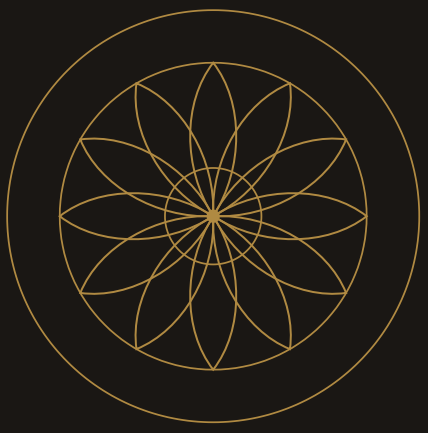


THE SACRED DIVIDE

THE FULL RECORD

Shia Islam

Islam family

HONOR THE FAITH · NAME THE MACHINERY

TEXT CHECKED 2026-10-03

Before you begin

This is the record of Shia Islam in *The Sacred Divide*. It has 27 sections, the same 27 used for every tradition, so that any section can be set beside the same section for another. Every fact is sourced.

Before each section, a short note says what the section is built to show, so you know what you are looking at before you read the detail.

After each section, a note headed *Why this matters to you* points at the part of the section most likely to touch an ordinary reader: a member, a donor, a parent, a voter, someone thinking about leaving, or someone outside forming an opinion. It usually ends with a question. The questions are not traps. They are the ones a careful reader would ask anyway.

The hard questions in section 23 are set out one at a time: the question, why it is asked, and an example already documented in this record.

Where a note states a fact, the fact comes from this record's own tables and cited sources or, in a few places, from a well-known research finding named in the text. Corrections are logged, with their dates, in the last section, *What changed on this page*.

Contents

01 At a glance 10

Disclosure scorecard

02 A day inside 12

03 The forefront 14

The unanswered question · The widest gap between word and record · One cost of leaving, beside its denial · The strongest objection, answered

04 What healthy looks like here 17

05 History 19

Timeline · Moments in the room

06 Branches & variants 24

07 Structure 25

Size and shape · Authority · The top of the chain · Who holds what · Succession watch

08 Law & state here 32

Who can compel an answer

09 Money 34

Where it comes from · Follow the money · Pipelines this tradition shares · Money in numbers

10 Genealogy 39

11 Reach 42

Information · Children · Bodies

12 The 30 techniques 46

All thirty at a glance · Stage 1 · Idealize · Stage 2 · Hook · Stage 3 · Devalue · Stage 4 · Confuse · Stage 5 · Isolate · Stage 6 · Extract · Stage 7 · Discard · Stage 8 · Replace

13 The loops 87

14 Say versus do 99

What they say, what the record shows · Accountability or theatre? · Words used here

15 Cost & cover 102

What leaving costs · The ledger of exit · How the cost is denied

16 The ledger 106

Who benefits · Money out, leverage back · Who pays

17 Who gets hurt most 109

Where the weight lands

18 The middle tiers 112

19 Documented cases 113

The death in custody (Iran, 2022–2024) · The state's own inquiry (Bahrain, 2011) · The cleric jailed for his writing (Iran, 1999–2000) · The Leader's UK office and the charity regulator (United Kingdom, 2022–2025)

20 Precedent 117

It has been broken before · What would change this page

21 Voices from inside 119

22 Regional variants 120
Iran · Iraq · Lebanon · Bahrain · Pakistan · United Kingdom

23 The questions 125
In closing

24 Leaving safely here 129

25 Where to get help 131

26 Sources 134
Constitution, law and official records · Inquiries, UN and human-rights reporting · Investigations and scholarship · Further sources

27 What changed on this page 142

How to read this

Every religion in The Sacred Divide is laid out the same way, in the same 27 sections, so that any section can be compared across religions. This file examines institutions, offices, money and power. It does not judge anyone's faith or the truth of any belief.

EVIDENCE GRADES

Each of the 30 techniques carries a grade for how it is established in this tradition.

- **CODIFIED** Written policy, published rule, contractual requirement, or a procedure the institution has confirmed in its own documents. The strongest grade and the hardest to deny.
- **DOCUMENTED** Established by court judgment, government inquiry, regulatory action, or financial filing. Not the institution's own words, but a body with subpoena power.
- **TAUGHT** Repeated leadership instruction from platform, publication, or curriculum, without a formal rule. Deniable as emphasis rather than policy.
- **CULTURAL** Community enforcement the institution neither mandates nor prevents. Real in effect, unattributable by design — the highest-deniability grade. A volume graded mostly Cultural has not been cleared of anything: it means the page names no document that makes the institution responsible. Cultural does not mean minor, and it is not a finding of absence.

- **CONTESTED** Occurs in some parts of the tradition and is actively opposed in others. Generalizing this grade across a whole tradition is a misuse of it.
- **REFORMED** Documented historically and materially changed since — policy withdrawn, practice ended, or independent oversight accepted. Recorded because omitting it would be dishonest.
- **UNGRADED** Present in the source material without a grade assigned yet. Read as an unverified pattern claim, not as a finding.

RECEIPTS

Bracketed labels such as **OFFICIAL POLICY** name the kind of source a claim rests on.

- **Official policy.** The institution's own written rule: handbook, canon, policy letter, catechism, trust deed, temple recommend question. The strongest evidence available, because it cannot be attributed to a rogue individual.
- **Court record.** Judgments, convictions, filings, and testimony given under oath. Adversarially tested, which is more than most religious claims about themselves have been.
- **Government inquiry.** Royal commissions, grand juries, parliamentary and state investigations with subpoena power. Where these exist they are usually the best record of what an institution did rather than said.
- **Regulatory action.** Findings and penalties from bodies like the SEC or consumer-protection regulators. Narrow in scope, unusually precise in what they establish.
- **Financial record.** Filings, audited statements, tax returns, disclosed compensation, property transactions. Frequently the only place an institution tells the truth about its priorities.

- **Leadership statement.** Recorded sermons, conference addresses, published letters. The institution in its own voice, to its own people, on the record.
- **Independent investigation.** Reports commissioned by the institution but conducted externally. Weaker than a court and far stronger than a press release — and notable when the institution publishes them in full.
- **Academic source.** Peer-reviewed history, sociology, and demography. Best for context, structure, and scale; weaker for specific institutional conduct.
- **Former member testimony.** Firsthand accounts from people who were inside. Indispensable and interested at once — graded as testimony, never presented as documentary proof.
- **Pattern observed.** A recurring configuration with no single document behind it. Labeled as an observation rather than a finding, and the weakest claim type in this codex.

