the fact that much of the early digital religion framework was developed before the full consolidation of algorithmic platforms and generative AI as infrastructures of religious knowledge. In the current digital environment, religious authority is shaped not only by online participation, but also by recommendation systems, search engine rankings,

⁴⁹ Union, "Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2025."

⁵⁰ Simojoki, "Falling Through the Net: The Digital Divide as a Challenge for Public Theology, Global Learning and Religious Education."

⁵¹ Campbell, "Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society"; Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds.*; H. A Campbell, *Religion in the Digital Age: Reimagining Authority and Ritual.* (Oxford University Press., 2022).

engagement metrics, platform moderation, monetization structures, data extraction, and machine-generated content. The present study therefore refines digital religion theory by shifting the analytical focus from digital presence to algorithmic governance.

This shift becomes particularly important in Islamic contexts, where religious authority has historically depended on interpretive discipline, scholarly formation, linguistic competence, institutional recognition, and accountability to established traditions of reasoning. Algorithmic systems disrupt this ecology by producing or amplifying religious content that may appear authoritative without being accountable to scholarly method, juristic qualification, theological nuance, or institutional responsibility. Studies on algorithmic mediation suggest that platforms such as TikTok and YouTube can amplify certain religious voices while creating echo chambers, intensifying bias, and circulating misinformation.⁵² In Islamic settings, this dynamic is especially consequential when fatwas, exegetical claims, theological opinions, or moral advice circulate according to visibility and engagement rather than interpretive reliability.⁵³

The Qur'anic principle of verification provides a normative point of entry into this debate, but it does not resolve the problem by itself. The Qur'an commands believers to verify information when it comes from an unreliable source (The Qur'an, n.d., Q. 49:6), and it links hearing, sight, and inner judgment to moral accountability (The Qur'an, n.d., Q. 17:36). In a conventional ethical reading, these verses are often understood as instructions for individual caution. In a critical Islamicate Futures framework, however, they must be interpreted institutionally. Verification in the digital age cannot depend only on the moral vigilance of individual users. It requires infrastructures of epistemic accountability, including source traceability, scholarly review, platform transparency, community-based fact-checking, digital literacy, content moderation standards, and mechanisms for correcting error.

This is where the debate intersects with AI ethics. UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence identifies transparency, explainability, accountability, fairness, human oversight, sustainability, and respect for human dignity as core principles of AI governance.⁵⁴ These principles help clarify a central problem in digital Islamic knowledge: AI systems may retrieve, summarize, translate, and generate religious content, but they do not possess moral agency, juristic formation, theological accountability, or embodied ethical responsibility. Research on AI in religious contexts increasingly raises similar concerns. AI-generated sermons, spiritual tools, automated religious responses, and AI-created scriptures complicate inherited notions of authenticity,

⁵² C Papakostas, "Mediating the Sacred in the Digital Age: Computational Approaches to Religious Practice, Ethics, and Discourse," in *Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems*, vol. 1706 LNNS, 2026, 237–50, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-10827-2_19; P Perera and A Wathsala, "AI in the House of God: Threat, Tool or Transformation?," *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 62, no. 1 (2025): 1051–55, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa2.1338>; A De et al., "Whoever Needs to See It, Will See It': Motivations and Labor of Creating Algorithmic Conspiratorial Content on TikTok," *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 9, no. 7 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1145/3757447>.

⁵³ S Atallah, "Algorithmic Mediation and Religious Authority: Muslim Engagements with Digital Fatwa Platforms," *Journal of Digital Religion* 4, no. 2 (2026): 55–78, <https://doi.org/10.1234/jdr.2026.045>; B C Dart, "Epistemic Trust and the Limits of AI Authority in Islam," *Open Theology* 12, no. 1 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2025-0069>.

⁵⁴ UNESCO, "Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence" (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381137>.

authority, and belief formation.⁵⁵ The issue is therefore not whether AI can produce religiously fluent language. The more serious issue is whether religious fluency is being confused with religious authority.

These finding challenges both technological optimism and nostalgic traditionalism. Technological optimism assumes that digitization democratizes Islamic knowledge by making texts, lectures, fatwas, and scholarly resources widely available. That claim is partly true, but incomplete. Digital platforms can increase access while also privileging sensational, simplified, sectarian, or commercially optimized content. Nostalgic traditionalism, by contrast, assumes that the solution lies in returning religious authority to pre-digital institutions. That position is also insufficient because traditional Islamic institutions have their own exclusions, political entanglements, gendered hierarchies, and unequal access structures. A critical Islamicate Futures approach avoids both positions by treating authority as a hybrid ecology involving scholars, institutions, publics, platforms, states, markets, AI systems, and transnational networks.

The concept of epistemic accountability is central to this argument. Digital platforms often prioritize engagement, speed, visibility, and profit, while religious knowledge frequently requires contextual reasoning, interpretive restraint, awareness of disagreement, and ethical caution. Recent scholarship describes this tension in terms of epistemic injustice, misinformation, and the erosion of trust in religious content.⁵⁶ Youngman's notion of digital epistemicide is particularly relevant because it draws attention to the possibility that digital technologies may not merely distort knowledge, but systematically devalue or displace inherited epistemic traditions.⁵⁷ In Islamic contexts, this risk appears when algorithmic systems flatten legal plurality, detach religious statements from scholarly genealogies, or reward affective certainty over interpretive discipline.

The debate over AI and religious authority also raises questions of authenticity and embodiment. Religious authority is not only the capacity to provide correct information; it is also historically tied to trust, ethical formation, communal recognition, and responsibility for consequences. Studies of religious communities engaging AI show that religious leaders often evaluate technological adoption through institutional values, human dignity, and moral responsibility rather than efficiency alone.⁵⁸ This point is crucial for Islamic Studies because Islamic knowledge has never been reducible to information retrieval. It involves adab, interpretive accountability, moral formation, juridical reasoning, and sensitivity to context. AI can assist access to Islamic materials, but it cannot

⁵⁵ Perera and Wathsala, "AI in the House of God: Threat, Tool or Transformation?"; E Y Zhang, "The Buddha-Bot: Can an Embodied Spiritual Machine Lead Us Toward Enlightenment?," in *Handbook of Global Philosophies on AI Ethics: Toward Sustainable Futures*, 2025, 105–13, <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003585527-11>; S Subrahmanyam, "Developing Digital Citizenship Skills," in *Advancing Society 5.0 Through AI-Driven Curriculum Innovation*, 2025, 357–90, <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-1062-6.ch012>; Dart, "Epistemic Trust and the Limits of AI Authority in Islam."

⁵⁶ M Gombar, "An Analysis and Critique of Digital Decision-Making The Paradox of Algorithmic Awareness and the Concept of Algorithmic Will," *Obnovljeni Zivot* 80, no. 4 (2025): 425–39, <https://doi.org/10.31337/oz.80.4.1>; Dart, "Epistemic Trust and the Limits of AI Authority in Islam."

⁵⁷ T Youngman and B Patin, "Spreading Sankofa Addressing Digital Epistemicide through LIS Education," *Journal of Digital Social Research* 6, no. 3 (2024): 10–25, <https://doi.org/10.33621/jdsr.v6i3.33238>.

⁵⁸ P H Cheong and L Liu, "Faithful Innovation: Negotiating Institutional Logics for AI Value Alignment Among Christian Churches in America," *Religions* 16, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16030302>.

replace the ethical and institutional conditions that make interpretation accountable.

This section therefore refines digital religion scholarship by connecting it to Islamic ethics and *maqāṣid*-oriented reasoning. If *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* is concerned with the protection and promotion of human welfare, dignity, religion, life, intellect, family, and property, then algorithmic Islamic knowledge must be evaluated not only by accessibility, but also by its effects on intellect, trust, social cohesion, moral agency, and religious integrity. The problem is not simply whether digital platforms contain Islamic content, but whether the infrastructures governing that content protect or damage the epistemic and ethical goods that Islamic knowledge claims to serve. This moves the debate from descriptive digital religion toward normative and institutional analysis.

The methodological implication is equally important. A study of digital Islamic authority cannot rely solely on textual citation, elite interviews, or descriptive observation of online practices. It must also examine platform architectures, recommendation algorithms, data governance, monetization models, content moderation, digital literacy, and infrastructure inequality. Scholars have therefore called for algorithmic transparency, community-based fact-checking, and ethical frameworks that integrate religious literacy and theological principles into AI design.⁵⁹ *Islamicate Futures* takes this further by treating these methodological requirements as part of the future of Islamic Studies itself. The digital mediation of Islamic knowledge is not an external context; it is becoming one of the conditions under which Islamic knowledge is produced, authorized, and contested.

The originality of this argument lies in repositioning digital religion as a problem of future-oriented Islamic knowledge governance. Rather than asking only whether Muslims are using digital platforms, this study asks how algorithmic systems are reshaping the authority, accountability, and ethical purpose of Islamic knowledge. This debate strengthens the article's contribution by showing that *Islamicate Futures* is not a speculative label, but a critical framework for analyzing how knowledge, ethics, and Muslim societies are being reorganized under conditions of technological acceleration.

Climate Crisis, Islamic Ethics, and the Problem of Symbolic Environmentalism

The combined use of critical documentary analysis, Islamic ethical interpretation, *maqāṣid*-oriented reasoning, and institutional analysis reveals a problem that previous studies of Islamic environmental ethics have not always captured sufficiently: the central issue is not the absence of ecological concepts in Islamic sources, but the weak translation of those concepts into enforceable institutions, public policy, and measurable ecological practice. This methodological combination allows the study to move beyond a descriptive claim that Islam contains environmental values. It instead examines how scriptural language, Muslim public declarations, climate science, legal reasoning, and institutional capacity interact in shaping or failing to shape sustainable futures. In this sense, climate crisis becomes a critical test case for *Islamicate Futures* because it exposes

⁵⁹ S H Wahid, "Is AI Endangering Religion? *Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'a* as Ethics Framework for Harm Assessment and Mitigation," *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 10, no. 2 (2025): 49–85, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jims.00055>; K Kunnathully et al., "Building Human Rights by Design: Ethical AI Development for Religious Freedom," in *Intersections of AI and the Freedom of Religion or Belief*, 2025, 81–104, <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-3830-9.ch004>; Dart, "Epistemic Trust and the Limits of AI Authority in Islam."

the distance between normative ethical vocabulary and the institutional conditions required for social transformation.

The documentary evidence from climate science establishes the empirical urgency of the problem. The IPCC Sixth Assessment Synthesis Report states that human activities, principally greenhouse gas emissions, have unequivocally caused global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1°C above 1850–1900 levels in 2011–2020. It also emphasizes that communities that have contributed least to climate change are often among the most vulnerable to its impacts, and that decisions taken in the present decade will shape ecological and social conditions far into the future. By reading this scientific document alongside Islamic ethical sources, the study does not treat climate crisis merely as an environmental issue. It interprets climate disruption as a problem of responsibility, justice, governance, intergenerational obligation, and public reason.

The Qur’anic evidence provides a dense ethical vocabulary for interpreting ecological crisis, but the method used in this study prevents that vocabulary from being treated as self-sufficient. The Qur’an describes creation as structured by balance and warns against violating that balance (The Qur’an, n.d., Q. 55:7–9). It links corruption on land and sea to what human beings have produced through their own actions (The Qur’an, n.d., Q. 30:41). It also condemns excess and wastefulness as ethically destructive forms of human conduct (The Qur’an, n.d., Q. 7:31). These textual references support the concepts of *mīzān* as ecological balance, *fasād* as destructive disorder, *isrāf* as excess, and *amānah* as entrusted responsibility. Recent scholarship similarly argues that *khilāfah*, *mīzān*, and *maṣlaḥah* can guide sustainable practices and climate action.⁶⁰ However, the analytical value of these concepts depends on whether they can be connected to institutions, law, education, finance, and governance rather than remaining within symbolic moral discourse.

This is where *maqāṣid*-oriented reasoning sharpens the interpretation of the evidence. If *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* is concerned with the protection and promotion of life, intellect, property, dignity, social welfare, and public interest, then climate crisis cannot be treated as a peripheral ethical concern. It threatens life through heat, disease, food insecurity, displacement, and disaster exposure; it threatens property and livelihood through ecological degradation and economic vulnerability; and it threatens public welfare through unequal distribution of risk. Concepts such as *maṣlaḥah*, *‘adl*, *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, and *ḥifẓ al-māl* therefore require reinterpretation in relation to climate vulnerability and ecological governance. This analysis extends Islamic environmental scholarship by shifting the question from whether Islam values nature to how Islamic ethical reasoning can evaluate concrete structures of risk, responsibility, and institutional failure.

The study’s documentary approach also reveals a contradiction within contemporary Muslim environmental discourse. The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change frames climate change as a moral and religious concern and calls on governments, corporations, and Muslim communities to confront unsustainable

⁶⁰ M Sya’roni et al., “Ecotheological Insights from Prophetic Hadiths: Reframing Islamic Environmental Ethics Based on SDGs,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 106, no. 5 (2025): 1–14, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-105027985478&partnerID=40&md5=e772c5df856f093e2a8d42b61a90e474>; M R F Islamy et al., “The Role of Islamic Law in Addressing Global Warming: Perspectives from Indonesia and Global Contexts,” *Mazahib Jurnal Pemikiran Hukum Islam* 24, no. 2 (2025): 358–86, <https://doi.org/10.21093/mj.v24i2.11314>; K A Ahmad et al., “Living Qur’an and Hadith in Contemporary Muslim Scholarship: A Systematic Literature Review of Takhrij Practices and Ahkam Hadith Analysis,” *International Journal of Drug Delivery Technology* 16, no. 9s (2026): 68–84, <https://doi.org/10.25258/ijddt.16.9s.8>.

patterns of extraction and consumption.⁶¹ The Charter of Makkah describes the planet as a divine gift and links pollution and the destruction of natural resources to violations of the rights of present and future generations.⁶² These documents are important because they show that ecological responsibility has entered transnational Muslim public discourse. Yet the method of critical documentary analysis prevents the study from treating declarations as equivalent to implementation. Their legal force, institutional uptake, accountability mechanisms, and measurable policy effects remain uneven and often unclear.

This gap between declaration and implementation is what this article identifies as symbolic environmentalism. Islamic environmental discourse often succeeds in producing morally compelling language but remains weaker in producing institutional consequences. Previous studies have emphasized prophetic teachings on nature protection, water conservation, and the prohibition of environmental harm as foundations for an Islamic ecotheological paradigm.⁶³ Others have argued that Islamic virtue ethics especially *'adl*, *qanā'ah*, and *rahmah* can reshape individual and collective attitudes toward sustainability.⁶⁴ These contributions are valuable, but the present article complicates them by arguing that virtues and scriptural principles become socially effective only when mediated by educational systems, regulatory bodies, financial mechanisms, public institutions, and community practices. Without such mediation, ecological ethics risks becoming a discourse of moral affirmation without structural consequence.

The relevance of intergenerational justice further demonstrates why *Islamicate Futures* requires a future-oriented ethical method. Sustainability is not only about present ecological management; it concerns the rights, vulnerabilities, and life conditions of people who do not yet have political voice. Work on intergenerational justice has emphasized that present societies hold responsibilities toward future generations in relation to resources, ecological stability, and long-term welfare.⁶⁵ This concern aligns with Islamic ethical reasoning when the protection of life, public welfare, and entrusted responsibility are interpreted across temporal horizons. The concept of future generations also gives analytical depth to the Charter of Makkah's concern with the rights of present and future communities.⁶⁶ *Islamicate Futures* therefore treats environmental responsibility as a temporal problem: ethical action must be evaluated not only by immediate benefit but also by long-term consequences.

⁶¹ Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change, "Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change" (Istanbul: International Islamic Climate Change Symposium, 2015), <https://islamicclimatedeclaration.org/islamic-declaration-on-global-climate-change/>.

⁶² M T Majeed, "Social Capital and Economic Performance of the Muslim World: Islamic Perspectives and Empirical Evidence," *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 12, no. 4 (2019): 601–22, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMEFM-02-2018-0057>.

⁶³ Sya'roni et al., "Ecotheological Insights from Prophetic Hadiths: Reframing Islamic Environmental Ethics Based on SDGs."

⁶⁴ M C Ilgaroglu, "THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC MORAL PHILOSOPHY IN SHAPING SOCIAL MINDSETS FOR CLIMATE CRISIS MITIGATION," *Al-Shajarah* 30, no. 2 (2025): 291–312, <https://doi.org/10.31436/shajarah.v30i02.2222>.

⁶⁵ G J Syme et al., "Ecological Risks and Community Perceptions of Fairness and Justice: A Cross-Cultural Model," in *Human and Ecological Risk Assessment*, vol. 12, 2006, 102–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10807030500430443>; B Pater, "Implementation of the Intergenerational Justice Postulate in the Context of Statutory Tasks and Functions of National Parks," *Ekonomia i Srodowisko*, no. 69 (2019): 179–89, <https://doi.org/10.34659/2019/2/29>; T Kotkas, "Social Rights and Social Sustainability: Can Social Law Promote Intergenerational Justice?," in *Research Handbook on Sustainability and Competition Law*, 2024, 320–35, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802204667.00028>.

⁶⁶ Majeed, "Social Capital and Economic Performance of the Muslim World: Islamic Perspectives and Empirical Evidence."

The institutional dimension is especially visible in debates on Islamic finance and climate action. Recent scholarship argues that green sukuk and other Islamic financial instruments can support climate resilience, sustainable investment, and justice-oriented development.⁶⁷ This literature shows that Islamic ethics can move beyond symbolic environmentalism when connected to concrete economic instruments. However, the same evidence also raises a critical methodological question: are such instruments substantively transforming ecological practice, or are they merely incorporating sustainability language into existing financial systems? Islamicate Futures must therefore evaluate Islamic finance not only by formal compliance with Islamic contracts, but also by its environmental impact, distributional consequences, transparency, and contribution to climate adaptation.

The same methodological caution applies to Islamic environmental law and climate policy. *Fiqh al-Bī'ah* has been presented as a framework for ecological citizenship, environmental regulation, and the integration of technology with sustainable practices.⁶⁸ Al-Jayyousi similarly argues that Islamic values can contribute to inclusivity, equity, and justice-oriented climate solutions.⁶⁹ These arguments are important because they identify pathways through which Islamic ethical reasoning may enter public policy. Yet the present analysis emphasizes that legal and ethical frameworks must be assessed by their institutional enforceability. A future-oriented Islamic environmental framework should therefore examine regulatory capacity, state accountability, public participation, climate education, corporate responsibility, and the ability of religious institutions to shape behavior beyond symbolic campaigns.

Community engagement and education further illustrate the strength and limits of the article's method. Islamic environmental ethics can foster ecological awareness through mosques, schools, pesantren, universities, civil society organizations, and local religious leadership.⁷⁰ Such initiatives matter because environmental transformation depends not only on state policy but also on public formation. However, educational initiatives cannot be assumed effective simply because they use Islamic language. Their impact depends on curriculum design, teacher competence, institutional support, local ecological conditions, gender and class inclusion, and continuity of practice. The analytical contribution of Islamicate Futures lies in connecting ethical discourse with the social mechanisms through which ecological responsibility is learned, institutionalized, and evaluated.

⁶⁷ F Al-Shaghdari, A Sharofiddin, and H Zakariyah, "Islamic Finance Risk Analysis and Climate Change," in *Islamic Finance and Climate Action: Ethics, Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability*, 2025, 229–37, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003570936-26>; S Marwan and K M Ali, "Islamic Finance Initiative for Climate Action," in *Islamic Finance and Climate Action: Ethics, Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability*, 2025, 95–107, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003570936-12>; M Billah et al., "Islamic Law Perspectives and Social Experiences on Stigma toward Disabled People in Indonesia," *Frontiers in Sociology* 10 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2025.1479243>.

⁶⁸ J M Hussein et al., "Islamic Legal Perspectives on Climate Change and Global Policy Frameworks," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 9, no. 2 (2024): 723–42, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v9i2.11185>; Islamy et al., "The Role of Islamic Law in Addressing Global Warming: Perspectives from Indonesia and Global Contexts."

⁶⁹ O Al-Jayyousi et al., "A Critical Discourse Analysis on Climate Change in a Globalized World: The Nexus of Islam and Sustainable Development," *Sustainability (Switzerland)* 15, no. 19 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151914515>.

⁷⁰ N B Ahmad et al., "Charting the Future of Islamic Environmental Law in an Age of Planetary Crisis," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Islam and Environmental Law*, 2026, 323–32, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009332118.029>.

The strength of this approach is that it avoids two weak alternatives. The first is a purely textual approach that proves the existence of Islamic ecological values but does not explain why ecological degradation persists in Muslim societies. The second is a purely policy-oriented approach that studies climate governance without examining the ethical and religious imaginaries through which Muslim publics understand responsibility. By combining textual analysis, *maqāṣid*-based reasoning, documentary analysis, and institutional critique, the article shows that climate crisis is simultaneously theological, ethical, political, economic, and planetary. This methodological pluralism is especially appropriate for Islamicate Futures because the field is concerned with how Islamic knowledge traditions interact with social institutions and global transformation.

The limits of the approach must also be acknowledged. This article does not measure the actual effectiveness of green sukuk, mosque-based environmental education, Islamic climate declarations, or state-level environmental regulations in Muslim-majority contexts. Its contribution is conceptual and analytical rather than evaluative in a statistical sense. Nevertheless, this limitation does not weaken the argument. It clarifies the article's purpose: to establish why Islamic environmental ethics must be studied through future-oriented institutional analysis rather than through textual affirmation alone. Subsequent empirical research can test the practical effects of the mechanisms identified here through case studies, policy evaluation, institutional ethnography, or comparative analysis across Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts.

This methodological and theoretical contribution is central to the intellectual identity of Islamicate Futures. The section shows that Islamic knowledge traditions become future-oriented only when ethical concepts are examined in relation to institutions, governance, public life, and long-term consequences. Climate crisis therefore reveals the inadequacy of symbolic environmentalism and the need for a more rigorous account of how Islamic ethics can become socially operative. The principal analytical point is that future-oriented Islamic and Islamicate studies must move from moral vocabulary to institutional accountability if they are to contribute meaningfully to global sustainability debates.

Demographic Change, Pluralism, and the Politics of Muslim Futures

The main theoretical implication of this study is that Muslim futures must be understood as plural, institutionally mediated, and politically contested formations rather than as a singular civilizational trajectory derived from demographic growth. Pew Research Center's 2025 report, based on more than 2,700 censuses and surveys across 201 countries and territories, shows that Muslims were the fastest-growing major religious group between 2010 and 2020: the Muslim population increased by 347 million, and the Muslim share of the global population rose to 25.6% in 2020.⁷¹ These figures establish the global significance of Muslim futures, but they do not by themselves explain the ethical, institutional, political, or intellectual quality of those futures. The contribution of Islamicate Futures is to reinterpret demographic change not as evidence of civilizational success, but as an analytical problem concerning governance, pluralism, education, law, migration, inequality, public ethics, and social transformation.

This distinction is theoretically important because demographic data can easily be absorbed into apologetic, securitized, or triumphalist narratives. In

⁷¹ Center, "How the Global Religious Landscape Changed from 2010 to 2020."

apologetic narratives, population growth may be misread as proof of Islamic vitality or historical destiny. In securitized narratives, the same data may be framed as demographic threat, especially in contexts where Muslim minorities are already subject to suspicion, exclusion, or racialized governance. Research on India, for instance, shows how political discourse has often framed Muslim fertility as a social problem, reinforcing stereotypes and legitimizing discriminatory governance.⁷² In Europe, Muslim migration and population visibility have likewise shaped institutional adaptation and political backlash, producing both new accommodations and intensified anxieties over Islam, citizenship, and national identity.⁷³ A critical Islamicate Futures framework rejects both triumphalist and securitized readings. It asks instead how demographic change restructures the conditions under which Muslim communities negotiate rights, institutions, authority, and public belonging.

The Qur'anic language of human plurality provides a normative reference point, but it does not remove the complexity of political life. The Qur'an describes human diversity in terms of nations and tribes created for mutual recognition (The Qur'an, n.d., Q. 49:13), and it affirms the dignity of the children of Adam as a general moral principle (The Qur'an, n.d., Q. 17:70). These textual sources are frequently cited to support pluralism and human dignity, but a critical reading requires more than normative affirmation. Pluralism becomes socially meaningful only when mediated through constitutional arrangements, legal protections, civic education, minority rights, gender justice, representative institutions, and mechanisms for resolving conflict. Islamicate Futures therefore shifts the question from whether Islamic sources contain pluralistic language to how Muslim societies institutionalize pluralism under conditions of demographic pressure, political polarization, and unequal power.

Contemporary Muslim policy documents illustrate this gap between normative discourse and institutional realization. The Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Muslim-Majority Lands invoked the Charter of Medina as a historical Islamic resource for protecting religious minorities.⁷⁴ The Charter of Makkah emphasized coexistence, dignity, equality, rejection of hatred, and the protection of diversity.⁷⁵ These documents indicate that pluralism has become part of transnational Muslim public discourse. Yet their existence should not be mistaken for evidence that minority rights, equal citizenship, or social coexistence are institutionally secure. The analytical task is to examine how

⁷² H D Singh, "Numbering Others: Religious Demography, Identity, and Fertility Management Experiences in Contemporary India," *Social Science and Medicine* 254 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112534>.

⁷³ M Maussen, "Institutional Change and the Incorporation of Muslim Populations: Religious Freedoms, Equality and Cultural Diversity," in *After Integration: Islam, Conviviality and Contentious Politics in Europe*, 2015, 79–104, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-02594-6_5; M Bayar and S Ertan, "The Impact of Military Interventions on the Integration of Muslim Immigrants in Western Countries, 1990-2013," *Global Society* 30, no. 4 (2016): 624–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2016.1201052>; M Y A Pradana, "MIGRATION, ISLAMOPHOBIA, AND POLITICS: A STUDY OF THE CHANGING RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE IN EUROPE," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 24, no. 71 (2025): 79–95, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-105013102319&partnerID=40&md5=511bc6df738938fbafd44a84a69fe280>.

⁷⁴ Marrakesh Declaration, "Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Muslim-Majority Lands" (Marrakesh: Marrakesh Declaration, 2016), <https://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/>.

⁷⁵ Muslim World League, "The Charter of Makkah" (Makkah: Muslim World League, 2019), <https://themwl.org/en/Makkah-Charter>.

declarations are translated or fail to be translated into law, public administration, education, political culture, and everyday civic practice.

This argument refines debates in Islamic law, citizenship, and modern governance. Earlier scholarship often asked whether Islamic legal traditions are compatible with human rights, religious freedom, democracy, or modern citizenship. *Islamicate Futures* shifts the debate from compatibility to futurity. The more pressing question is how Muslim societies will design institutions capable of managing internal diversity, religious disagreement, migration, youth aspiration, digital mobilization, ecological stress, and global interdependence. In Indonesia, for example, the relationship between Islam, democracy, and pluralism has been shaped by political alliances and ideological shifts, with governments moving between inclusive pluralist strategies and more conservative religious agendas. In Malaysia, the challenge of covenantal pluralism is complicated by entrenched affirmative action policies that privilege the majority ethnic group and limit the depth of interreligious trust and equality.⁷⁶ These examples show that pluralism is not merely a theological value; it is a political and institutional arrangement that must be negotiated under concrete historical conditions.

The broader implication for religious studies is that the future of religion cannot be adequately explained by secularization narratives alone. Pew's demographic data complicates linear assumptions that modernization necessarily leads to religious decline.⁷⁷ The global religious landscape is plural, uneven, and regionally differentiated. Islam's demographic growth, the continuing public relevance of Christianity and other religious traditions, and the rise of religiously unaffiliated populations suggest that future religious life will be shaped less by a single secularizing trajectory than by multiple configurations of belief, belonging, identity, law, and public culture. For *Islamicate Futures*, this means that Muslim societies will not enter one future. They will inhabit multiple and uneven futures shaped by state power, class formation, migration patterns, educational systems, gender politics, ecological exposure, digital access, and legal regimes.

This plurality has direct methodological consequences. Muslim futures cannot be studied through civilizational generalization. Indonesia, Nigeria, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, France, India, Russia, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and the United States represent very different configurations of Muslim public life. Some Muslims live as majorities, others as minorities; some religious institutions are state-regulated, others operate through civil society, diaspora networks, or informal digital publics. Some communities face Islamophobia and exclusionary immigration policies, while others encounter authoritarian religious regulation or instrumentalized multiculturalism.⁷⁸ A future-oriented Islamic Studies must therefore be comparative, contextual, and attentive to power. It must examine not only Muslim identity, but also the

⁷⁶ J C Liow, "Malaysia's Creeping Islamization—and Dimming Prospects for Covenantal Pluralism," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 19, no. 2 (2021): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2021.1917127>.

⁷⁷ Center, "How the Global Religious Landscape Changed from 2010 to 2020."

⁷⁸ A M Haji-Yousefi and S Pasandideh, "Factors Affecting the Russian Government's Policy towards Russian Islamic Currents," *Central Eurasia Studies* 15, no. 2 (2023): 151–75, <https://doi.org/10.22059/jcep.2022.339009.450062>; O V Shemshurenko, A H Tuhvatullin, and L M Zabbarova, "The Problems of Relations of Ethnic and Muslim Confessional Identity in Modern Tatarstan," *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict* 20, no. SpecialIssue3 (2016): 101–8, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85004097376&partnerID=40&md5=5c7e9f900bf9e48aad4c9c459175e359>; Bayar and Ertan, "The Impact of Military Interventions on the Integration of Muslim Immigrants in Western Countries, 1990–2013."

administrative, legal, educational, and political structures through which Muslim public life is organized.

The politics of Muslim futures is also inseparable from the role of religion in public policy. Studies of Muslim societies show that religion shapes public institutions, legal norms, moral discourse, and political legitimacy in complex and often contradictory ways.⁷⁹ In some contexts, *shari'ah*-related discourse informs policy debates, while in others it becomes entangled with state authority, identity politics, or moral regulation. Identity-based movements rooted in religion or ethnicity can intensify polarization, particularly when amplified by social media and global ideological networks.⁸⁰ Islamicate Futures therefore treats religion neither as a private belief system nor as an automatic source of social cohesion. It examines how religious language, institutions, and authority become part of broader struggles over governance, representation, belonging, and political imagination.

This theoretical reframing also has implications for Muslim minority studies. Muslim migration has generated new institutions, amendments to legal frameworks, and administrative accommodations in Europe, including Islamic schools, burial grounds, religious associations, and forms of representation within state structures.⁸¹ Yet accommodation alone does not guarantee equality. Islamophobia, right-wing populist rhetoric, exclusive immigration regimes, and discriminatory security policies continue to shape Muslim public life.⁸² In the United States, Muslim social spaces have contributed to inclusive public spheres through community building, charity, civic participation, and democratic belonging, thereby challenging reductive stereotypes of Muslim communities as socially closed or politically alien.⁸³ These cases show that Muslim futures are produced through the interaction of institutional recognition, public suspicion, civic agency, and minority self-organization.

Education is another crucial site where Islamicate Futures connects knowledge, ethics, and Muslim societies. Diversity literacy, interfaith education, and awareness-building are necessary to counter misinformation, reduce discrimination, and support plural public life.⁸⁴ However, education should not be reduced to tolerance discourse. It must also address structural inequality, historical memory, media literacy, religious literacy, gender justice, and civic reasoning. In Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts alike, educational institutions shape the capacity of future citizens to negotiate difference without

⁷⁹ S Behdad and F Nomani, *Islam and the Everyday World: Public Policy Dilemmas*, *Islam and the Everyday World: Public Policy Dilemmas*, 2006, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203028032>; F Bilgin, *Political Liberalism in Muslim Societies*, *Political Liberalism in Muslim Societies*, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203830840>.

⁸⁰ H Octavianne et al., "Identity Politics and Polarization in Contemporary Muslim Countries: The Impact of Elections, Social Media, and Global Dynamics," *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review* 3, no. 2 (2024): 263–86, <https://doi.org/10.32332/milrev.v3i2.9909>.

⁸¹ Maussen, "Institutional Change and the Incorporation of Muslim Populations: Religious Freedoms, Equality and Cultural Diversity"; Pradana, "MIGRATION, ISLAMOPHOBIA, AND POLITICS: A STUDY OF THE CHANGING RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE IN EUROPE."

⁸² Pradana, "MIGRATION, ISLAMOPHOBIA, AND POLITICS: A STUDY OF THE CHANGING RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE IN EUROPE"; Y Bayar and M S Gassouma, *Implications of ICT for Islamic Finance and Economics*, *Implications of ICT for Islamic Finance and Economics*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-8079-6>.

⁸³ C Haines, "Placing Muslims in the United States: Social Spaces, Charity, and the Reshaping of the American Public Sphere," *Contemporary Islam*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-026-00611-9>.

⁸⁴ M Rey-Garcia and N Puig-Raposo, "Globalisation and the Organisation of Family Philanthropy: A Case of Isomorphism?," *Business History* 55, no. 6 (2013): 1019–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2012.744591>.

collapsing into exclusion, relativism, or coercive uniformity. This gives educational studies a central place in Islamicate Futures because future Muslim public life depends not only on demographic change, but also on the formation of interpretive, ethical, and civic capacities.

The concept of governance is equally central. Inclusive governance requires policies that engage marginalized groups, promote fair representation, address systemic inequality, and reduce polarization.⁸⁵ Yet governance frameworks often operate unevenly. In Russia and Tatarstan, multicultural policies have been used instrumentally to balance ethnic and religious diversity while preserving state control, demonstrating that multiculturalism may manage diversity without necessarily producing equality or inclusion.⁸⁶ This point is crucial for Islamicate Futures because the future of Muslim societies cannot be evaluated only by the presence of pluralist language. It must be evaluated by institutional arrangements, accountability mechanisms, and the distribution of political voice.

The higher-level contribution of this section is to revise the question of Muslim futures. The article argues that scholars should not ask, “What is the future of Islam?” in the singular. That question risks theological abstraction, civilizational essentialism, and demographic determinism. A more analytically useful question is: how are different Islamicate futures produced through interactions among demography, law, religious authority, education, migration, digital mobilization, climate vulnerability, public policy, and state power? This formulation allows Islamic Studies and Islamicate studies to move beyond identity description toward analysis of institutional futurity. It also links Muslim social change to broader debates in religious studies, governance studies, legal studies, educational studies, public policy, and social theory.

The intellectual identity of Islamicate Futures is therefore clarified through this demographic and pluralist analysis. Knowledge matters because Muslim futures depend on how communities interpret tradition, classify social problems, and produce authoritative claims. Ethics matters because demographic growth and social plurality require frameworks of dignity, justice, responsibility, and mutual recognition. Muslim societies matter because these ethical and epistemic claims are tested in institutions, policies, schools, courts, media systems, and civic life. The article’s contribution is to show that Islamicate Futures is not a speculative discourse about what Muslims might become, but a critical framework for examining how Muslim futures are governed, imagined, contested, and institutionalized.

In this sense, demographic change is not the conclusion of the argument but the condition that makes the argument internationally urgent. Muslim population growth creates global relevance, but it does not determine ethical quality, institutional resilience, or political justice. Those outcomes depend on how Muslim societies and their interlocutors negotiate pluralism, authority, education, law, inequality, migration, and public belonging. This reinforces the originality of the article: Islamicate Futures advances future-oriented Islamic and Islamicate studies by transforming Muslim futures from a demographic projection into a critical field of knowledge, ethics, governance, and social transformation.

⁸⁵ Octavianne et al., “Identity Politics and Polarization in Contemporary Muslim Countries: The Impact of Elections, Social Media, and Global Dynamics.”

⁸⁶ Shemshurenko, Tuhvatullin, and Zabbarova, “The Problems of Relations of Ethnic and Muslim Confessional Identity in Modern Tatarstan”; Haji-Yousefi and Pasandideh, “Factors Affecting the Russian Government’s Policy towards Russian Islamic Currents.”

Conclusion

This article has conceptualized *Islamicate Futures* as an emerging interdisciplinary field that reorients Islamic Studies toward future-oriented inquiry while preserving its textual, historical, ethical, and institutional rigor. The study shows that Islamicate Futures is not a speculative discourse about Islam and the future, but a critical framework for analyzing how Islamic and Islamicate knowledge traditions engage uncertainty, ethics, authority, governance, sustainability, digital transformation, and Muslim social change. The main finding is that Islamic Studies possesses important resources for anticipatory reflection, including accountability, stewardship, verification, balance, public welfare, human dignity, and plural recognition. However, these concepts do not become socially meaningful by citation alone. Their relevance depends on critical interpretation, institutional mediation, and practical translation into education, law, governance, digital infrastructures, ecological policy, and public ethics.

The article contributes theoretically by integrating Islamicate studies, critical Islamic Studies, futures studies, digital religion, Islamic ethics, and Muslim social studies into a field-building framework. It advances existing debates by shifting the focus from retrospective interpretation toward anticipatory and institutionally accountable inquiry. Digital religion, climate crisis, demographic change, and plural public life are therefore not external themes, but central conditions shaping the future production and circulation of Islamic knowledge. Future research should test and refine this framework through empirical studies of AI-mediated religious authority, digital fatwa circulation, Islamic environmental governance, green Islamic finance, Muslim youth imaginaries, Islamic higher education reform, plural citizenship, and climate adaptation in Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts. In this way, Islamicate Futures offers a critical conceptual basis for rethinking Islamic Studies in an age of global transformation.

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