



Foundational Requirements for Cultural Governance in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Insights from the Ayatollah Khamenei

Shahla Bagheri ^{1✉} , Sadegh Akbari Aghdam ^{2✉} , Seyyed Saeed Zahed Zahedani ^{3✉} 

1. Professor of Sociology, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran. (Corresponding Author) Email: sbagheri@khu.ac.ir
2. PhD Student in Cultural Policy, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran. Email: sadeghakbariaghdam@khu.ac.ir
3. Associate Professor of Sociology, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran. Email: zahedani@shirazu.ac.ir

Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:

Received: 13 January 2025
Received in revised form: 24 July 2025
Accepted: 19 September 2025
Published online: 23 September 2025

Keywords:

Culture, Cultural Governance, Ayatollah Khamenei, Thematic Analysis.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the foundational requirements for cultural governance in the Islamic Republic of Iran from the perspective of Ayatollah Khamenei. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes thematic analysis of the Supreme Leader's statements on culture and cultural governance. The purposively selected corpus includes texts and speeches addressing cultural issues, governance, and related concepts. Findings indicate that the cornerstone of Iran's cultural governance model is the popularization of Islamic culture, structured around two principal components: Islamic guidance of culture and public participation in cultural affairs. Five enabling requirements underpin this model: (1) optimal attitudinal and performance indicators, (2) cultural management, (3) cultural engineering, (4) cultural discourse-making, and (5) institutionalization of divine governance indicators, which encompass Islam-centered, people-centered, culture-centered, Imam-centered, law-abiding, justice-oriented, awareness-driven, responsible, unity-promoting, and dignified governance. The ultimate outcome is the personal and social elevation of individuals and society. This framework is recommended as a guiding macro-structure for cultural policymaking, contributing to the advancement of a new Islamic civilization.

Cite this article: Bagheri, S.; Akbari Aghdam, S. and Zahed Zahedani, S. S. (2025). Foundational Requirements for Cultural Governance in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Insights from the Ayatollah Khamenei. *Social Theories of Muslim Thinkers*, 15(3): 95-115. <https://doi.org/10.22059/jstmt.2025.388641.1766>



© The Author(s).

Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jstmt.2025.388641.1766>

1. Introduction

The 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran, with its cultural and civilizational dimensions, not only challenged the prevailing political order but also reshaped dominant paradigms in revolutionary theory. Under the leadership of Imam Khomeini and the guidance of Ayatollah Khamenei, religious culture, faith, and spiritual leadership—previously marginalized—became central to revolutionary analysis, laying the foundation for a governance model rooted in divine teachings and religious values.

This shift recognized culture as a decisive variable in societal formation, continuity, and organization (Bagheri, 2023:2). Scholars such as Philip Smith (2008), Jeffrey Alexander (2006), Margaret Archer (1995), and John Foran (1997) emphasized the integration of structural factors and human agency, highlighting the critical role of culture. Michel Foucault also acknowledged the Iranian Revolution's cultural and religious underpinnings (Marengo, 2020:723–725).

The establishment and continuous reform of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, guided by Ayatollah Khamenei, illustrate the centrality of culture in Iran's governance. Rapid development in cultural studies and the shift from state-centric to governance-oriented approaches underscore culture's pivotal role in both national and international governance processes.

Agency, structure, and culture—and their interplay—remain fundamental topics in social theory and policymaking. Cultural governance emerges as a connecting framework between culture and governance. The absence of a comprehensive model based on epistemological and transformative foundations, coupled with socio-cultural challenges such as Western cultural influence, institutional fragmentation, and youth orientation toward foreign models, necessitates a model grounded in Ayatollah Khamenei's vision.

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, systematically analyzing cultural governance in Iran according to Ayatollah Khamenei's guidance. It offers a comprehensive model of macro-level cultural management, linking cultural governance with broader governance domains.

2. Methodology

This qualitative study analyzed selected texts using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Units of analysis included words, themes, and elements related to governance, culture, and enabling strategies. Analytical sources consisted of speeches and writings by Ayatollah Khamenei on cultural governance, retrieved from official software, books, and websites. Statements were coded and organized into sub-themes and main themes through the six-phase thematic analysis: familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, definition, and final reporting.

3. Findings

The central pillar of Iran's cultural governance is the *popularization of Islamic culture*, supported by two components: *Islamic guidance of culture* and *public participation*. Five foundational requirements were identified:

1. **Optimal Attitudinal and Performance Indicators:** Attitudinal and performance indicators of devout cultural agents.
2. **Cultural Management:** Progressive, revolutionary–jihadi, participatory, and directed management.
3. **Cultural Engineering:** Targeted development, integrated strengthening, and national identity formation.

4. **Cultural Discourse-Making:** Shaping cultural values, principled reform, and internal empowerment.
5. **Institutionalization of Divine Governance Indicators:** Ten themes including Islam-centered, people-centered, culture-centered, Imam-centered, law-abiding, justice-oriented, awareness-driven, responsible, unity-promoting, and dignified governance.

The model aims at *personal and social elevation*, emphasizing decision-making, institution-building, rule-setting, and strategic action within an Islamic epistemological framework, leveraging human and public resources to institutionalize Islamic culture.

4. Conclusion

Cultural governance in Iran, grounded in Islamic guidance and public participation, provides an effective model for macro-level cultural management. Moral education and religious discourse-making serve as central pillars. Culture functions as a guiding force for policymaking and a foundation for Islamic civilization, linking cultural development to social and political elevation. Implementing this framework as a macro-structure is essential for advancing a new Islamic civilization.

Author Contributions: The first author (supervisor and corresponding author) contributed to the research design, academic supervision, and final revision of the manuscript. The second author (PhD candidate) was responsible for data collection, data analysis, and drafting the main text of the article. The third author (advisor) provided theoretical guidance, scientific consultation, and content review. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Ethical Considerations: This article is derived from the Second Author's PhD dissertation titled "Analyzing the Requirements of the Cultural Governance Model in the Islamic Republic of Iran" in Kharazmi University.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Aghasi, Anahita; Bani-Hashemi, Seyyed Mohsen; Aghili, Seyyed Vahid. (2021). Thematic analysis of cultural identity in the thought of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. *Social Theories of Muslim Thinkers*, 11(2), 155–176.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. (2006). *The civil sphere*. Oxford University Press.
- Archer, Margaret. (1995). *Realist social theory: The morphogenetic approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Arefi, Khalil; Farzandi, Abbas-Ali. (2024). Alignment of leadership governance foundations with Alawi governance principles. *Scientific Journal of Exalted Governance*, 5(2), 9–37.
- Bagheri, Shahla. (2005). *Doctoral dissertation: A comparative study of Iran's cultural system before and after the Islamic Revolution*. Allameh Tabataba'i University.
- Bagheri, Shahla. (2023). *Cultural sociology*. Research Institute of Hawzah and University Press.
- Basimia, Mehdi. (2013). *Various approaches to cultural engineering in post-revolutionary Iran*. Amir Kabir Publishing.
- Fiske, John; Hartley, John. (2004). *Reading television*. Routledge.

- Foran, John. (1997). Discourses and social forces: The role of culture and cultural studies in understanding revolutions. In John Foran (Ed.), *Theorizing revolutions* (pp. 1–26). Routledge.
- Giddens, Anthony. (2000). The globalizing of modernity. In David Held & Anthony McGrew (Eds.), *The global transformations reader: An introduction to the globalization debate* (pp. 92–98). Polity Press.
- Jamshidi, M. (2024). Cultural Governance in Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi's Religious Readings. *Aeine Hokmrani*, 2(3), 255–286. doi: 10.22034/ah.2025.719484
- Khashaei, Vahid; Harandi, Ataollah. (2014). Explaining the dimensions of exalted governance based on the governmental conduct of Imam Ali (AS): A combination of ijthadi approach and content analysis. *Science and Religion Research*, 5(2), 85–110.
- Laclau, Ernesto; Mouffe, Chantal. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. Verso.
- Marengo, Stefano. (2020). Lo spirito della rivolta. Michel Foucault e la rivoluzione iraniana. *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics*, XXII(2), 723–748.
- Mazinani, Mehdi. (2021). Cultural governance in the Islamic system. *Exalted Governance Journal*, 2(5), 211–236.
- Najari, Reza; Sadehnejad, Fakhriyeh. (2023). Cultural governance: A new concept of governance. *Human Resources and Capital Quarterly*, 8, 67–79.
- National Cultural Engineering Roadmap Document. (2013). Approved by: Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. Notification Number: 2349/92/DSh. <https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/859054>
- Smith, Philip. (2008). *Cultural theory: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Soltani, Ali Asghar. (2005). Discourse analysis as theory and method. *Political Science Quarterly*, 7(28), 1–25.
- The Official Website of the Office for the Preservation and Publication of the Works of the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei. (n.d.). <https://khamenei.ir/>
- Zoheiri, Alireza. (2015). Ecological evaluation of the good governance model. *Political Science Quarterly*, 17(2), 87–111.
- Zolfaghari, Naemie (2024). The impact of governance culture on cultural governance (focusing on the Supreme Leader's announcement to members of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution in 2020), *First National Conference on Governance and the Cultural Policy-Making System*. Tehran.