http://jstmt.ut.ac.ir

Social Theories of Muslim Thinkers

ISSN
Print: 2538-5240
Online: 2783-3216

Formulating a "Religious Life Research Program" as an Analytical Tool in the Sociology of Religion in Iran

Reza Nazarian[1], Younes Nourbakhsh[2], and Qasem Zaeri[3]

1. Ph.D. in Cultural Sociology, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. Email: reza.nazarian@ut.ac.ir
2. Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tehran, Teran. Iran. (Corresponding author) Email: ynourbakhsh@ut.ac.ir
3. Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tehran, Teran. Iran. Email: qasem.zaeri@ut.ac.ir

Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:
Received: 24 March 2026
Received in revised form: 18 June 2026
Accepted: 10 August 2026
Published online: 23 September 2026

Keywords:
Action, Legitimacy, Religious life research program, Shari'i structures, Sociology of religion, The Qodsi, The Shari'i.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to formulate a new research program in the sociology of religion in Iran. The prevailing literature on religious life, particularly in Durkheim's work, analyzes the relationship between the profane and the *sacra* (sacred things) in the form of a duality. This duality has been uncritically accepted in sociological studies of religion in Iran as well. This research expands the duality into a quaternary: nature and the natural, *'Urf (custom)* and the *Urfi (customary)*, *Sharia* (Islamic law) and the *Shari'i* (Islamic-legal), and *Qedasat* (sanctity) and the *Qodsi* (sacred). This expansion aims to provide a more precise tool for explaining religious life or religious disaffiliation (disengagement from religion, particularly from religiosity in Iran: the *'Urfi* arises from an understanding of nature, and the *Qodsi* arises from an understanding of *Sharia*. In accordance with this shift in the "hard core," the theoretical apparatus (protective belt) and the methodological rules (heuristic rules) of the Religious Life Research Program are also redefined. Theoretically, the *Qodsi* is situated within structures of action and legitimacy and is continuously developed according to historical and cultural conditions. Methodologically, understanding the formation of religion in a social context requires a typology of a specific *Shari'i* structure as a constellation and the identification of types that are far from or close to religious life. The application of this research program to an example from Iranian society demonstrates that, compared to rival programs such as secularization theory, religiosity measures and typologies, or the ethnography of religion, this framework provides a more accurate and realistic explanation of the position of religion within the social structure of Iran.

Cite this article: Nazarian, R., Nourbakhsh, Y., & Zaeri, Q. (2026). Formulating a "Religious Life Research Program" as an Analytical Tool in the Sociology of Religion in Iran. *Social Theories of Muslim Thinkers*, 16(3), 117—133. https://doi.org/10.22059/jstmt.2026.412125.1872

© Author(s) retain the copyright. **Publisher:** University of Tehran Press.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22059/jstmt.2026.412125.1872

Introduction and Problem Statement

Within the macro-research program of the empirical sociology of religion, diverse studies have measured the extent, quality, and status of religion and religiosity in Iran. These include waves of surveys on the values and attitudes of Iranians, which began before the Islamic Revolution and continue today in various forms (Asadi, 1974; Goudarzi, 2003; Javadi Yeganeh, 2015; Rezaei, 2000; Zaeri, 2023), as well as studies on secularization, types and measures of religiosity, and the ethnography of religion.

However, the central issue of the Religious Life Research Program is not the extent and quality of religiosity or the increase and decrease of the role of religion. The issue is not the increase or decrease of beliefs, but rather the conditions of their believability. The subject is not the diversity of beliefs with equal chances, but the formation of the shape of beliefs that can become legitimate and acceptable historically and culturally, and that produce durable structures of action.

Studies of lived religion under the umbrella of the ethnography of religion provide thick descriptions and thus a better basis for understanding the conditions of believability, although their unit of analysis remains the experiences of individuals. Quantitative studies also show, through conventional cross-tabulations, how beliefs form under different gender, age, income, and educational conditions. However, the Religious Life Research Program emphasizes believability within the historical and cultural context of Iran, prior to these differences.

Studies of religiosity, whether in the form of types or measures, largely consider individuals' motivations a sufficient factor for understanding the state of religion. This recourse is insufficient for at least three reasons: 1. an individual may not be aware of the true motivations of their action; 2. similar action processes can be situated within different motivational frameworks; and 3. individuals are often influenced by conflicting motivations (Weber, 2005, pp. 32-33). Therefore, individuals' motivations must be studied within more durable structural, historical, and cultural patterns. In sociology, quantity and quality acquire meaning only when the issue on which quantification and qualification are based is first specified: "We only want to determine to what extent religious forces have contributed qualitatively to the formation of this spirit (capitalism) and quantitatively to its spread in the world" (Weber, 2006, p. 90). In other words, the researcher must first present a theoretical design of the subject of study and then measure its quantity and quality. Studies of the measures and types of religiosity in Iran have largely bypassed this theoretical step.

Explaining the state of religion involves determining which form of religious belief existed in the past and which form is probable in the present and future. "The Greeks sacrificed; we still do the same; the only thing that can be understood is: what is the deity for this or that system?" (Weber, 2003, p. 172). Since we are facing not an absence of religious belief but competing religious beliefs, the sociological issue is not, first and foremost, the reduction of the social role of religion. The issue is how far a specific religious belief has been able to become complete, and how much it has yielded its place to competing beliefs. In other words, what historical and cultural course has the system of "normals" and "anormals" in a specific religion undergone, and has it been socially limited or expanded during this course?

Common research programs in the sociology of religion focus mostly on the vertical idea of the increase and decrease of religiosity or the role of religion. In contrast, the Religious Life Research Program emphasizes the wide or narrow horizontal idea of the religious matter and attends to how religion expands or becomes limited. From this perspective, we are not facing a flat, smooth land separated from other lands, but uneven terrain with fluid and disputed borders (Smith, 2022, pp. 17-20).