METHOD

- Separation of targets. This codex analyzes institutional control patterns, never the worth of believers or the truth of beliefs. Theology is out of scope; behavior, money, and power are in scope.
- Pattern over anecdote. A tactic is attributed to a tradition's high-control expressions only where the mechanism recurs — one bad congregation proves nothing; the same architecture in a hundred proves the architecture.
- Evidence weighting. Every factual claim carries a bracketed source-type label and should carry a grade (A–D). Claims marked SOURCE NEEDED or PATTERN OBSERVED are analysis, not established fact, and must not be published as fact.
- Steelman rule. Every tactic section presents the institution's strongest defense before countering it. If the defense cannot be stated in a form its adherents would recognize, the counter is not yet earned.

- Asymmetry honesty. Similar tactic does not mean identical severity. A shunning policy that costs your entire family is not the same as a community that cools toward doubters, and the codex must never flatten that difference.
- The mirror rule. Any framework this powerful can itself be misused — to smear traditions, flatter one's own, or manufacture grievance. The self-audit and language guardrails apply to this project as much as to any institution it examines.

CITATIONS

A small raised number in the text links to the matching item in this religion's Sources, near the end. Every source was checked, and the date of the last check is shown at the top.

01 At a glance

BEFORE YOU READ

The whole page on one screen: how big Shia Islam is, who sits at the top, how that person is chosen and whether anyone can remove them, where the money comes from, and what leaving costs. The disclosure scorecard underneath asks six yes-or-no questions any charity or public company would be expected to answer. Every later section expands one of these rows.

SIZE	Shia Islam has about 200–260 million adherents. That applies Pew's estimate of 10–13% of Muslims [16] to the current Muslim population; Pew's own 2009 count was 154–200 million. **ACADEMIC SOURCE** · Pew
WHO'S IN CHARGE	There are two apexes. In Iran, the Supreme Leader holds the office created by velayat-e faqih (rule by the senior Islamic jurist): Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, chosen in March 2026 after his father, Ali Khamenei, Leader since 1989, was killed in an air strike on 28 February 2026. The office holds constitutional authority over doctrine, courts, media and the bonyad economies (the holdings of the revolutionary foundations). In Najaf, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, among the most widely followed senior jurists, holds no office.
CHOSEN BY	The Assembly of Experts (an elected body of senior clerics) chooses him, and his own Guardian Council (a constitutional council of clerics and jurists) vets its candidates.

REMOVABLE BY	In theory, that Assembly can remove him. In thirty-seven years and two Leaders it never has, and it chose the late Leader's son.
MONEY IN ONE LINE	Khums (the religious 'fifth') is a 20% levy on annual surplus income. Half of it, the sahm-e Imam (the Imam's share), goes to the office of the marjaʿ (a senior jurist whom believers follow) as the deputy of the Imam (the twelfth Imam, held to be in hiding); the other half, the sahm-e sadat (the sayyids' share), is owed to needy descendants of the Prophet. No audited public accounting is required. **OFFICIAL POLICY** · fiqh manuals
LEAVING IN ONE LINE	In Iran, the state apparatus enforces religious compliance through morality policing and exposure to apostasy and blasphemy charges. **GOVERNMENT REPORT** · UN human rights reporting
THE UNANSWERED QUESTION	Khums is a sacred obligation and the shrine conglomerates' books are closed. Who audits the deputy of the Imam?
EVIDENCE	Two of the 30 techniques are sourced to a named document (17 and 26). The grades are Taught 13, Codified 2, Cultural 13, Documented 1 and Contested 1.
FAMILY	Islam — islam, sunni-islam, shia-islam, ahmadiyya, dawoodi-bohra
LAST CHECKED	2026-10-03

Disclosure scorecard

ACCOUNTS	PAY	SAFEGUARDING	EXTERNAL FIRST	REMOVAL	REPLY
NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

Y Yes — established from a public source · **P** Partial — true of some parts of the tradition, or true in some jurisdictions · **N** No — not established from any public source · **?** Not assessable — no institutional apex exists to assess

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The glance table's answer to who chooses the top office is "The Assembly of Experts (an elected body of senior clerics) chooses him, and his own Guardian Council (a constitutional council of clerics and jurists) vets its candidates", and to who can remove its holder, "In theory, that Assembly can remove him. In thirty-seven years and two Leaders it never has, and it chose the late Leader's son". Read that as though it described the board of a pension fund holding your savings. Would you accept the arrangement there? The scorecard finds no public evidence of accounts, leaders' pay, a public safeguarding policy, allegations going to police first, a written removal procedure or on-the-record replies. Each "No" is something the institution could publish tomorrow. Ask yourself why it hasn't.

02 A day inside

BEFORE YOU READ

One ordinary day, told from inside. The person is a composite built from documented patterns, not a real individual. The point is to make the structure visible at human scale: phrases like "removal mechanism" or "giving record" are easy to read past, but a Tuesday organized around them is not.

Nasrin · A Tuesday in Muharram · Tehran

The black banners have been up for a week. She loves Muharram (the month in which the death of Husayn at Karbala is mourned). She has loved it since she was small enough to be carried through it, and the grief in it is not performed for her — it is the realest thing her calendar contains.

She leaves for the university at seven-forty and checks her scarf in the lift mirror, and adjusts it, and checks it again, and this takes eleven seconds and happens every single day of her life and she has never once counted it before.

In the seminar a lecturer says something careful about the economy and then, a beat later, says something more careful. Two students exchange a look. Nasrin writes down neither sentence.

At lunch her friend Sahar shows her a photograph on a phone held low: a girl they were at school with, in a hospital bed, from the protests in the autumn. Sahar puts the phone away after four seconds. They eat their rice. Nasrin says, eventually, *does her mother know* and Sahar says *her mother is the one who sent it.*

In the evening, the majlis (the mourning gathering). The reciter's voice does the thing it does, and the room breaks, and Nasrin cries the way everyone cries, for Husayn, who stood in front of a ruler who claimed God's authority and refused him and was killed for it. She means every tear.

Walking home her father talks about khums, which is due, and about which office they follow, and Nasrin asks — lightly, as a joke almost — whether anyone ever sees where it goes. Her father laughs and says that is not a question one asks. He is a kind man. He is not warning her. He simply does not have the question available, and she watches herself decide not to ask it again.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Did any moment in that day feel familiar: a cost nobody questions, a door nobody can see how to open? The section of this page that explains that moment is the one to read first. If nothing felt familiar, ask whether that's because it isn't your life, or because the patterns have become normal to you.

03 The forefront

BEFORE YOU READ

The page's thesis in one place. First, the single question the documented record could not answer. Then the widest gap between what the institution says and what the record shows, one cost of leaving set beside how it is officially denied, and the strongest objection to this whole page, answered rather than dismissed.

> Karbala (the battle of 680 at which Husayn was killed) is in your body. The grief is not manipulation — it is one of the most morally serious things any religion has ever produced: a permanent memorial to refusing a corrupt ruler. Which is exactly why it matters who is standing on it now, and what they are collecting.

THE UNANSWERED QUESTION

Khums is a sacred obligation and the shrine conglomerates' books are closed. Who audits the deputy of the Imam?

The widest gap between word and record

THEY SAY	THE RECORD SHOWS	RECEIPT
Karbala teaches resistance to unjust rulers.	The commemoration is administered by the ruler, and used to mobilize for state projects.	ACADEMIC SOURCE

One cost of leaving, beside its denial

COST	DOCUMENTED?	DETAIL	THE USUAL DENIAL
State punishment (Iran)	Yes	The state uses morality policing, exposure to apostasy charges and the imprisonment of critics.	These are national security matters.

The strongest objection, answered

The objection. You are repeating the talking points of governments hostile to Shia populations.

What is true in it. Shia communities are persecuted minorities across much of the Muslim world, and anti-Shia violence is real and current. This codex states that.

The answer. The critique offered here is the Najaf critique (from the Iraqi shrine and seminary city) — the tradition's own senior center rejects clerical rule. And the protesters were Iranian, many of them devout. When the internal dissent is religious, calling it foreign is the tell.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Try answering the unanswered question yourself: *Khums is a sacred obligation and the shrine conglomerates' books are closed. Who audits the deputy of the Imam?* If you can't, who could, and would asking them be welcome? How an institution reacts to a fair question often tells you more than the answer does.

04 What healthy looks like here

BEFORE YOU READ

What genuinely works in Shia Islam, stated first and separately from any critique. That is a standing rule of this book: no tradition is reduced to its worst documented moments. Anything criticized later is measured against the best of what is described here.

> Shia Muslims are ~10–13% of all Muslims and a majority in Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Bahrain. The tradition is centered on devotion to the Prophet's family and the Imams, and has a uniquely structured clerical hierarchy.

- The quietist school (which holds that clerics should not rule the state), such as Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's in Najaf, explicitly rejects clerical rule.
- Iranian clerics and laity have dissented at enormous personal cost. Mohsen Kadivar, a jurist, wrote a critique of rule by the jurist from inside Shia jurisprudence [30].
- Senior clerics, including Ayatollah Khamenei in 1994 and Grand Ayatollah Fadlallah, have prohibited or discouraged tatbir (ritual blade-cutting) [18].
- The tradition has its own resource in Karbala, a template for resisting corrupt power, including clerical power.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

A bias check before the critique. People tend to read criticism of their own group as an attack and criticism of other groups as simply true. Social psychologists call this in-group bias; it shows up even when the groups are assigned at random (Tajfel's "minimal group" experiments, 1971). If you belong here, did this section feel fair? If you don't, did anything in it surprise you? The surprise is a rough measure of what you had assumed.

05 History

BEFORE YOU READ

A dated timeline and a few moments where the direction changed. Dates matter because they show that most rules had a beginning. A rule that began in a particular year, for a particular reason, is a rule that can be examined, and sometimes retired.

Shia Islam is rooted in the succession claim of Ali (the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law) and the martyrdom of Husayn at Karbala (680 CE). The Twelver (recognizing twelve Imams) clerical hierarchy, the marja'iyya, developed independent financial power through religious taxes. In 1979 Iran fused the hierarchy with a state.

Timeline

HISTORY AT A GLANCE



Numbered markers match the timeline below; spacing is proportional to the years.

1

632–661 CE

Succession claim of Ali; partisans of the House form

Authority is tied to lineage and designated knowledge, not consensus.

2

680

Karbala: Husayn killed by Umayyad forces

Martyrdom becomes the tradition's emotional and moral center — and a permanent mobilizing engine.

3

874–941

Minor Occultation (the period in which the hidden twelfth Imam was held to act through deputies): four named deputies act for the Twelfth Imam; from 941 the Major Occultation leaves no named deputy

Over the following centuries jurists claim a general deputyship — the clerical class that still governs.

4

1501

Safavid Iran adopts Twelver Shiism as state religion

The tradition acquires a state and a state-funded hierarchy.

5

1700S–1800S

Usuli school (which gives qualified jurists authority to derive rulings) prevails; marjaʿiyya and khums collection consolidate

Clerics gain an independent revenue stream — self-financing religious power.

6

1890S–1970S

Clerical involvement in Iranian constitutional and nationalist politics

The hierarchy learns to move mass publics.

7 1979

Iranian Revolution; velayat-e faqih installs clerical rule

For the first time, a jurist rules a modern state as a matter of constitutional law. OFFICIAL POLICY

8 1980S–2000S

Bonyads and shrine conglomerates expand; transnational networks grow

Off-budget religious economies answerable to the Leader alone. ACADEMIC SOURCE

9 2003–PRESENT

Post-Saddam Najaf revival; Sistani's quietist authority

A living demonstration that the tradition's own mainstream rejects clerical rule.

10 2017–PRESENT

Mass protests — in Iran against clerical governance, including by believers; in Iraq (2019) against a sectarian political class and militia power, with Najaf backing the protesters' right to demonstrate; in 2026 the founding generation's Leader is killed in war and the Assembly of Experts chooses his son

Internal dissent is religious, not merely secular — the most important fact for readers to hold. GOVERNMENT REPORT

Moments in the room

874–941 — THE OCCULTATION, AND THE DEPUTIES

With the twelfth Imam in hiding, authority passed to deputies and then to the scholarly class. A community without its Imam constructed a working substitute — the marjaʿiyya — that would hold for a thousand years.

Why it matters. It is the origin of an authority structure that is genuinely learned, genuinely plural, and structurally unauditable. Khums flows to a man whose legitimacy rests on emulation, and emulation has no accounts.

1979 — A THEORY BECOMES A CONSTITUTION

Khomeini's velayat-e faqih — a scholarly theory contested by many senior clerics, including quietists in Najaf — was written into the constitution of a state with an army, a treasury, and a judiciary.

Why it matters. It was the moment a disputed theological position acquired coercive power. The dispute did not end; it was simply outvoted by an apparatus.

2019–2020 — THE QUIETIST SPEAKS, AND THE CEILING SHOWS

Grand Ayatollah Sistani's Friday sermons in Najaf helped bring down an Iraqi government during the protest movement. He held no office, commanded no army, and was not removable by anyone.

Why it matters. It is the most benign demonstration in this codex of unaccountable authority, used, by most accounts, well. It is included because the codex grades structures, not intentions, and a structure that depends on the character of its occupant is still a structure that depends on the character of its occupant.

Sources for this section: 1 17 19

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Pick one rule that shapes your week and look for it on the timeline. If it has a start date, it was decided by people at a particular moment, for reasons of that moment. Were you taught it as timeless? What would it mean for you if it turned out to be younger than your grandparents' grandparents?

06 Branches & variants

BEFORE YOU READ

Shia Islam is not one bloc. This section maps the main branches and variants, so that nothing documented about one community is read as true of all of them.

The Twelvers are the vast majority. The Ismailis divide into the Nizari, under the Aga Khan, and the Musta'li, chiefly the Dawoodi Bohras (~1 million) under the Da'i al-Mutlaq (the community's supreme religious leader). The Zaydis include the Houthi movement's base in Yemen. Within the Twelvers there are quietist (Najaf) and activist or state (Qom) currents.

BRANCH	WHERE	WHAT DIFFERS ON THIS PAGE'S QUESTIONS
Twelvers (Ithna 'Ashari)	Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Lebanon, and large communities in Pakistan and India [16] [22]	The largest branch. Authority passes to the scholars (marja'iyya) while the twelfth Imam is in occultation; in Iran, to one scholar as head of state [1] [22].
Ismailis — Nizari	South and Central Asia, East Africa, diaspora [22]	They follow a living, hereditary Imam (the Aga Khan) instead of a scholarly class, and dues are paid to the Imamate [22].

Ismailis — Musta'li / Tayyibi	South Asia (the Dawoodi Bohra)	They are led by a *dai* who succeeds by his predecessor's designation (nass) and are covered on their own page (Dawoodi Bohra).
Zaydis	Yemen [22]	It is the branch closest to Sunni doctrine; any qualified member of the Prophet's family may claim the imamate [22].
Alawites	Syria [23]	Whether they count as Shia has been debated; they were recognised as Shia by the 1973 ruling of Musa al-Sadr, a Lebanese Shia cleric [23].

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

If you know one community of Shia Islam, you know one community. Most bad generalizations about a religion, and most unfair defenses of it, come from treating one branch as the whole. Which branch is the one you picture when you hear the name? Is that picture yours, or one you were given by news coverage or by the community itself?

07 Structure

BEFORE YOU READ

The organizational chart: how many people and institutions there are, where authority sits, who holds the top office, and who holds what beneath it. The question to keep in mind is simple: if the person at the top got something badly wrong, what written procedure exists to correct or remove them?

Size and shape

Adherents	Shia Islam has about 200–260 million adherents. That applies Pew's estimate of 10–13% of Muslims [16] to the current Muslim population; Pew's own 2009 count was 154–200 million. ACADEMIC SOURCE · Pew
Regions	Shia are the majority in Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Bahrain, and are concentrated in Lebanon. There are large minorities in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, Kuwait and Yemen, where they are Zaydi.
Trend	Numbers are stable to growing with population. The political prestige of clerical rule has declined markedly among young Iranians. ACADEMIC SOURCE
Participation	In Iran, state enforcement makes measurement unreliable, because declared observance and private practice diverge sharply. Ritual participation, as in Muharram, far exceeds clerical obedience.

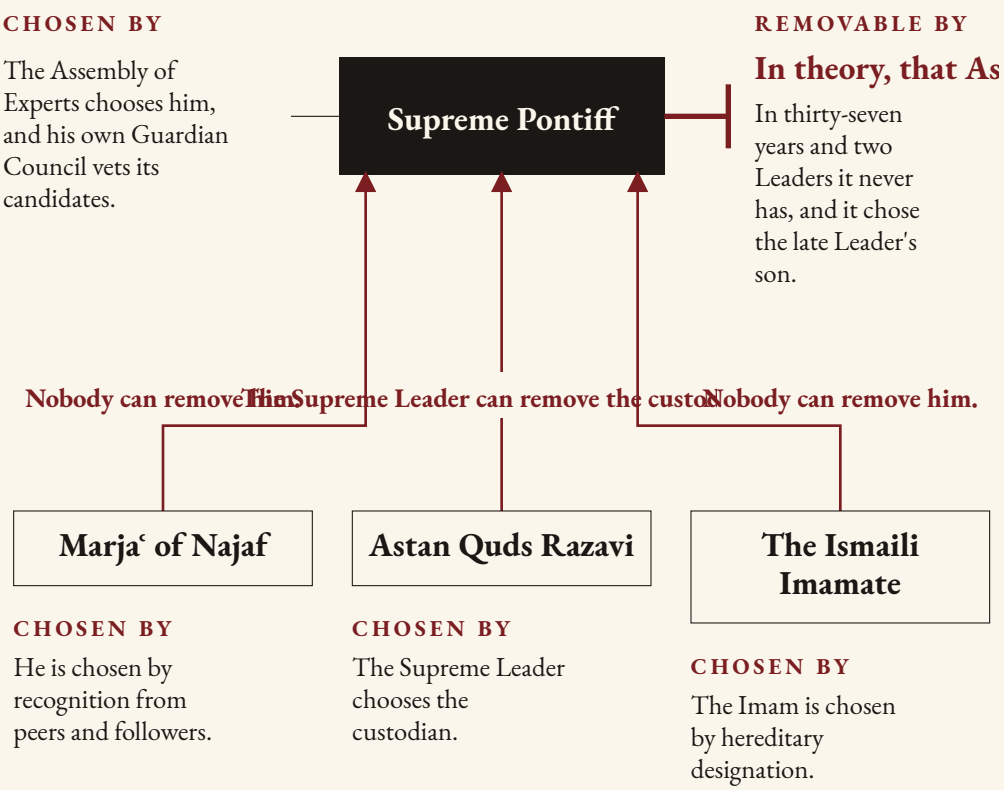
Authority

- The marjaʿiyya is made up of senior ayatollahs whom believers must emulate (taqlid, the practice of following a qualified jurist in religious law); in Iran, velayat-e faqih places a cleric atop the state itself.
- Clerical students and networks are bound to marjas through stipends funded by religious taxes, which makes the hierarchy self-financing, something unusual in Islam. ACADEMIC SOURCE

The top of the chain

> There are two apexes, one constitutional and one charismatic, and a hereditary third. All three are named, and none can be removed from below.

WHERE THE ARROWS END



Each arrow points to whoever can remove the office below it. From the table that follows.

OFFICE	WHO SITS IN IT NOW	CHOSEN BY	REMOVABLE BY
Supreme Leader of Iran (velayat-e faqih)	Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei holds it. He was chosen in March 2026 after his father, Ali Khamenei, Leader since 1989, was killed in an air strike on 28 February 2026. The office holds constitutional authority over doctrine, courts, media and the bonyad economies.	The Assembly of Experts chooses him, and his own Guardian Council vets its candidates.	In theory, that Assembly can remove him. In thirty-seven years and two Leaders it never has, and it chose the late Leader's son.
Marjaʿ of Najaf	Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, born 1930, holds it. Khums flows from around the world route through his office, and his succession will be the tradition's next great unaudited transfer.	He is chosen by recognition from peers and followers.	Nobody can remove him. The office ends only with the man.
Astan Quds Razavi — the Imam Reza shrine conglomerate (the tomb of the eighth Imam, in Mashhad)	A custodian appointed directly by the Supreme Leader holds it.	The Supreme Leader chooses the custodian.	The Supreme Leader can remove the custodian.
The Ismaili Imamate	Aga Khan V, Rahim al-Hussaini, inherited the Imamate on his father's death in February 2025.	The Imam is chosen by hereditary designation.	Nobody can remove him.

THE TELL

The circular vetting is the design: the Leader screens the only body that could, on paper, unseat him.

Who holds what

ENTITY	TYPE	HOLDER	HOLDS	WHY IT MATTERS TO YOU	RECEIPT
Velayat-e faqih — the office of Supreme Leader	Constitutional office	The Supreme Leader	It holds final authority over the state, the judiciary, the armed forces and the religious foundations.	It governs your dress, your speech, your internet and your daughter's arrest record.	OFFICIAL POLICY · Iranian constitution
Astan Quds Razavi	Shrine conglomerate	A custodian appointed by the Supreme Leader	It is one of the largest economic entities in Iran, tax-exempt and outside parliamentary oversight.	It is an economy your parliament cannot audit.	ACADEMIC SOURCE / INVESTIGATIVE REPORT
Bonyads — revolutionary foundations	Off-budget conglomerates	Appointees of the Leader	They hold industrial, agricultural and financial assets under charitable status.	This is where the country's wealth sits, unexamined.	ACADEMIC SOURCE

The marjaʿiyya	Clerical hierarchy	Senior ayatollahs, each with an office	It holds khums receipts, twenty percent of followers' surplus with half payable to the office, and they are unaudited.	A fifth of your surplus income goes to an account you cannot see.	**OFFICIAL POLICY** · fiqh manuals
The Najaf quietist school	Countervailing authority	Senior Najaf marjaʿiyya	It is the tradition's senior center, and it rejects clerical rule.	It is proof that the state's version is not the religion.	**ACADEMIC SOURCE**
Morality enforcement bodies	Police power	State security organs	They hold statutory authority over public dress and conduct.	They decide whether you get home.	**GOVERNMENT REPORT**
Popular Mobilization Forces (Iraq)	State-funded armed network	A commission under the Iraqi prime minister holds it; factions keep their own leaderships, and several are aligned with Iran.	It holds a state salary line created after Grand Ayatollah Sistani's 2014 call to arms against ISIS and formalized in law in 2016, and UN and human-rights investigators have documented factions committing abuses.	It shows who holds guns in your city, and on whose religious call they first mobilized.	**GOVERNMENT REPORT** · UN reporting; Iraqi PMF law 2016

Succession watch

OFFICE	NOW	MECHANISM	PREDICTION	WHAT WOULD FALSIFY IT
Marjaʿ of Najaf	Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, born 1930	The successor emerges by recognition from peers and followers, with no procedure, no electorate and no term.	It will be the tradition's largest unaudited transfer. The codex predicts a contested, gradual, and partly geopolitical settlement, with khums flows fragmenting between claimants — and no published accounting at any stage from any party.	Publication of accounts by any successor office, or an orderly documented transfer, would falsify it.

Sources for this section: 1 2 3 4 6 14 15 16 20

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Two very different kinds of authority sit on this page. In Iran, clerical rule was written into a state's constitution; the body that could in theory remove the Leader has never done so, and in 2026 it chose the late Leader's son. In Najaf, the senior marjaʿ holds no office and commands no army, yet his sermons helped bring down an Iraqi government. If you follow a marjaʿ, which model do you actually live under, and which would you choose?

08 Law & state here

BEFORE YOU READ

What states actually do. That includes how they fund, protect, regulate or enforce the tradition, and which outside body, if any, can compel an answer from it. For most readers, this is where the institution meets their own passport.

COUNTRY	LEAVING ISLAM	CRITICIZING RELIGION OR CLERGY	FAMILY LAW	WHO HOLDS THE RELIGIOUS MONEY AND PULPIT
Iran	Leaving Islam can carry the death penalty [37].	Clerics are tried in the Special Court for the Clergy, and a reformist cleric served 17 months for his writing [30].	Hijab is compulsory; a harsher 2023 law was paused in December 2024, but existing rules stayed in force [24]. Death is the prescribed penalty for same-sex acts [12].	The Leader holds them, and appoints the custodian of the largest shrine conglomerate [16].

Iraq	—	—	A 2025 code lets Shia families opt into a Ja'fari (Shia school of law) personal-status code that Human Rights Watch says makes women "second class" [8] [13].	The Najaf marja'iyya holds them, outside the state; a state-funded militia commission was created after a 2014 fatwa (a jurist's ruling) [4] [19].
Lebanon	—	—	There is no civil marriage; Ja'fari courts decide Shia marriage, divorce and custody, with no clear minimum marriage age [25] [26].	Sect-based religious councils and courts hold them [25].
Bahrain	—	Protest in 2011 was met with mistreatment that the state's own inquiry called torture [10].	—	A Sunni monarchy governs a Shia majority [10].
Pakistan	—	—	—	Community clerics and trusts; no state religious office for Shia (see section 22).
United Kingdom	Leaving is legally free.	Criticism is legally free.	A religious-only marriage leaves women without legal status (see Sunni Islam).	The Charity Commission appointed an interim manager to run the Supreme Leader's UK office in place of its trustees in 2023 [27] [40]

Who can compel an answer

In the diaspora, charity regulators can compel an answer from khums-receiving foundations and centers, and so can ordinary courts. Inside Iran

no body compels an answer, and that absence is not a gap in this list — it is the section's central finding.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

If you are a Shia woman, the country decides almost everything. In Iran hijab is compulsory, and a harsher 2023 law was paused but the existing rules remain. A 2025 Iraqi code lets families opt into a personal-status code that Human Rights Watch says makes women "second class." Lebanon has no civil marriage and no clear minimum marriage age. In the UK you are free, but a religious-only marriage leaves you without legal status. Do you know which rules would decide your divorce?

09 Money

BEFORE YOU READ

Where the money comes from, how each flow is justified, how it can be used to control, and who benefits. Read it the way you would read any organization you give to: what is disclosed, what is not, and who decides.

Where it comes from

- Khums is a 20% levy, chiefly on annual surplus income. Half of it (sahm-e Imam) is paid to the marjaʿ's office, or spent with its permission, as the Imam's deputy; the other half (sahm-e sadat) is owed to needy descendants of the Prophet [39]. No audited public accounting is required. **OFFICIAL POLICY** · fiqh manuals
- In Iran, bonyads (revolutionary religious foundations) and shrine conglomerates like Astan Quds Razavi control vast tax-exempt economic empires answerable to the Supreme Leader, not parliament. **INVESTIGATIVE REPORT / ACADEMIC SOURCE**
- Pilgrimage economies form around Karbala, Najaf, Mashhad and Qom.

Follow the money

FLOW	STATED PURPOSE	HOW IT CONTROLS	WHO BENEFITS
Khums (20% of surplus), half paid as sahm-e Imam	Support the Imam's portion and the poor	Doctrine mandates payment directly to a cleric's office, with no external audit.	Marjaʿ offices, seminaries and clerical networks benefit **OFFICIAL POLICY** · fiqh manuals.

Bonyads and shrine conglomerates	Charitable and revolutionary foundations	They are tax-exempt commercial empires outside parliamentary oversight.	Iran's clerical-security elite benefits ACADEMIC SOURCE / INVESTIGATIVE REPORT.
Shrine pilgrimage economies (Karbala, Najaf, Mashhad, Qom)	Devotional visitation	Vast donation flows go unaudited, alongside adjacent commercial monopolies.	Shrine administrations and appointed custodians benefit.
Seminary stipends	Support religious study	Thousands of students depend financially on the hierarchy's goodwill.	The hierarchy benefits through its own continuity.

WHERE THE MONEY GOES, AND WHAT IT HOLDS

Khums (20% of surplus), half paid as sahm-e Imam

STATED PURPOSE
Support the Imam's portion and the poor

HOW IT CONTROLS
Doctrine mandates payment directly to a cleric's office, with no external audit.

→ Marjaʿ offices, seminaries and clerical networks benefit · fiqh manuals .

Bonyads and shrine conglomerates

STATED PURPOSE
Charitable and revolutionary foundations

HOW IT CONTROLS
They are tax-exempt commercial empires outside parliamentary oversight.

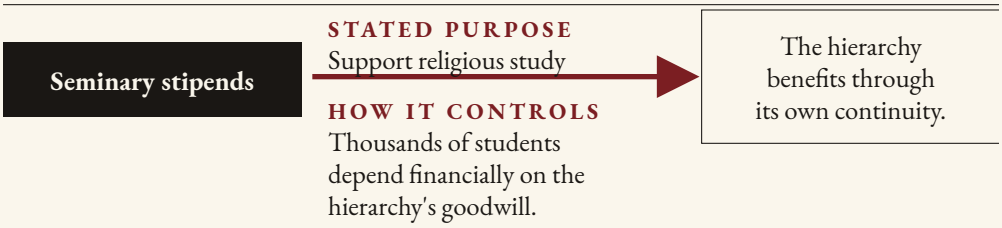
→ Iran's clerical-security elite benefits ACADEMIC SOURCE / INVESTIGATIVE REPORT .

Shrine pilgrimage economies (Karbala, Najaf, Mashhad, Qom)

STATED PURPOSE
Devotional visitation

HOW IT CONTROLS
Vast donation flows go unaudited, alongside adjacent commercial monopolies.

→ Shrine administrations and appointed custodians benefit.



Not to scale. The table gives one figure, the German church tax of €6.75bn in 2025; the other flows are shown without amounts.

Pipelines this tradition shares

KHUMS TO CLERICAL NETWORK

Source. The money is twenty percent of surplus income.

Path. Marjaʿ office → Seminary stipends → Student and cleric loyalty

Disclosed. Nothing is disclosed systematically.

Hidden. Receipts, holdings and allocation are hidden.

PILGRIMAGE ECONOMY

Source. Devotional visitation to the shrine cities.

Path. Pilgrims → Shrine administrations → Appointed custodians

Disclosed. Headcounts, as with Arbaeen (21 million in 2025 [28]).

Hidden. Donation totals and any concession awards are not recorded on this page.

REVOLUTIONARY FOUNDATION

Source. The sources are confiscated and donated assets, plus shrine income.

Path. Foundation outside parliamentary oversight → Commercial conglomerate → Clerical-security elite

Disclosed. Only the charitable purpose is disclosed.

Hidden. Holdings, revenue and beneficiaries are hidden.

Sources for this section: [6] [14] [15]

Money in numbers

Khums — a fifth of annual surplus income — is the Shia tradition's defining money flow, and it has no required public ledger [39]; where a marja"s network runs a registered charity abroad, that charity files accounts (section 14). What has numbers:

- **Setad**, the conglomerate under the Supreme Leader's office, was valued at about **$95 billion** by a 2013 Reuters investigation [14].
- **Astan Quds Razavi**, the Imam Reza shrine's economic empire, is run by a custodian the Leader appoints [6] [15].

- **Arbaeen**, the walk to Karbala, drew about **21 million** people in 2025 by the shrine authorities' own electronic count — a figure no one independently audits [28]. The 2026 pilgrimage drew about 20 million, during the regional war [50].

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

If you pay khums, you give a fifth of your surplus income, half of it to your marja''s office. The page records that no audited public accounting is required. In Iran, shrine conglomerates such as Astan Quds Razavi are among the largest economic entities in the country, tax-exempt and outside parliamentary oversight. The glance table asks the question plainly: who audits the deputy of the Imam? Have you ever asked for the accounts of the office you pay?

10 Genealogy

BEFORE YOU READ

Rules with a history. Each card asks the same three questions: what was this rule originally for, has that reason expired, and who benefits from the rule continuing anyway?

KHUMS PAID DIRECTLY TO A CLERIC'S OFFICE

Origin. It developed as the Usuli school prevailed in the 18th–19th centuries, and under it half of the 20% levy (sahm-e Imam) goes to the marjaʿ as the Imam's deputy. OFFICIAL POLICY

What it was for. With no Imam present and no state support, the hierarchy needed independent funding to remain free of kings. It worked — Shia clergy were financially independent precisely because ordinary people paid them directly.

Why that reason expired. The mechanism now funds a hierarchy that in one country *is* the state. Independence from rulers was the entire justification; when the marjaʿ rules the country, the justification is gone and only the revenue remains.

Who benefits now. Marjaʿ offices and their networks benefit, unaudited. You pay a fifth of your surplus to an institution that will not show you a ledger.

VELAYAT-E FAQIH — CLERICAL RULE

Origin. It was a minority juristic position, elevated to constitutional principle in 1979.
OFFICIAL POLICY

What it was for. It was presented as protection from a corrupt Western-backed monarchy. Many devout people believed it, and the grievance was real.

Why that reason expired. After four decades the question is empirical, not theoretical: the arrangement produced morality police, prison sentences for journalists, and off-budget economic empires. The quietist Najaf school — the tradition's own mainstream — rejects it, which settles the claim that this is simply Shiism.

Who benefits now. A clerical-security elite benefits, governing bonyads and shrine conglomerates outside parliamentary oversight. ACADEMIC SOURCE

MARTYRDOM DEVOTION AS POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

Origin. Karbala mourning (680 CE) began as devotional and moral practice and was converted into state mobilization infrastructure after 1979. ACADEMIC SOURCE

What it was for. It was for remembering that a righteous man refused an unjust ruler and paid for it, as a template for resisting power.

Why that reason expired. The meaning has been inverted. The commemoration of resistance to a corrupt ruler is now administered by the ruler. Grief for Husayn is used to recruit for state projects — an exact reversal of the story's meaning.

Who benefits now. The state and its military structures benefit. Your tears are a mobilization asset, and the man you weep for died refusing exactly this.

COMPULSORY HIJAB AND MORALITY POLICING

Origin. The state built the enforcement apparatus after 1979; there is no classical precedent for police checking women's hair. ACADEMIC SOURCE

What it was for. The state's stated purpose was religious. Critics describe it in practice as a visible loyalty test for a new regime consolidating control of public space.

Why that reason expired. A young woman died in custody over it in 2022 and the country rose, including believers. When enforcement kills the person it claims to protect, the claim is finished. GOVERNMENT REPORT

Who benefits now. The state benefits through its control of public space, and so do the security bodies employed to patrol it.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The expired-reason test works on any rule. Take one you follow or enforce, name what it was originally for, and ask whether that reason still exists. If it doesn't, and the rule survives anyway, the section's last question is the one that matters to you: who benefits from it continuing?

11 Reach

BEFORE YOU READ

How far the institution's authority extends into three private areas: what members may read and hear, how children are raised and schooled, and decisions about their own bodies.

Information

- In Iran, religious authority and state censorship are the same apparatus: banned books, filtered internet, jailed journalists, and clerical courts. GOVERNMENT REPORT
- Marjaʿ-following (taqlid) routes practical religious questions through a single office; changing marjaʿ is permitted, but the framework itself is not up for debate.
- Criticism of clerical rule is framed as serving foreign enemies — a nationalist inoculation against internal dissent. LEADERSHIP STATEMENT

Children

- Mourning rituals introduce children to grief narratives very young; in some contexts children participate in self-flagellation, including tatbir (blade cutting), which senior clerics themselves have prohibited or discouraged. LEADERSHIP STATEMENT
- In Iran, school curricula, hijab rules for girls from age 7 in the school setting, and ideological instruction are state-mandated. OFFICIAL POLICY
- Seminary tracks recruit adolescents into stipend-dependent careers that make later dissent economically ruinous.

Bodies

- Compulsory hijab is enforced by morality police in Iran; the death of Mahsa Amini in custody (2022) and the protest wave that followed made the enforcement machinery undeniable. GOVERNMENT REPORT
- Temporary marriage (mutʿa) is doctrinally permitted and is used both consensually and, per critics, to legitimize exploitation. ACADEMIC SOURCE
- Where religious law is state law, there are legal asymmetries in testimony weight, inheritance, custody and travel permissions. OFFICIAL POLICY
- Same-sex relations are capital offenses under Iranian law. OFFICIAL POLICY / GOVERNMENT REPORT

Sources for this section: 9 12 18

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

If you are a parent, this is the section about your children: what they may read, what they are taught about their bodies, and who else has a say in their schooling. Ask what your child would need to do at sixteen to hear the strongest case against what they were taught. Would they be allowed? Would they know it existed?



12

The 30 techniques

How the thirty techniques are established here

2	1	13	13	1
CODIFIED	DOCUMENTED	TAUGHT	CULTURAL	CONTESTED

STAGE 1 Idealize	1 Love Bombing **CULTURAL**	2 Weaponized Generosity **CULTURAL**		
STAGE 2 Hook	3 Future Faking **TAUGHT**	4 Hoovering **TAUGHT**		
STAGE 3 Devalue	5 Devaluation **TAUGHT**	6 Gaslighting **CULTURAL**	7 Double Bind **TAUGHT**	
STAGE 4 Confuse	8 Intermittent Reinforcement **TAUGHT** 12 DARVO **CULTURAL**	9 Moving the Goalposts **CULTURAL** 13 Normalization / Desensitization **TAUGHT**	10 Strategic Ambiguity **TAUGHT**	11 Projection **TAUGHT**
STAGE 5 Isolate	14 Isolation **TAUGHT**	15 Triangulation **TAUGHT**		

STAGE 6 Extract	16 Flying Monkeys **CULTURAL**	17 Smear Campaign **DOCUMENTED**	18 Silent Treatment / Stonewalling **CULTURAL**	19 Manufactured Consent **TAUGHT**
	20 Trauma Bonding **TAUGHT**	21 Learned Helplessness **CULTURAL**	22 Benevolent Control **CULTURAL**	23 Infantilization **CODIFIED**
	24 Identity Erosion **CULTURAL**	25 Spiritual Bypassing **CULTURAL**	26 Financial Control **CODIFIED**	
STAGE 7 Discard	27 Manufactured Crisis **TAUGHT**	28 Discard **CONTESTED**		
STAGE 8 Replace	29 Replacement **CULTURAL**	30 Plausible Deniability **CULTURAL**		

Thirty named techniques from domestic-abuse and social-psychology research, applied to institutions, in the eight stages of the cycle.

BEFORE YOU READ

A fixed checklist of thirty influence and control patterns from research on coercive control and social psychology, applied here to institutions rather than to individual people. Every entry carries an evidence grade. The grade matters more than the name of the technique: Codified or Documented means there is a paper trail; Contested means the claim is disputed.

Thirty named techniques from domestic-abuse and social-psychology research, applied to institutions, in the eight stages of the cycle. Each carries an evidence grade for this tradition.

Stage 1 · Idealize

You arrive with a need and are met with more warmth than you have had in years.

The welcome comes through the majlis, hospitality, family warmth and the overwhelming moral gravity of Karbala. You are told you have found the persecuted truth that history buried.

What it asks of you: The grief was sincere. The question is who arrived to administer it.

1 · Love Bombing

Overwhelming affection on arrival to create emotional dependency before terms are revealed.

How it shows here

- A seeker may be drawn in through intense hospitality, majlis gatherings, Karbala narratives, mourning rituals, family warmth, and the emotional gravity of Imam Husayn's martyrdom.
- The newcomer is often made to feel they have discovered the hidden, persecuted truth behind Islamic history.
- Devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's family) can become the emotional center before the convert understands clerical authority, marjaʿ following, sectarian boundaries, ritual obligations, or community surveillance.

The strongest defense. Shia hospitality and mourning are sincere expressions of love and remembrance.

The counter. Sincerity does not remove leverage. A community can cry real tears and still use those tears to bind people. If grief, martyrdom, and loyalty are fused so tightly that questioning the institution feels like betraying Husayn himself, emotion has become a cage.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Majlis hospitality and devotional welcome are community practice.

2 · Weaponized Generosity

Giving help that installs unspoken obligation.

How it shows here

- Shia communities may welcome seekers through majlis gatherings, mourning rituals, meals, family hospitality, lectures, ziyarat (shrine pilgrimage) culture, and devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt.
- A convert or returnee can receive deep emotional support by being folded into the story of Karbala: suffering, loyalty, sacrifice, oppression, and sacred grief.
- That support can later become obligation: loyalty to the community, deference to scholars, marjaʿ authority, sectarian boundaries, ritual participation, and silence around internal abuses.
- Financial giving through khums, mosque donations, shrine donations, or community relief can be framed as both worship and loyalty.

The strongest defense. Shia communal care is rooted in love for the Prophet's family and solidarity with the oppressed.

The counter. Solidarity with the oppressed becomes hollow if it cannot tolerate dissent from within. If the community helps you, then later treats disagreement as betrayal of Husayn, betrayal of the Ahl al-Bayt, or betrayal of the persecuted truth, the generosity has been fused to sacred guilt.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The welcome, support and giving described here, and the obligation that follows them, are community practice; no written rule directs them.

Stage 2 · Hook

You are given a future that cannot be verified, and a rope for whenever you drift toward the door.

The future on offer is the intercession of the Imams, reunion with the martyrs and justice finally arriving, after death. Retrieval runs through Muharram, family and the moral weight of Husayn himself.

What it asks of you: The most morally serious story your tradition owns is now the instrument that brings you back. Ask who arranged that.

3 · Future Faking

Promising a future that keeps you invested but never has to arrive.

How it shows here

- Shia Islam offers a future saturated with loyalty, martyrdom, justice, intercession, and the eventual vindication of the oppressed.
- Karbala becomes not only memory but future orientation: suffer faithfully now, remain loyal now, mourn now, sacrifice now, and divine justice will vindicate the truth.

- The return or rule of the Mahdi (the hidden twelfth Imam, expected to return) can function as the great deferred correction: history is broken, leadership was usurped, the righteous were oppressed, but the final age will reveal who was right.
- Devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt can be tied to future intercession and spiritual safety. Loyalty becomes not merely love but insurance.
- Institutions can use sacred grief to keep people invested: your pain participates in the cosmic drama, your loyalty matters eternally, your questioning may place you outside the circle of truth.

The strongest defense. Shia hope is rooted in justice for the oppressed and loyalty to the Prophet's family.

The counter. Hope for justice becomes future faking when present authorities borrow the emotional power of martyrdom to demand obedience. If every critique of clerics, rituals, community pressure, or sectarian narratives is treated as betrayal of Husayn, then the future vindication of the oppressed is being used to silence the currently oppressed.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT The intercession of the Imams, the return of the Mahdi and the vindication of the oppressed are taught doctrine; using that promise to hold present loyalty is devotional and communal practice.

4 · