

The Role of Good Governance in Religious Associations (Hey'ats) in Yazd

Majid Kashani*¹, Amir Masoud Amir Mazaheri², Mohammad Hassan Zareian Baghdadabadi³

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Abstract

Religious associations (hey'ats), as deeply rooted institutions in Iranian society, possess capacities that extend beyond their religious and ritual functions to encompass social participation and the strengthening of social capital. The present study aims to analyze the functions of good governance in religious associations in the city of Yazd. Adopting a qualitative approach, the study was conducted using grounded theory methodology based on the systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 35 participants, including religious association activists, officials and representatives of relevant institutions, and university and seminary scholars. In addition, relevant documents were analyzed, and participant observation was conducted in five religious associations. Participants were selected through purposive sampling using a maximum-variation strategy, with sampling continuing until theoretical saturation was achieved. The data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti through the stages of open, axial, and selective coding. During open coding, 243 initial concepts were identified and organized into 67 subcategories. Ultimately, three core categories—leadership, management, and social relations—were identified and integrated into the study's theoretical model. The findings indicated that, in the leadership dimension, religious and spiritual leadership, ethical role modeling, and value-based direction; in the management dimension, accountability and transparency, rule of law and organizational order, efficiency and effectiveness, and strategic planning; and in the social dimension, participation and collective synergy, social justice and inclusion, and consensus-building and dialogue constitute the major components of good governance. The findings demonstrate that religious associations, through strengthening trust, cooperation, and popular participation, possess the capacity to function as social and intermediary institutions within governance processes.

Keywords: Good Governance, Religious Associations (Hey'ats), Hey'at-Based Governance, Functionalism, Social Capital, Religious Civil Society.

1. Department of Social Sciences, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. (fahmm@yahoo.com)

² , Department of Social Sciences, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran(a.amirmazaheri@gmail.com)

³ . Department of Social Sciences (Cultural Sociology), Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. (zareian53@gmail.com)

Introduction

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, governance cannot be understood solely within the framework of formal political and administrative structures. Religious and social institutions can also function as intermediary institutions, facilitating opportunities for public participation and communication between citizens and formal structures. Among such institutions, religious associations (hey'ats) constitute deeply rooted forms of community-based organization in Iranian society. In addition to their ritual and religious functions, they possess considerable capacities for fostering social networks, strengthening solidarity, transmitting religious values, and organizing collective activities. Domestic studies have likewise examined the role of religious associations in the formation and strengthening of social capital. For instance, Amirpour and Mansouri (2013) investigated the level of *social capital* among prevalent religious groups in the city of Torbat-e Jam. Similarly, Demouri, Taheri Damaneh, and Konjkav Monfared (2010), in their study entitled "An Exploration of the Role of Shiite Religion in the Creation of Social Capital," emphasized the role of religious associations in generating social capital.

Governance, in turn, is a concept that extends beyond the direct administration of society by the state and emphasizes interaction, coordination, and participation among governmental institutions and social actors. From this perspective, citizens are not merely recipients of public policies and services; rather, they can participate in decision-making, implementation, and oversight processes. Within the domestic literature on Islamic governance, the importance of public participation and the mobilization of social capacities in realizing participatory governance has also been emphasized. Akbari, Khanmohammadi, Mirbagheri, and Najafi (2023), in a study entitled "Extracting the Components of Realizing Participatory Governance in an Islamic Society Based on the Teachings of the Arbæen Pilgrimage of Imam Hussein," identified public participation in decision-making, implementation, and oversight processes as important components of participatory governance and emphasized the role of social capital and social cohesion in this process (Akbari et al., 2023).

From this perspective, religious associations, owing to their communication networks, voluntary participation, value-based ties, and capacity for social mobilization, can be regarded as important arenas for public participation. The social functions of hey'ats are not limited to the organization and performance of religious rituals; rather, previous studies have identified the strengthening of social solidarity, consolidation of the moral order, and preservation of society's cultural patterns among the functions performed by these institutions. Accordingly, the capacities of religious associations can be examined in relation to concepts such as social capital, public participation, and social cohesion.

Against this backdrop, the central issue is how the religious, cultural, and social capacities of religious associations can be mobilized within the framework of participatory governance without undermining the autonomy and community-based character of these organizations. Attention to such capacities, particularly in cities such as Yazd, where religious associations have a long-standing history and a significant social standing, can provide an opportunity to understand the mechanisms of interaction between community-based religious institutions and formal governance structures. From this perspective, examining the role of religious associations in governance and identifying the mechanisms through which they interact with formal structures can contribute to the development of an indigenous model for strengthening social participation and people-centered governance.

Statement of the Problem

Religious associations (hey'ats) in Yazd, as spontaneous and deeply rooted institutions within the cultural and social structure of Iranian society, possess considerable potential for strengthening religious identity, social cohesion, and public participation. Through their sustained engagement with diverse segments of society, as well as their extensive social networks and reliance on voluntary participation, these institutions can extend beyond their ritual and ceremonial functions to contribute to the formation of social capital and the organization of collective action. From this perspective, religious associations can be regarded as an important capacity of community-based institutions within an Islamic society for strengthening the links among religious values, social participation, and governance.

In contemporary approaches, good governance is likewise understood as extending beyond the performance of formal institutions and emphasizing active public participation and interaction among government, society, and civil society institutions. Within this framework, social participation and social capital are regarded as important components of effective governance. In participatory governance models, citizens move beyond the role of passive recipients of public services and become involved in decision-making, implementation, and oversight processes; such participation can contribute to strengthening social capital, social justice, and social cohesion (Akbari et al., 2023).

Despite these capacities, the role of religious associations in realizing good governance and the nature of their interaction with governmental structures, particularly within the framework of public participation, remain in need of systematic and empirical investigation. At present, many religious associations remain primarily focused on the organization of religious rituals and programs, whereas their capacities could also be mobilized in areas such as strengthening

social capital and participation, fostering cultural cohesion, addressing social issues, and facilitating communication between communities and formal institutions. Accordingly, the central issue is not merely whether religious associations are present in the social sphere, but rather how their existing capacities can be transformed into coherent and purposeful participation in governance processes.

This issue is particularly significant in Yazd Province, where religious associations have a substantial cultural and social history and have, over time, developed networks of trust, participation, and social interaction. However, in the absence of a clearly defined framework for interaction between these institutions and formal structures, the activities of religious associations may remain fragmented and disconnected from broader social issues and priorities. Therefore, identifying the capacities, functions, and mechanisms through which religious associations interact with governance structures can provide a basis for more effective mobilization of this form of social capital.

Moreover, recent social and cultural transformations, the expansion of digital communication, and the increasing complexity of social problems have heightened the need to reconsider the ways in which community-based institutions participate in public affairs. Under such circumstances, limiting religious associations to purely ritual functions means leaving a significant portion of existing social capacity underutilized. Conversely, redefining the role of these institutions can create opportunities for their involvement in strengthening social capital, social cohesion, collective responsibility, and the resolution of cultural and social issues.

Accordingly, the primary research gap addressed by the present study can be formulated at two levels: substantive and theoretical. At the substantive level, the reviewed literature revealed no field-based and systematic study that has specifically examined the capacities and mechanisms through which religious associations in Yazd can contribute to governance processes and interact with formal structures. At the theoretical level, existing studies have largely focused on concepts such as participatory governance, social capital, public participation, or the role of religious institutions separately, while relatively little attention has been devoted to systematically integrating these components into an indigenous model specifically applicable to religious associations.

Therefore, the present study seeks to develop a model of good governance through an empirical investigation of religious associations in Yazd and an examination of the components and mechanisms underlying their social and institutional roles. The proposed model aims to preserve the community-based character and structural autonomy of religious associations while facilitating purpose-

ful interaction between these institutions and governmental structures and elucidating their capacity to strengthen public participation, social capital, and social cohesion. Accordingly, the main research question is: **How can religious associations in Yazd, within an indigenous model, function as intermediary institutions in strengthening public participation, social capital, and social cohesion, and what mechanisms can be proposed for their systematic interaction with governmental structures?**

Significance and Necessity of the Study

Religious associations (hey'ats) in Iranian society are not merely institutions established for the performance of religious rituals. Rather, owing to their extensive communication networks, voluntary participation, social trust, and deep connections with broader segments of society, they possess considerable capacity to generate and strengthen social capital. These characteristics make religious associations one of the most important community-based capacities for fostering social participation and strengthening linkages between society and formal structures. Accordingly, examining their role in governance is of fundamental importance, particularly under circumstances in which good governance increasingly requires the active participation of community-based institutions and the mobilization of existing social capacities.

The significance of this issue is particularly pronounced in Yazd Province, where religious associations have a substantial cultural and social history and have played an important role in shaping social relations, transmitting religious and cultural values, and organizing public participation. Despite these capacities, no coherent framework has yet been developed to explain how religious associations can contribute to governance processes and how they can interact with formal structures. Therefore, identifying the components and mechanisms underlying their participation can contribute to a better understanding of local capacities and to the development of a model aligned with the cultural and social conditions of Yazd.

The necessity of the present study also stems from recent social and cultural transformations, including changes that have brought about challenges such as declining forms of social participation, shifts in patterns of communication, the expansion of virtual spaces, and the increasing complexity of cultural and social issues. Under such circumstances, mobilizing community-based and trust-oriented institutions can help address emerging governance needs. From this perspective, redefining the position of religious associations and identifying areas in which they can participate—including strengthening social capital and social cohesion, managing cultural and social issues, and increasing public participation—constitute both a scientific and practical necessity.

From a scholarly perspective, this study can contribute to the development of the indigenous literature on governance by focusing on religious associations as community-based institutions and intermediary actors. A substantial portion of the existing literature has primarily focused on the roles of the state, civil society, and formal institutions, while the distinctive capacities of religious-community institutions in the Iranian context have received comparatively limited attention. Accordingly, developing an indigenous model of governance for religious associations in Yazd can not only address part of the existing gap in scholarly research but also provide a basis for policymaking and planning aimed at the purposeful mobilization of these institutions' capacities to strengthen public participation, social capital, and social cohesion.

Review of the Literature

Nassari, Hosseini, Nazemi Ardakani, and Babaei (2025), in a study entitled "Reproduction of Islamic Identity for Transcendent Governance: An Analysis of the Rhetorical Mechanisms of Religious Eulogists and Speakers," employed grounded theory methodology to examine the role of religious speakers and eulogists in linking Islamic identity with transcendent governance. In addition, at the 25th session of the "Islamic Republic Studies" conference (2025), the issue of cultural governance in the country and its requirements were discussed.

Akbari, Khanmohammadi, Mirbagheri, and Najafi-Rastaghi (2023), in their study entitled "Identifying the Components of Participatory Governance in an Islamic Society Based on the Teachings of the Arbāeen Pilgrimage of Imam Hussein," emphasized the role of public participation in decision-making, implementation, and oversight, as well as its implications for social capital, social justice, and social cohesion.

Ranjbar and Gholami (2022), in their study on "Good Governance, Social Capital, and Political Trust," demonstrated that trust, as a component of social capital, is shaped by social conditions and the broader social environment.

Alini, Ghaffari, and Zaheiri (2015), in their study entitled "Religious Foundations of Social Capital and Their Relationship with Good Governance," emphasized the relationship between social capital and good governance, as well as the importance of public participation and the role of civil society institutions.

Zarei (2024), likewise, employed grounded theory methodology to develop a paradigmatic model for the development of social capital within Islamic governance, with an emphasis on the teachings and patterns of communication and behavior associated with Imam Reza.

A review of previous studies indicates that, although issues such as Islamic governance, participatory governance, social capital, public participation, and the

role of religious institutions have received considerable scholarly attention, religious associations (hey'ats), as community-based institutions and intermediary actors within governance processes, have received comparatively limited direct and systematic attention, particularly within the cultural and social context of Yazd. Moreover, among the studies reviewed, no empirical investigation was identified that specifically examined the capacities and mechanisms through which religious associations in Yazd contribute to governance and interact with formal structures.

Furthermore, previous studies have predominantly examined the various dimensions of governance, social capital, public participation, and the role of religious institutions separately. The present study seeks to address this gap by drawing on an integrated framework comprising functionalism, social capital theory, and religious civil society. It aims to analyze the capacities and functions of religious associations in Yazd within governance processes and, based on empirical findings, develop an indigenous model for the role of these institutions in strengthening public participation, social capital, and social cohesion.

Theoretical Framework

To provide a sociological analysis of the functions of religious associations (hey'ats) in Yazd, the present study draws on three complementary theoretical frameworks: **functionalism**, which is used to identify the manifest and latent functions of religious associations; **social capital theory**, which provides a framework for analyzing networks of trust and cooperation; and **religious civil society**, which is employed to examine the position of religious associations as intermediary institutions that maintain a degree of autonomy from the state.

Functionalism

Functionalism is one of the most influential approaches in the sociology of religion. Émile Durkheim, a foundational theorist of this perspective, argued in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* that the primary function of religion is to create and sustain collective solidarity. According to Durkheim, religious rituals bring individuals together and generate collective effervescence, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging to a moral community (Durkheim, 2004). Such solidarity not only connects individuals to one another but also contributes to the reproduction of shared norms and values.

Robert K. Merton, a major theorist of neofunctionalism, refined the Durkheimian approach by distinguishing between **manifest and latent functions**. Manifest functions refer to consequences that are intended by social actors and readily observable, whereas latent functions are unintended and not immediately apparent consequences that nevertheless exert significant effects on the social system

(Ritzer, 2014, pp. 147–150). This distinction is particularly important for analyzing religious associations, as many of their social functions—such as counseling, economic empowerment, and political networking—can be understood as latent functions. Participants may not attend religious associations with the explicit intention of obtaining such benefits, yet they may nevertheless benefit from them in practice.

From a functionalist perspective, women's religious associations in Yazd perform both **manifest functions** (such as mourning rituals, commemoration ceremonies, and religious celebratory gatherings) and **latent functions** (such as informal education, psychological support, economic networking, and political activism). The present study focuses primarily on identifying and analyzing these latent functions, as they have received comparatively limited attention in previous research. From a functionalist perspective, the central question is what role each of these latent functions plays in maintaining social stability and cohesion and in reproducing the social system.

Social Capital

Although the concept of social capital has intellectual roots in Durkheim's work on collective solidarity and the mediating role of voluntary associations, it was developed into its contemporary theoretical form by scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu and Robert Putnam. Robert Putnam defines social capital as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993). Bourdieu conceptualizes social capital as the aggregate of actual or potential resources associated with possessing a durable network of relationships based on mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248).

Putnam distinguishes between two forms of social capital: **bonding social capital**, which refers to strong and cohesive ties among members of a particular group, such as family members, close friends, or members of a religious association; and **bridging social capital**, which refers to weaker but more extensive connections with individuals and groups outside the immediate social circle. Bonding social capital provides members with emotional and practical support but may also foster exclusivity and distrust toward outsiders. Bridging social capital, by contrast, facilitates connections across different social groups and contributes to broader forms of social solidarity (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993).

Religious associations in Yazd constitute important settings for the production and reproduction of social capital. Regular participation in these associations creates networks of relationships based on trust and norms of mutual assistance. Such networks enable members to access both material resources, including financial assistance, interest-free loans, and marriage-related support such as

dowry provision, and nonmaterial resources, such as counseling, psychological support, and information. In the present study, social capital is primarily employed as a framework for analyzing networks of cooperation, trust, and resource exchange among members of religious associations. The central questions from the perspective of social capital theory are what types of networks religious associations create, how these networks are converted into access to resources, and what relationship exists between bonding and bridging social capital in the activities of religious associations.

Civil Society

Philippe Schmitter conceptualizes civil society as encompassing associations, groups, and intermediary institutions that are independent of the state and occupy the space between families and the state. These institutions emerge independently of public authorities and possess the capacity for dialogue and organization in order to undertake collective action in pursuit of their interests. Their activities take place within the framework of law and under the broader authority of government (Abolhasani & Ghobadi, 2021).

Religious Civil Society

Civil society refers to the sphere of voluntary, autonomous, and self-governing institutions situated between the state and the family, through which citizens organize themselves to pursue their collective interests. However, the concept of civil society requires contextualization and localization when applied to religious-traditional societies such as Iran. **Religious civil society** refers to a set of voluntary and self-governing institutions with religious roots that operate with a degree of autonomy from the state while being defined within the framework of religious values and norms. Religious associations, *hosseiniyehs*, religious charitable organizations, and women's religious organizations can be regarded as prominent manifestations of religious civil society in Iran (Mashalchi & Morshedi, 2021, pp. 214–217). Contrary to the common assumption that civil society is inherently secular, these institutions demonstrate that religion is not necessarily an impediment to civil society; rather, it can provide a significant context for its formation and consolidation.

Religious associations in Yazd can therefore be analyzed as institutions of religious civil society. These associations are community-based, self-governing, and relatively autonomous from the state; their members participate voluntarily; they perform functions extending beyond purely ritual activities, including social services, support for disadvantaged groups, counseling, and empowerment; and they operate within the framework of religious values and norms. From the perspective of religious civil society, the central question is the extent to which reli-

gious associations have been able to function as intermediary institutions between the state and the family and what relationship exists between their autonomy and their interaction with governmental institutions.

The three theoretical frameworks outlined above complement one another. **Functionalism** addresses the question, “*What functions do religious associations perform?*” **Social capital theory** addresses the question, “*Through what mechanisms—including networks, trust, and norms—do these functions emerge and operate?*” **Religious civil society** addresses the question, “*What is the position of these associations within Iran’s sociopolitical system?*” Religious associations in Yazd can thus be understood as institutions of religious civil society that, through the production of social capital—particularly networks of trust and cooperation—perform multiple latent functions, including educational, charitable, counseling, service-oriented, and political functions, for their members and the local community. Although these functions may initially appear to operate alongside the manifest function of mourning and religious ritual, in practice they contribute to social cohesion, women’s empowerment, and the strengthening of collective solidarity.

Research Methodology

The present study employed a qualitative approach using grounded theory methodology and Strauss and Corbin’s systematic approach. The study aimed to identify the components and mechanisms underlying the role of religious associations (hey’ats) in Islamic governance and to develop an indigenous model for interaction between these community-based institutions and governmental structures.

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 35 participants, including activists and officials of religious associations, officials from relevant institutions, and seminary and university scholars familiar with the fields of religious associations and governance. To enrich the dataset, in addition to interviews, relevant documents—including policy statements and higher-level policy documents, such as the Second Step Statement of the Islamic Revolution and related speeches—were examined. Participant observation was also conducted in five religious associations located in different areas of Yazd.

Sampling initially began through purposive sampling using a maximum-variation strategy and subsequently continued through theoretical sampling. Participants and settings were then selected based on their potential to contribute to the refinement and further development of emerging categories. In selecting participants and research settings, efforts were made to capture variation among religious associations in terms of their history, organizational structure, and modes of operation. Data collection and analysis continued until theoretical saturation

was reached, meaning that additional data no longer generated new or substantively meaningful concepts or categories beyond those already identified.

Data analysis followed the systematic procedures of Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory methodology, including **open coding, axial coding, and selective coding**. Initial codes were extracted from the interview transcripts, observations, and documents and were subsequently organized into related concepts and categories through constant comparison. During axial coding, relationships among categories were identified, while selective coding was used to identify the core category and construct the final theoretical model of the study.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, constant comparison across different datasets and sources, review of the findings, and continuous comparison of the emerging model with new data were employed. Finally, based on the extracted categories and the relationships among them, a **Good Governance model** was developed to explain how religious associations can contribute to strengthening public participation, social capital, social cohesion, and interaction with governance structures.

Research Findings

The data analysis process was conducted through open, axial, and selective coding. In the first stage, 243 initial concepts were extracted from the data obtained through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Subsequently, similar and related concepts were organized into 67 subcategories. During axial and selective coding, three core categories—**leadership, management, and social**—were identified.

Table 1. Extracted Core and Subcategories

Core Category	Subcategories
Leadership	Religious and spiritual leadership; ethical role modeling; value-based direction
Management	Accountability and transparency; rule of law and order; cultural efficiency and effectiveness; vision and strategic planning
Social	Participation and collective synergy; social justice and inclusion; consensus-building and dialogue; innovation and cultural adaptation; responsiveness to social needs

1. Core Category: Leadership

The first core category identified was **leadership**, which emerged across three dimensions: religious and spiritual leadership, ethical role modeling, and value-

based direction. The findings indicate that leadership in religious associations involves more than the administration of executive affairs; it also encompasses guiding activities in accordance with religious values, drawing on collective wisdom, and creating opportunities for member participation. In this regard, the participation of young people and women in the design and implementation of programs was emphasized as a factor contributing to the dynamism and creativity of religious associations.

Religious and spiritual leadership refers to guiding the activities of the association on the basis of religious and ethical principles and values accepted within the community. The research data emphasized the role of association leaders, speakers, and religious eulogists in enhancing religious knowledge, providing role models based on the conduct of the Infallibles, and providing value-based direction to the activities of religious associations.

Regarding **ethical role modeling**, the findings emphasized the provision of content appropriate to the intellectual and ethical needs of society and the creation of a balance between religious rationality and religious emotions. **Value-based direction** is likewise achieved through the reproduction and reinforcement of values such as honesty, self-sacrifice, unity, social service, justice, and social responsibility.

2. Core Category: Management

The second core category was **management**, encompassing four dimensions: accountability and transparency, rule of law and order, cultural efficiency and effectiveness, and vision and strategic planning.

The findings indicate that an effective management structure in religious associations requires an integrated organizational structure, clear division of responsibilities, systematic planning, financial and human-resource management, and the development of young personnel. In the financial domain, particular emphasis was placed on the transparent and purposeful use of religious donations and public contributions and on avoiding unnecessary expenditures.

In the dimension of **accountability and transparency**, periodic reporting on the association's activities, services, and financial status—including donations and endowments—was identified as a mechanism for enhancing members' trust. At the same time, limited dialogue with young people, the politicization of religious associations, and the absence of a transparent financial system were identified as managerial challenges in the data.

Rule of law and order also emerged as important components of good governance within religious associations. The findings emphasized compliance with

religious, legal, and administrative regulations; the establishment of internal by-laws; clear allocation of responsibilities; documentation of activities; and coordination with relevant institutions.

In terms of **cultural efficiency and effectiveness**, an effective religious association is one that can appropriately mobilize its human, financial, and cultural resources and, while maintaining its religious objectives, exert a meaningful influence in responding to the cultural and social needs of the community. The findings also highlighted the necessity of a **strategic vision and planning**. Accordingly, to sustain their activities and preserve their social influence, religious associations need to move beyond routine and fragmented activities and develop long-term goals and strategies that are responsive to cultural transformations, generational change, and the expansion of new media.

3. Core Category: Social

The third core category, **social**, encompasses the broadest range of dimensions identified in the findings and includes participation and collective synergy, social justice and inclusion, consensus-building and dialogue, innovation and cultural adaptation, and responsiveness to social needs.

In the dimension of **participation and collective synergy**, members of religious associations are not merely recipients of programs but actively participate in decision-making and the implementation of activities. The data identified several forms of participation, including devotional, financial, executive, intellectual-cultural, and social participation. Trust, a sense of belonging, social capital, the position of the association within the neighborhood, and the participation of young people and women in decision-making were also identified as factors influencing participation.

Regarding **social justice and inclusion**, the findings emphasized creating opportunities for participation among different segments of society. Justice was conceptualized at three levels—structural, social, and cultural—while inclusion encompassed dimensions related to age, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity/local identity.

Consensus-building and dialogue also emerged as important components of social governance within religious associations. Organizing deliberative meetings and using dialogue to reach shared decisions can facilitate the use of collective wisdom and reduce intra-association tensions. Conversely, individualized and preference-based decision-making may generate dissatisfaction and internal fragmentation.

Furthermore, **innovation and cultural adaptation** were identified as responses to social change, communication technologies, and generational trans-

formations. The findings indicate that, in order to maintain their social effectiveness, religious associations need to adapt their methods, programs, and managerial and cultural practices to contemporary societal needs without compromising their religious identity.

Responsiveness to social needs reflects the expansion of the role of religious associations beyond ritual activities into social, cultural, economic, and educational domains. The needs identified in the data included livelihood support, assistance to disadvantaged families, employment and skills training, education and counseling, psychological and emotional support, strengthening youth identity and participation, charitable activities, and networking to address local issues.

4. Axial Coding and the Development of the Good Governance Model

During axial coding, the relationships among the identified categories were examined. Following the **paradigmatic logic of Strauss and Corbin**, the causal conditions, central phenomenon, strategies, and consequences were identified. Accordingly, the central phenomenon of the study was formulated as “**religious associations as intermediary institutions between the people and the governing structures.**”

Within this model, the **causal conditions** included the distance between citizens and formal institutions, the need to activate community-based capacities, and the weak integration of cultural activities. In contrast, the deep-rooted nature of religious associations, social trust, the presence of supporting institutions, and cultural diversity constituted the **contextual conditions**.

The **intervening conditions** included weak coordinated regulation, the influence of political tendencies, insufficient financial support, and generational gaps. In response to these conditions, the principal **strategies** included empowerment, smart regulation, networking, support for community-based productions, and the use of media.

The anticipated **consequences** of these strategies include enhanced social cohesion, the development of religious social capital, the realization of an indigenous model of cultural governance, and gradual progress toward broader cultural objectives.

5. Selective Coding and the Core Category

During selective coding, the three core categories of **leadership, management, and social** were integrated into a coherent structure. Based on the findings, religious and value-based leadership provides direction and preserves the substantive authenticity of the association’s content; management organizes existing capacities through transparency, rule of law, order, efficiency, and planning; and the social dimension transforms these capacities into social action

through participation, justice, dialogue, innovation, and responsiveness to community needs.

From this perspective, **good governance** in the present study does not refer merely to the administration of a religious association as a ritual organization. Rather, it represents a model in which religious leadership, coherent management, and social participation interact with one another, enabling the association to function as a community-based institution and intermediary actor connecting society with formal structures.

To clarify the final structure derived from selective coding, Table 2 presents the ten final governance components and the ultimate objective associated with each component.

Table 2. Summary of Governance Components in Religious Associations in Yazd

No.	Component	Brief Description	Ultimate Objective
1	Religious Leadership	Spiritual guidance based on <i>Ve-layat</i> and religious values	Religious authenticity
2	Participation	Collective presence and decision-making by members	Social cohesion and solidarity
3	Transparency and Accountability	Financial and operational reporting	Public trust
4	Rule of Law	Compliance with formal regulations and internal bylaws	Order and legitimacy
5	Cultural Efficiency	Meaningful impact on society	Cultural mobilization
6	Justice and Inclusion	Participation of all social groups without discrimination	Social convergence
7	Consensus-Building and Dialogue	Decision-making based on mutual understanding	Stability in management
8	Strategic Vision	Long-term cultural planning	Sustainable development

9	Responsiveness to Social Needs		Engagement with societal issues	Strengthening social capital
10	Cultural	Innovation	Use of new tools, media, and forms of communication	Effectiveness among younger generations

Based on Table 2, good governance cannot be reduced to a single component; rather, it emerges from the interconnection and interaction of a set of religious, managerial, and social components. In this regard, religious leadership determines the direction and value-based identity of activities, coherent management provides the basis for organizing and efficiently utilizing available capacities, and the social components enable these capacities to be transformed into participation and social action.

The results of open, axial, and selective coding indicate that the identified components do not constitute a linear or isolated relationship; rather, they operate as an interconnected network and interact with one another. Religious and value-based leadership determines the direction and content of the hey'at's activities; transparent, rule-based, and strategic management organizes human, financial, and cultural capacities; and the social dimension, through participation, justice, dialogue, innovation, and responsiveness to social needs, transforms these organized capacities into social action.

This process, moreover, takes shape under conditions in which, on the one hand, a degree of distance between citizens and certain formal institutions, the need to activate community-based capacities, and weak integration of cultural activities create challenges, while, on the other hand, the deep-rooted nature of religious associations, social trust, and existing communication networks provide a favorable context for these institutions to assume such a role. At the same time, factors such as weak coordinated regulation, the influence of political orientations, limited financial support, and generational gaps may affect the extent to which this role is realized.

Accordingly, the final model of the study is grounded in the proposition that, when a religious association simultaneously possesses religious leadership, coherent management, and social participation, it can evolve from a purely ritual institution into a community-based and socially and culturally influential institution and, as an intermediary institution, facilitate communication between society and formal structures.

Accordingly, the model of "Good Governance" developed in the present study is formed through the interconnection of three principal levels: leadership as the provider of value-based direction, management as the organizer of capacities,

and the social dimension as the mechanism through which capacities are transformed into collective action. The interaction of these three levels strengthens participation, trust, and social capital, reinforces cultural and social cohesion, and enhances the capacity of religious associations to respond to societal issues.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted to analyze the functions of good governance in religious associations (hey'ats) in the city of Yazd. The findings demonstrated that, beyond their ritual and religious functions, religious associations possess capacities that can enable them to become influential institutions in fostering social participation, strengthening social capital, and facilitating communication between society and formal structures. Based on the analysis of data obtained from semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participant observation, 243 initial concepts were identified and organized into 67 subcategories, ultimately yielding three core categories: leadership, management, and the social dimension.

In the leadership dimension, the findings emphasized the importance of religious and spiritual leadership, ethical role modeling, and value-based direction. Accordingly, the roles of religious association leaders, speakers, and eulogists are not limited to conducting ritual programs; rather, they contribute to the transmission of religious values, strengthening religious identity, moral education, and providing cultural direction to members. Thus, leadership within the good governance model represents a form of value-based and spiritual leadership that can establish connections among religious beliefs, cultural needs, and social responsibilities. This finding is consistent with the "Religious Leadership" component in the final model, which conceptualizes leadership as spiritual guidance grounded in Velayat and religious values and, ultimately, as a means of preserving the religious authenticity of the hey'at.

In the management dimension, the findings indicated that realizing good governance in religious associations requires a coherent structure, clear division of responsibilities, planning, rule of law, financial and operational transparency, accountability, and attention to cultural effectiveness. A religious association cannot rely solely on its emotional and religious capacities to fulfill its social role; rather, it requires systematic and accountable management mechanisms. Within this framework, transparency and accountability provide the basis for public trust, rule of law contributes to order and legitimacy, and cultural effectiveness facilitates the transformation of the hey'at's internal capacities into meaningful social impact.

In the social dimension, the findings showed that participation and collective synergy, justice and inclusion, consensus-building and dialogue, innovation and

cultural adaptation, and responsiveness to social needs constitute among the most important dimensions of good governance in religious associations. Within this model, members are not merely recipients of services or audiences for programs; rather, they participate in decision-making, implementation, and social activities. Moreover, the inclusion of different social groups, attention to younger generations and women, the creation of spaces for dialogue and collective decision-making, and responsiveness to real societal issues enhance the capacity of religious associations to perform meaningful social roles.

The overall findings can be formulated in terms of ten final components: religious leadership, participation, transparency and accountability, rule of law, cultural effectiveness, justice and inclusion, consensus-building and dialogue, strategic vision, responsiveness to social needs, and cultural innovation. Taken together, these components demonstrate that good governance is not limited to improving the internal management of religious associations; rather, it represents a framework for connecting the religious, managerial, and social capacities of these institutions with the issues and needs of society.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can also be explained through the three theoretical frameworks employed in the study. From a functionalist perspective, religious associations possess not only manifest religious and ritual functions but also social and cultural functions, including fostering solidarity, participation, and value transmission. From the perspective of social capital theory, trust, social relationships, participation, and communication networks developed within religious associations can provide resources for cooperation and collective action. From the perspective of religious civil society, religious associations can function as intermediary institutions between society and formal structures, organizing and channeling part of the existing capacity for social participation. This theoretical integration makes it possible to explain simultaneously the functions of religious associations, the mechanisms through which participation is generated, and their position within the broader social structure.

One of the most important findings of the study is that religious associations cannot be viewed merely as institutions for conducting religious rituals. The findings indicate that, when supported by effective religious leadership, transparent and rule-based management, and mechanisms for participation and dialogue, these institutions can mobilize their capacities to respond to the cultural and social needs of society. Under such conditions, the *hey'at* can evolve from a purely ceremony-oriented structure into a social and cultural institution capable of contributing to trust, cooperation, participation, and social cohesion.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that moving toward a more functionally oriented *hey'at* does not mean abandoning its traditional and religious identity;

rather, it entails expanding its functions in response to cultural, social, and generational transformations. The transition from the traditional hey'at to a functionally oriented hey'at, the integration of rationality and spirituality, the development of new human resources, the strengthening of relations with religious and cultural institutions, the promotion of justice and social inclusion, and the formulation of a cultural roadmap aligned with the needs of the neighborhood or city were identified in the study as elements of the desired vision for religious associations in Yazd. Accordingly, cultural innovation within the proposed model should be pursued alongside the preservation of the religious and spiritual identity of the hey'at.

Overall, it can be concluded that good governance emerges from the integration of three levels—leadership, management, and social action—such that religious leadership determines the direction and values underlying activities, management provides the foundations for organization, transparency, rule of law, and effectiveness, and the social dimension facilitates participation, justice, dialogue, innovation, and responsiveness to societal needs. The outcome of this integration is an enhanced capacity of religious associations to function as community-based and intermediary institutions within governance processes. Accordingly, good governance can be conceptualized as a model in which the religious and community-based capacities of the hey'at are mobilized through managerial and participatory mechanisms to strengthen social cohesion, public trust, and cultural and social responsiveness.

In light of the findings, strengthening this model requires simultaneous attention to the managerial empowerment of religious associations, enhancement of transparency and accountability, expansion of member participation in decision-making, greater attention to younger generations and diverse social groups, strengthening communication networks between religious associations and cultural and social institutions, and support for innovations aligned with societal needs. Under such conditions, religious associations can preserve their religious authenticity and identity while activating their social and cultural capacities to assume a more effective role in governance.

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