The issue is not even that we face secularization at the institutional level but not yet at the level of beliefs (Casanova, 2006, p. 7; Kazemi & Faraji, 2003, p. 243). In a specific historical and cultural experience, the secularization of institutions has become a shared conception, understanding, and practice (Taylor, 2021, p. 190). In the historical and cultural experience of Iran, by contrast, institutions have always been annexed to legitimate *Sharia* (Islamic law). The specific form of the religious institution in Iran is formulated in the Religious Life Research Program under the title of *Shari'i* (Islamic-legal) Structures.

What is central to the Religious Life Research Program is the *Verstehen* (understanding) of action constellations: a tool with which one can recognize distinct motivations in similar instances of action, or a similar motivation in distinct instances of action (Weber, 2005, pp. 445-446). The macro-research program of the empirical sociology of religion mostly settles for the appearance of motivations and actions and rarely uncovers their structural patterns. Yet a single action or motivation must be referred back to the constellation to which it belongs. Part A within a constellation, in combination with B, has a specific meaning, function, and position, and the same A, in combination with C, acquires a different meaning, function, and position. In the constellational method, components carry meaning not within themselves but in relation to one another.

In the Religious Life Research Program, rituals are re-read within a conceptual and methodological system. The main issue is not the investigation of specific religious rituals such as mourning, vows, or sacrifice, and the analysis of their symbolic systems (for example, see Bahar, 2013; Izadi Jiran, 2013; Kahirdeh, 2013; Rahmani, 2015). Rather, rituals and beliefs are considered the action and legitimacy of *Shari'i* structures that are constantly being reconstructed and reinterpreted. Depending on the type of this reconstruction, the religious matter either expands or is limited.

Objective and Research Question

The most important question of the research is: what are the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological characteristics of the "Religious Life Research Program" as an analytical tool for the sociology of religion in Iran? This research program must show under what conditions our society is truly religious, what the criterion for its religiosity is, and under what conditions we face religious disaffiliation.

Importance and Necessity of the Research

The importance of the Religious Life Research Program lies in providing a more precise analytical tool for explaining religion within the social structure of Iran. Some common analytical tools in the sociology of religion in Iran, including the same duality of the *'Urfi* and the *Qodsi* that dominates most research programs in this field, are better suited to European historical and cultural conditions than to Iranian and Islamic ones. Therefore, the relationship between the *'Urfi* and the *Qodsi* requires a conceptual and theoretical apparatus that is more compatible with the Iranian context. By converting this hard core from a duality into a quaternary, the Religious Life Research Program proposes such a tool for detecting religious life or religious disaffiliation in society.

Furthermore, an analytical tool is effective when it is built to solve a specific problem and not to open every "nut and bolt"; otherwise, it loses its specialized capability. For instance, explaining religious disaffiliation solely on the basis of the inefficiency of the system or the development model (Shojaeizand, 2006, pp. 44–45) does not yield an exclusive explanation of the phenomenon of religion, because inefficiency and disproportionate development patterns can generally explain the failure of any society, not just religious disaffiliation. The Religious Life Research Program, through the analysis of its quaternary and its theoretical and methodological requirements, seeks such a more specific explanation.

Subject Background and Research Literature

Since religious life depends on the dual conceptual, theoretical, and methodological formulation of the profane and the *Sacra* (sacred things), the background of this research includes studies in the sociology of religion that have examined the relationship between the *Sacra* and the profane in Iran. These include:

A. Shariati and Soroushfar (2017), in the article "Investigating the temporal politics governing the Iranian calendar in the years after the Islamic Revolution," argue that the *Sacra* is an exceptional matter, but that the Iranian calendar after the revolution, through ritualization and the activation of collective memory suited to post-revolutionary conditions, has disrupted the relationship between the exceptional *Sacra* and the common profane.

B. This research shares common ground with Mazaheri's (2019) study, titled "The thickness of rituals," in that both suggest that the density of rituals or the expansion of sacralization can, over time, lead to the ineffectiveness of rituals or the *Sacra*.

C. Zakeri's (2020) research, titled "The relationship between the sacred and morality in post-revolutionary society: The desacralized sacred," also argues in this direction: the loosening of the bond between religion and morality also diminishes the sanctity of religion.

D. Kazemi and Hesaraki (2023), in the article "Religiosity in post-revolutionary Iran: The politics of religious communities," address sacred spaces and their relationship with religious communities.

The importance of these studies lies in their attention to the decreasing or ineffectiveness of the *Sacra*. However, they all formulate the *Qodsi* within the conceptual system of the Western world and in the form of the same *Sacra*–profane duality. The present article redefines this relationship

as a quaternary rather than a duality, and proposes a different conceptual, theoretical, and methodological system. In accordance with this change in the analytical tool, the findings of the aforementioned studies regarding the increasing or decreasing effectiveness of the *Qodsi* must also be re-analyzed and re-interpreted.

Theoretical-Methodological Framework

The idea of a research program begins from the fact that we are not faced with a simple set of falsifiable hypotheses, but rather with generative and complex relationships among three realms: Knowledge, the knower, and the known. The type of combination and outcome of these realms determines the relative success or failure of a research program.

Every theory arises from an idea of the world, humans, and generally of science; this fundamental idea escapes falsification and is not identifiable or evaluable with empirical tools. This first layer of the research program, depending on the type of epistemological system of philosophers of science or scientific methodologists, is named with various titles: sometimes the "hard core," meaning very general theoretical hypotheses that constitute the basis of a scientific theory (Lakatos, 1978, pp. 48–49); sometimes the "world of cultural values" (Weber, 2016, pp. 120–121); and sometimes the "realm of the thing-in-itself," which is beyond individual and collective constructs (Parsania, 2013, p. 9). Regardless of this difference in naming, the first layer of a research program consists of those fundamental ideas about the subject of study that form the innermost layer of a scientific program.

The second layer relates to the type of construct that the scientist, given their own historical and cultural conditions, presents from the fundamental idea of the first layer: the theorist must wear a "protective belt" around the skeleton of their theory, a flexible belt consisting of auxiliary hypotheses that are refutable and modifiable (Chalmers, 1999, p. 98). This layer is also called the "rationalization of the cultural world" (Weber, 2016, pp. 120–121) or the "vessel of the scientist's consciousness and knowledge" (Parsania, 2013, p. 9).

If the second layer were mostly related to the relationship of the theorist with the fundamental idea, that is, the relationship of the scientist with science, the third layer in a scientific program would be mostly related to the relationship of the theorist with reality, that is, the relationship of the scientist with the known or the object of their study. Reality sometimes appears incompatible with the hard core; here, the theorist must possess the capacity to resolve the conflict: they must both devise rules for shielding the hard core from falsification (negative heuristic) and keep the hard core functional in relation to new realities (positive heuristic) (Chalmers, 1999, p. 98).

The relative capacity of a research program is measured by whether it is "progressive" or "degenerating": being progressive depends on its coherence and the extent of its novel predictions, whereas a program that merely prevents the falsification of the hard core and brings no new predictions is degenerating (Lakatos, 1978, pp. 87–89). In this layer, the theorist must continuously monitor the applicability or ineffectiveness of their theory in conflict with reality: "The task of historical research is to determine in each case to what extent this ideal construct approaches or deviates from reality" (Weber, 2016, p. 141). Thus, the theory moves out of self-sufficiency, is

reflected in the vessel of culture and collective consciousness (Parsania, 2013, p. 9), and its success or failure is assessed in comparison with reality.

The Religious Life Research Program also follows these three layers. Its hard core is the understanding of the *'Urfi* and the *Qodsi* in the form of a quaternary, analyzing the *'Urfi* within the concept of nature and the *Qodsi* within the concept of *Sharia*. In the second step, this quaternary is rationalized using the framework of action and legitimacy, and its protective belt is formed. In the third step, through the typology method and its rules, the successful application of this program in reality and the possibility of new predictions from it are determined.

The unit of analysis in the Religious Life Research Program is *Shari'i* structures. Data analysis is carried out by relying on the framework of action and legitimacy, and using the typology method, the degree of distance or proximity to "religious life" is determined.

Findings

A. Hard Core

Religious life depends on the type of formulation of the *Sacra* and the Profane. The research literature of religious life raises this fundamental question: how can the characteristic of a person's sanctity be legitimately transferred to objects (Durkheim, 2012, pp. 265–266)? To put it more simply, how can the relationships of life be pulled out of a state of randomness and a rule be established for them? Sociological studies of religious life attempt to explain the role of religion in regulating life. Since the answer to this question, namely how life organizes itself and what role religion plays in this, depends on the cultural and historical world of the questioner, "religious life" is not an obvious or neutral concept.

In the European formulation of religious life, the *Sacra* does not have an extra-historical essence or a supernatural identity. Nominalism, in this cultural world, denies the possibility of the *Sacra* being essential; therefore, in the modern period, the *Sacra* is recognized solely through a formal distinction from the ordinary (Durkheim, 2004, p. 51). Dualities such as moral hot and cold, left and right, fascist and non-fascist, or the savage and civilized *Sacra* (Batai, 2012; Durkheim, 2004a; Hertz, 1960; Mauss, 1979; Richman, 2002; Shariati, 2006) all find meaning in this same historical and cultural world. They speak of the "purified matter" without speaking of essence, truth, or degrees of purity. What matters are the religious manifestations and their formal heterogeneities, not an essential and hierarchical relationship between them (Durkheim, 2004, p. 51). In this cultural world, the *Sacra* is understood as a secularized matter, and prohibitions and taboos have a socio-political function, not an extra-historical truth (for example, see Bellah, 1967 and Goffman, 1963).

In the Iranian and Islamic world, the *Qodsi* is an attribute that represents and manifests the essence of *Qedasat*. Therefore, the conventional duality of the *Sacra* and the Profane must be expanded into a quaternary.

The first concept of this quaternary is the duality of nature and the natural. The nature of humans and societies carries *Qedasat* and is not an accidental and rule-less matter, but rather occurs with a specific order and through the separation of powers from one another (Tusi, 1985, p. 150). A prerequisite for the *Qodsi* is the observance of this natural order. In the absence of such natural

order and separation of social groups, the *Qodsi* does not form either. Nature is the will and act of Allah, whereas the natural is the will and act of humans. The will and act of humans are transformative, changeable, and corruptible, but the will and act of Allah are far from transformation and, in a sense, from corruptibility.[1]

The second concept of this quaternary is the duality of *'Urf* and the *'Urfi*. *'Urf* in the sense of the desirable, the known, the agreeable[2], and the conventional takes place within the nature of humans and societies. In a general sense, *'Urf* refers to all the legitimate natural desires that humans have recognized, found desirable, and requested, and it is the foundation of the wisdom of every society that they have established over time and space for living together (Alidoust, 2016, pp. 146–147).[3] The *'Urfi* is the rational formation of social life in a specific historical and cultural condition.

The third concept is the duality of *Sharia* and the *Shari'i*. *Sharia*, as a codified law, expresses the *'Urf* and gives it a specific framework. In fact, *Sharia* is the reinforcement, clarification, and stabilization of human nature and *'Urf*, and it means the clear and obvious way (Raghib, 1984, Vol. 2, p. 448). *Sharia* is only capable of commanding and forbidding in society to the extent that its rulings are recognized in the *'Urf* of the society. Commanding the good and forbidding the evil is, in fact, an extra effort beyond the obligatory and the forbidden, so that the divine ruling is linked with the ruling of the society. Nevertheless, the rulings of *Sharia* sometimes conflict with each other, sometimes the adaptation of a *Sharia* ruling to a specific case is not clear, sometimes the necessity of precedence and succession in rulings arises, and sometimes a matter that has been permissible until now becomes temporarily forbidden due to specific time and space conditions. All these cases show that relying on the outward appearance of *Sharia*, much like relying on the outward appearance of any law, is insufficient. *Sharia*, in specific *'Urfi* conditions, provides a specific framework for the feelings and actions of the religious practitioners, and the *Shari'i* is the continuity of *Sharia* in different *'Urfi* conditions.

Here, a distinction must be made between the three concepts of *Sharia*, the *Shari'i*, and *Shari'i* structures. *Sharia* determines the rules of action for the religious practitioner. The *Shari'i* continues *Sharia*, preserves its goals and interests, and determines the precedence and succession of *Sharia* in specific *'Urfi* conditions. *Shari'i* structures are systems that justify and explain themselves by relying on *Sharia*, but they do not necessarily approach its goals and interests and can distance themselves from them.

Shari'i structures are not necessarily in accordance with *Sharia*, nor do they necessarily lead to the creation of the *Shari'i*. They are the historical embodiment of *Sharia*, in the sense that the discursive structure of *Sharia* (what we call the book and tradition) is combined with the operational structure of a specific historical, cultural, and social period. Therefore, *Shari'i*

---

[1] . The Holy Qur'an, Sūrat Fāṭir (35), verse 43.

[2] . The Holy Qur'an, Sūrat al-Aʿrāf (7), verse 199; Sūrat al-Baqarah (2), verse 273; Sūrat al-Mursalāt (77), verse 1.

[3] . ʿUrf may be contrasted with the profane. In this usage, ʿurf denotes what is regarded as desirable, legitimate, and religiously sanctioned, whereas the profane refers to what lies outside the sacred or religious sphere. Etymologically, profane derives from the Latin pro ("before" or "in front of") and fanum ("temple"), originally denoting what was outside the temple. The sense of "impure" or "undesirable" is therefore an interpretive association, not the term's literal meaning.

structures are not merely the discursive structure of *Sharia*, but are inevitably colored by the conditions of the time, mixed with the purposes of those who were in pursuit of power and legitimacy, or the result of a specific way of reading *Sharia*. To identify the state of religion in Iran, our unit of analysis is these *Shari'i* structures.

For example, the Caliphate was a *Shari'i* structure in a specific historical-cultural period that justified and explained its action and legitimacy by citing *Sharia*, but it organized the discursive structure of *Sharia* within a specific and different operational structure. Another example is the citation of various social groups throughout history to the verse *Uli al-Amr* (those in authority). The reference of each of these groups to this verse is, to some extent, dependent on the specific conditions of their time, the type of rivals they had, and the absolute order they were pursuing. The idea of the *Velayat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist) of Imam Khomeini (RA) is another example of a *Shari'i* structure. It was not that, for example, the scholars of the Constitutional period did not have access to the citations of Imam Khomeini (RA). Rather, their placement in a different time and space vessel, together with the type of social forces of that period and other reasons, made the proposal of this idea irrelevant to them.

Shari'i structures have a constellational character. Constellations have a pattern-like movement but do not move mechanically (Weber, 2016, p. 141). They are neither the result of coincidence nor the result of a compulsory and predetermined movement. Rather, they provide favorable and probable conditions for the formation of some actions and legitimacies and, at the same time, make the formation of other actions and legitimacies unlikely and unfavorable.

The fourth concept of the religious life quaternary is the duality of the essence of *Qedasat* and the *Qodsi*. The essence of *Qedasat* is not embodied in society but is manifested. In the doctrine of the incarnation of God, the link between nature and *'Urf* is severed from the sacred, and God dissolves into nature and loses his subjecthood. In the doctrine of manifestation (*Tajalli*) (manifestation), however, *Shari'i* structures can be, in a limited and conditional way, the manifestation and representative of the essence of *Qedasat*. The *Qodsi* is a conditional representation of the essence of *Qedasat*. Religious life means the harmony of the will and act of humans with the will and act of Allah. Unlike the will and act of Allah, which is of the nature of necessity, the will and act of humans are of the nature of possibility, and therefore humans may move away from the divine act and will, just as they may move closer to it. Allah has created nature, as the lowest point of the pyramid of existence, with a specific division and order. Allah has granted humans *'Urf* or the capacity for understanding, and has placed a clear and obvious way before them through *Sharia*. Humans, through their will and act, move away from or closer to these divine systems.

Table 1. Hard Core of the Religious Life Research Program

Essence of *Qedasat* and the *Qodsi*	***Sharia* and the *Shari'i* and *Shari'i* structures**	***'Urf* and the *'Urfi***	**Nature and the natural**
The *Qodsi* is the result of the conjunction and alignment between *Sharia* and *'Urf*. Society never coincides with the essence of *Qedasat* but can represent it conditionally.	*Sharia* institutionalizes, clarifies, and stabilizes the *'Urf*, and the *Shari'i* continues *Sharia*. *Shari'i* structures are the combination of *Sharia* with the conditions of the time.	*'Urf* is the rational perfection of the natural order. The *'Urfi* is the rational foundation of a society in a specific time-space context.	Nature is arranged according to the will and act of Allah in a structured and differentiated manner. The natural is the continuity of the will and act of Allah through humans.

B. Protective Belt

The proposed quaternary of the religious life research program, as the hard core, must be rationalized in the second layer (that is, the protective belt). In this layer, the relationship of the theorist with their fundamental idea is raised, and how this idea is justified and reasoned and, like a protective belt, preserves the hard core. Therefore, in the following, we attempt to explain *nature* and *'Urf* as the structure of feeling and action, and *Sharia* and the *Qodsi* as the structures of legitimacy.

The structure of feeling and action means that we humans sometimes, when facing the problems of life, place them in predetermined formulas and try to eliminate their singularity and freshness in any way possible; sometimes we are intimidated and attracted by new problems and, without the support of our historical-cultural tradition, absorb them uncontrollably; sometimes we organize new problems with the urgencies of instrumental rationality; and sometimes we place new problems in proportion to our historical-cultural tradition.

"Religious life" requires maintaining absolute values while paying attention to the worldly consequences of action, a formulation close to the framework of value-rational action in the work of Weber. In this framework, we are faced with a duality that makes achieving balance between the two difficult: on the one hand, absolute values must be maintained, and on the other hand, attention must be paid to the worldly consequences of action. Weber has declared such a balance impossible: "The more the value considered for an action approaches the position of an absolute value, the more irrational the action becomes" (Weber, 2005, p. 54). In the Western cultural world in which Weber lived, adherence to absolute values comes at the cost of ignoring the consequences of action.

Weber's quaternary of action, in his legitimacy systems, is reduced to a trinity of the charismatic, the traditional, and the bureaucratic (Weber, 2003, p. 93; Weber, 2005, pp. 312–313), because in his view, value-rational legitimacy in the modern age (the age of godlessness and prophethoodlessness) is not understandable.

Weber does not entirely deny the rationality of absolute values, but from the standpoint and horizon of instrumental rationality, he considers the rationality of absolute values to be out of reach.

From the standpoint of instrumental rational action and legitimacy, which is the main characteristic of the Western cultural world, conflicting ultimate values are accepted and a formal arrangement among these values is put on the agenda; the actor must choose to which gods, and at what time, to serve (Weber, 1994, pp. 78–79).

In the Iranian and Islamic cultural world, the possibility of establishing a balance between absolute values and the worldly consequences of action exists. If the *Shari'i* arises in relation to *Sharia*, the fixed structure of *Sharia* is reconstructed in accordance with the changing conditions of life.

If the *Shari'i* places the absolute values of *Sharia* in proportion to the worldly consequences of action, this cannot be realized through affectual behavior, traditional behavior, or instrumental action. Sometimes the needs of the time are taken as a principle and an attempt is made to make *Sharia* compatible with these needs; such a work in fact destroys the relationship between *Sharia* and the *Shari'i* and replaces *Sharia* with fleeting and temporary inclinations. One cannot be a mere follower of what seems to be the need of the time, because these needs themselves may conflict with each other; what seems necessary in current conditions may appear unnecessary a few decades later. Weber also emphasizes in explaining instrumental rational action that the mere categorization of urgent needs based on priority leads to an instrumental action that has been emptied of rationality (Weber, 1978, p. 53).

Sometimes a fleeting, emotional, and uncontrolled reaction is given to the events of the time, which is the characteristic of affectual behavior; and sometimes the *Shari'i* does not form in relation to *Sharia*, where only attention is paid to *Sharia* in traditional behavior, and its adaptation to the worldly consequences of action is ignored.

Life routines usually either move toward the repetition of predetermined relationships, toward uncontrolled and emotional reactions, toward the optimization of tools, or toward the inner and value-oriented goals of action (Weber, 2005, p. 52).

Affectual and traditional behavior can be elevated to the rational aspects of action, just as instrumental-rational and value-rational actions can descend into irrationality. Whenever, in instrumental rationality, only tools (disregarding goals) are considered, or, in value-rationality, the consequences of action are ignored, action falls from rationality to irrationality (Weber, 1922, p. 12; Weber, 1978, p. 25).

Actions, when they become specific and widespread routines, create legitimacy. Legitimacy or dominance means "the probability that a specific group of individuals will obey specific commands issued from a specific source" (Weber, 2005, p. 302), and the motivations for obedience can arise from emotional bonds, tradition and custom, material interests, or value-oriented motivations (Weber, 2005, p. 302). In the Religious Life Research Program, *Shari'i* structures must be studied as structures of legitimacy, and one must ask what kind of legitimacy each one creates.

Table 2. Protective Belt of the Religious Life Research Program

Legitimacy	Action
Value-rational legitimacy creates the *Shari'i* through regular changes in the fixed structure of *Sharia*. In real life, there are usually legitimacies based on emotional bonds, tradition and custom, and material interests.	The *Qodsi* is distinguishable by two features: adherence to absolute values and attention to the worldly consequences of action, which is the characteristic of value-rational action. In real life, either only optimized tools are considered, or uncontrolled reactions, or repetitive trends.

C. Methodological Rules

In the third layer, the relationship of the theorist with reality becomes subject matter, and negative and positive methodological rules are raised. The Religious Life Research Program uses the typology method to understand the conditions of "religious life" or religious disaffiliation in Iran, because with it, one can recognize the types of affective, traditional, instrumental-rational, and value-rational action and legitimacy within *Shari'i* structures. Three essential conditions must be observed in social typologies.

The first condition is that the criterion of division must be specified: the division of objects into various types depends on the "basis of division" (Divider). For example, we sometimes distinguish objects by the criterion of large and small, sometimes based on their gender, and sometimes based on their mode of use (Beili, 2013, p. 10). Thus, the same angle upon which the division is made is the first condition of typology, and it is called "value-relevance" in sociological literature. Without it, all matters remain in an equal state, because "the construction of the historical individual is conditional on value-relevance" (Weber, 2016, p. 220). In the Religious Life Research Program, value-relevance is the extent of distance or proximity of *Shari'i* structures to the framework of value-rational action and legitimacy, an indicator upon which types are evaluated and which forms part of the negative heuristic rules of this research program.

The second condition is that the components within a type must have little difference from one another; a large difference within a type indicates the merging of several unrelated phenomena into one kind. The third condition is the existence of difference between types. The error that occurs in some typologies is that either several unrelated phenomena are placed within one kind, or a single individuality is placed in several different kinds. Kinds such as ritualistic or meaningful religiosity (Azadarmaki & Etemadifard, 2019, p. 1) may not be kinds in the true sense, because meaningful practitioners, and similarly ritualistic practitioners, can be connected to completely different religious constellations within themselves.

The way in which religion is operationalized in a specific *Shari'i* structure or religious policy (affective, traditional, instrumental, or value-oriented) is important. Does this *Shari'i* structure or religious policy occur in a reactive, temporary, and uncontrolled context, or in the form of a rational and long-term plan that makes sufficient use of alternative tools? Is it used regardless of worldly consequences, or with consideration of them? We are usually faced with a complex combination of these factors, and we must clarify in which context a belief began, how it entered other kinds in its evolutionary course, and what reasons this movement stemmed from.

Instead of examining individuals' motivations, the religious policies that individualities adopt should be analyzed. Religious policies are more general than *Shari'i* structures. *Shari'i* structures, as a specific type of religious policy, necessarily benefit from the discursive structure of Islam's *Sharia*, although they operationalize it in a specific way. Yet there are some religious policies that are either indifferent to or in opposition to Islam's *Sharia*. In all these cases, it must be seen how individualities act, how they make their beliefs legitimate, and how they confront their opposing religious actions and legitimacies. The Religious Life Research Program proposes new positive heuristic rules here. Individualities that are indifferent to or in opposition to Islam's *Sharia* can also be studied within the framework of action and legitimacy.

Social types and kinds are common in terms of the basis of division but are distinguished from each other as separate parts. In such conditions, understanding the points of connection and divergence between types becomes important: two types are distinguished not in all respects, but from a specific aspect and under specific conditions, and the issue of causality here is nothing but the discovery of temporary lines of connection between types. A specific *Shari'i* structure, in its evolutionary course, continuously welcomes different frameworks of action and legitimacy; therefore, its dynamic structure, and the way its continuous arrangement as a constellation is organized, must be considered. The issue of causality here is not the accumulation of factors upon one another. For example, if three factors A, B, and C explain only 70% of phenomenon D, we go to other factors such as E and F to explain the remaining 30% (see Mill, 1881). Rather, causality concerns the ambiguity of factors and the specific way of their connection with other factors in a certain historical and cultural condition. In our intended causal approach, each factor is seen as developmental and can take completely different meanings. For example, concepts such as guild, state, or union in the work of John Stuart Mill are merely equivalent to a specific function, but these same concepts can find completely different structural conditions in the work of Durkheim. Therefore, such phrases are seen in Durkheim's works: "In order for a guild to have such an effect…" (Durkheim, 1999, p. 467); "The effect of the state can be exercised with utility only if…" (Durkheim, 1999, p. 473); "Unions will only be able to perform the role assigned to them if…" (Durkheim, 1999, p. 82).

Thus, factor A, depending on the conditions, can find completely different functions. A simple analysis of it is insufficient, and studying the pattern-like and temporary relationship of the composite factor formed by A and B (or B and A) is more effective. Factors in this view are defined not just as 0 and 1, but by considering the interval between them (Chalabi, 2009, p. 2). In the fuzzy set method, the combination of types between the two boundary limits of 0 and 1 is also subject matter (Chalabi, 2009; Ragin, 2000; Taleban, 2015). The fuzzy set method, although it well considers the composite reality of factors, is insufficient for the Religious Life Research Program in at least three respects. First, it does not provide an explanation regarding the historical and cultural conditions of the development of types; types are not just numbers, but they have a history of development. Second, in fuzzy logic, all types, whether probable or improbable, are equally enumerated, whereas in social analysis, only probable types are important. Third, in fuzzy research, the independent variable is seen as composite and multi-faceted, but the dependent variable remains

simple. However, previous constellations, which are composite yet discrete and specific, lead to new constellations (Weber, 2016, p. 118), and this proposition means that in social life, we are not faced with simple and single-dimensional factors. In this sense, in the Religious Life Research Program, we do not consider religion as a simple and single-dimensional factor, or as 0 and 1. We also do not consider the development of the shape of components within religion as a fixed set such as 0, 0, 1, 1. In historical and cultural conditions, zero does not exist at all. Rather, we are faced with the substitution of components. For example, in the absence of *'Urf*, tendencies outside of *Sharia* exist, and in the absence of the *Shari'i*, other forms of legitimacy are formed.

Table 3. Commonality and Difference Between the Research Method of the Religious Life Research Program and Fuzzy Sets

Commonality	Difference
Both independent and dependent variables are historical, cultural, composite, developmental, and probable wholes.	The independent variable is a composite whole and acquires a different identity depending on the type of combination between its components.

D. Application of an Example

A fatwa in the Constitutional period can be considered a *Shari'i* structure. In these fatwas, we are not only facing the discursive structure of *Sharia*, but also an operational structure that has gained importance in the public sphere. This sphere arose from various factors. On the one hand, the obligation to follow the most learned *mujtahid* (qualified jurist) gave the authority the possibility to address a wide spectrum of individuals (Saboorian & Parsania, 2017, p. 37). On the other hand, the transformation of lifestyle, which manifested in the expansion of the press, changes in the educational system, and changes in governance, gave individuals the possibility to pursue broader interests and goals. The fatwa in this period must be seen as a constellation. The fatwas of this period, although they all referred to Islamic *Sharia*, each created a different framework of action and legitimacy. In the fatwa regarding the sanction of tobacco by Mirza Shirazi, a natural separation and ordering of matters can be seen. The duty of the state was enforcement and implementation, the duty of religious scholars was exhortation and encouragement, and the duty of merchants was meeting the essential needs of Muslims (Najafi, 1994, p. 90). In this triple division, the effective social groups complemented one another while their roles remained separate, and the *nature* and the *'Urfi* were realized in such an order. Mirza Shirazi never pursued a pattern of overthrowing the government. Rather, he warned the government about the consequences of the contract and encouraged it to cancel the contract. Merchants also protested by relinquishing their ownership, and through the activism of the religious authority, this protest was moderated from an overthrow of the government to the cancellation of the contract. With the activism of Mirza Shirazi and Mirza Ashtiani, the *Shari'i* arose in relation to *Sharia*, the government implemented the cancellation of the contract, and the absolute value of rejecting foreign dominance found its executive capability within a rational action context.

In the fatwas after the tobacco sanction, this coordinated natural and *'Urfi* system collapses, and we face a different type and kind of fatwa, which must be distinguished from the fatwa of Mirza

Shirazi. The fatwas after the tobacco incident, such as the declaration of 1911 by Mulla Muhammad Kazem Khorasani and Sheikh Abdullah Mazandarani, the pledge of the scholars of Isfahan in 1911 to abstain from Russian tobacco and tea, and the declaration of the scholars of Shiraz in response to the Russian and English governments' violation of the territorial integrity of Iran (Najafi, 1994, pp. 87–108), are no longer creating the *Qodsi*. On the one hand, there is no powerful government that would take responsibility for enforcement, as seen in the 1907 agreement regarding Iran, which was decided without the presence of Iranian authorities. On the other hand, religious authority still pursues the jurisprudential literature of fighting tyranny, while the issue is no longer a tyrannical ruler but a crisis of the absence of government. Merchants, as another effective social group, lose their social cohesion and class organization, and in such conditions, each social group acts autonomously without coordinating with the others. In these fatwas, the *nature*, the *'Urfi*, and the *Shari'i* cannot be formed. Since uncontrolled emotional behaviors become widespread, the opportunity for understanding and acting upon these fatwas is not provided, and the absolute value of rejecting foreign dominance does not find its executive capability within a rational action framework.

Conclusion

In the research literature of religious life, the order of life and the role of religion in it are of interest. However, the answer to the question of how life organizes itself and what role religion plays in it depends on our historical and cultural world. To analyze the role of religion in the order of life of the Iranian person, three interconnected steps must be taken.

A. The first step is to move beyond the duality of the Profane and the Sacra and convert this duality into a quaternary: *nature* and the natural, *'Urf* and the *'Urfi*, *Sharia* and the *Shari'i*, and *Qedasat* and the *Qodsi*.

B. The second step is the rationalization of this quaternary within the framework of action and legitimacy. The main criterion is the degree of distance or proximity of a specific *Shari'i* structure to value-rational action and legitimacy. Paying attention to the consequences of action without considering absolute values leads to affective or instrumental-rational behavior and legitimacy. Paying attention to absolute values without considering consequences leads to traditional behavior and legitimacy.

C. The third step is to consider the *Shari'i* structure of a specific period as a constellation. Constellations are historical, cultural, composite, developmental, and probable entities. It must be seen what combination of the discursive structure of *Sharia* and the operational structure of its time the current *Shari'i* structure has produced, what evolutions it is the result of from the previous *Sharia* structure, what kinds it makes possible within itself, and what path it paves for *Shari'i* structures in the future.

The recommendation of this research is that new waves of national studies should be carried out relying on the Religious Life Research Program. This path does not necessarily require massive data, a complete census, or a larger statistical population, and it is not necessary to study all cities. As far as possible, however, it requires examining the religious policies adopted by individuals.

Religious policies are more general than *Shari'i* structures. The actors of *Shari'i* structures justify, explain, or even hide their behavior through *Sharia*, but some actions and legitimacies may be indifferent to or even in opposition to *Sharia*. These latter two types, although they do not fall within the framework of *Sharia*, still find proximity to a system of belief and rituals and engage in a religious policy, albeit one contrary to *Sharia*. The progressiveness of the Religious Life Research Program lies in its ability to analyze the religious policies of religious, agnostic, and atheist individuals within the framework of the action and legitimacy system.

By relying on this analytical tool, religious disaffiliation can be considered from two directions. First, the nature of society, through the cultural invasion of the West, is organized in a framework contrary to Islamic *Sharia*, and the place of "normals" and "anormals" in society is reversed, where uncontrolled emotional behaviors prevail. Second, *Sharia* rulings merely take a formal shape, and their link with the *'Urfi* requirements of society decreases, where traditional behavior becomes dominant.

The findings of this research regarding Iranian society show the necessity of looking at religiosity from a historical and cultural perspective. From this standpoint, instead of speaking of the decrease or increase of religiosity, it is better to say that religiosity faces obstacles or finds the opportunity for emergence and manifestation. What lies in between is the favorable or unfavorable condition for religiosity, not its increase or decrease. These favorable or unfavorable conditions depend on the extent to which the natural, *'Urfi*, and *Shari'i* order has been observed in life; whether social groups confront each other in an ordered and differentiated manner or society takes a mass and disordered form; whether the possibility of mutual recognition and understanding between groups exists or is denied; and whether the custodians of *Sharia* consider the conditions of the time or, in a merely traditional framework, remain indifferent to society and its transformations.

Author Contributions: This article is extracted from the doctoral dissertation of the first author that was responsible for the initial drafting of the manuscript and subsequent revisions. The second author served as the dissertation supervisor and contributed to the conceptualization and refinement of the research problem. The third author served as the dissertation adviser and contributed to the conceptualization of the research problem and its practical application. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Ethical Considerations: The authors avoided data fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism, and any form of misconduct.

Data Availability Statement: Data available on request from the authors.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest in this study.

Declaration of AI Use: The authors has used no AI tools.

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions in manuscript revision.

References

The Holy Qur'an.

Alidoust, A. (2016). *Sources of jurisprudence: Reason and 'Urf*. Al-Mustafa Publications. [In Persian]

Asadi, A. (1974). *Cultural tendencies and social attitudes in Iran* [Report]. Public Opinion and Social Research Center of the Radio and Television Organization. [In Persian]

Azadarmaki, T., & Etemadifard, S. M. (2019). Family base, types of religiosity and quality of religious values in Iran. *Journal of Youth Research, Culture and Society*, (4), 1–23. [In Persian]

Bahar, M. (2013). Religious objects and generational identity in Iran with emphasis on mourning objects. In J. Rahmani (Ed.), *Sociological and anthropological studies of Muharram mourning rituals* (Vol. 1). Khayme Publications. [In Persian]

Batai, G. (2012). *The psychological structure of fascism* (S. Moradian, Trans.). Rokh Dad No Publications. [In Persian]

Beili, K. D. (2013). *Taxonomy and typology: An introduction to the techniques of classification* (S. M. Arabi & K. Khalili, Trans.). Cultural Research Office. [In Persian]

Bellah, R. N. (1967). Civil religion in America. *Daedalus, 96*(1), 1–21.

Casanova, J. (2006). Rethinking secularization. *The Hedgehog Review, 8*(1–2), 7–22.

Chalabi, M. (2009). Fuzzy membership-based indexing, typology and calibration in sociology. *Iranian Journal of Social Studies, 3*(4), 1–20. [In Persian]

Chalmers, A. (1999). *What is this thing called science? An introduction to the philosophy of science* (S. Zibakalam, Trans.). SAMT Publications. [In Persian]

Durkheim, É. (1999). *Suicide* (Nadrosalarzadeh Amiri, Trans.). Allameh Tabataba'i University Publications. [In Persian]

Durkheim, É. (2004). *The elementary forms of religious life* (B. Parham, Trans.). Nashr-e Markaz. [In Persian]

Durkheim, É. (2004a). Religious feeling in the present age (S. Shariati, Trans.). *Iranian Journal of Sociology, 5*(2), 201–207. [In Persian]

Durkheim, É. (2012). *Sociology lessons: Moral physics and law* (S. J. Mousavi, Trans.). Nashr-e Ney. [In Persian]

Goffman, E. (1963). *Behavior in public places*. Free Press.

Goudarzi, M. (2003). *Values and attitudes of Iranians (second wave)*. National Design Office. [In Persian]

Hertz, R. (1960). *Death and the right hand*. Cohen & West.

Raghib Isfahani. (1984). *Mufradat alfaz al-Qur'an* (S. G. Khosravi Hosseini, Trans.; Vol. 2). Mortazavi Bookstore Publications. [In Persian]

Izadi Jiran, A. (2013). Tasting rituals: An ethnography of the sensory experience of Nazri food in Tehran. *Iranian Anthropological Research, 3*(2), 25–45. [In Persian]

Javadi Yeganeh, M. (2015). *Values and attitudes of Iranians (third wave)*. National Design Office in cooperation with the National Social Observation Center of the Ministry of Interior. [In Persian]

Kahirdeh, N. (2013). A sociological look at the transformation of the role of preacher and orator in Ashura rituals. In J. Rahmani (Ed.), *Sociological and anthropological studies of Muharram mourning rituals* (Vol. 1). Khayme Publications. [In Persian]

Kazemi, A., & Faraji, M. (2003). Secularization and everyday life. *Letter of Social Sciences*, (21), 243–269. [In Persian]

Kazemi, A., & Hesaraki, N. (2023). Religiosity in post-revolutionary Iran: The politics of religious communities. *Iranian Journal of Sociology, 24*(1), 71–95. [In Persian]

Lakatos, I. (1978). *The methodology of scientific research programmes* (Vol. 1). Cambridge University Press.

Mauss, M. (1979). *Seasonal variations of the Eskimo: A study in social morphology*. Routledge.

Mazaheri, M. (2019, December 1). The absence of religion and the mute language of believers. Sidanet.

Mill, J. S. (1881). *A system of logic: Ratiocinative and inductive* (8th ed.). New York: Harper & Brothers, Franklin Square.

Najafi, M. (1994). Expansion of the economic sanctions domain through ten historical documents and declarations. In *The tobacco sanction era: On the 100th anniversary of the tobacco sanction uprising*. Amir Kabir Publications. [In Persian]

Parsania, H. (2013). Theory and Culture: Fundamental Methodology of Evolution of Scientific Theories. *Strategy for Culture*, 6(23), 7–28.

Ragin, C. C. (2000). *Fuzzy-set social science*. University of Chicago Press.

Rahmani, J. (2015). *Anthropology of Muharram mourning rituals: Rite and myth in Shiite Iran*. Khayme Publications.

Rezaei, A. (2000). *Values and attitudes of Iranians (first wave)*. National Design Office.

Richman, M. H. (2002). *Sacred revolutions: Durkheim and the Collège de Sociologie*. University of Minnesota Press.

Saboorian, M., & Parsania, H. (2017). The Conditions for Establishment of Shiite's Marja'iyat Taqlid Institution. *Islam and Social Studies, 5*(19), 29–50. https://doi.org/10.22081/jiss.2017.65551

Shariati, S. (2006, March 4). Durkheim's cursed legacy. *Hamshahri Newspaper*.

Shariati, S., & Soroushfar, Z. (2017). Investigating the temporal politics governing the Iranian calendar in the years after the Islamic Revolution. *Journal of Social Studies and Research in Iran, 6*(1), 67–89.

Shojaeizand, A. (2006). A model for measuring religiosity in Iran. *Iranian Journal of Sociology, 6*(1), 34–66.

Smith, J. K. (2022). *How not to be secular: A report on the thought of Charles Taylor* (H. Qadiri, Trans.). Tarjoman Human Sciences Publications. [In Persian]

Taleban, M. (2015). Causality in Historical Studies. Journal of Historical Perspective&Historiography, 25(15), 61-87. https://doi.org/10.22051/hph.2016.2407

Taylor, C. (2021). *A secular age* (A. Paknejad, Trans.). Pegah Roozegar. [In Persian]

Tusi, M. ibn M. (1985). *Naseri ethics* (M. Minovi & A. Heydari, Eds.). Kharazmi Publications.

Weber, M. (1922). *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology* (G. Roth & C. Wittich, Eds.). University of California Press.

Weber, M. (1994). *Political writings* (P. Lassman & R. Speirs, Eds.). Cambridge University Press.

Weber, M. (2003). *Religion, power, and society* (A. Tadayon, Trans.). Hermes Publications. [In Persian]

Weber, M. (2005). *Economy and society* (A. Manouchehri, M. Torabiniazad, & M. Emadzadeh, Trans.). SAMT. [In Persian]

Weber, M. (2006). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (A. Rashidian & P. Manoucheri Kashani, Trans.). Scientific and Cultural Publications Company. [In Persian]

Weber, M. (2016). *The methodology of the social sciences* (H. Chavoshian, Trans.). Nashr-e Markaz. [In Persian]

Zaeri, Q. (2023). *Fourth wave survey of values and attitudes of Iranians*. Research Institute of Culture, Art and Communication.

Zakeri, A. (2020). The relationship between the sacred and morality in post-revolutionary society: The desacralized sacred. *Quarterly of the Iranian Association of Cultural and Communication Studies, 16*(58), 81–108.