



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

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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.

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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.

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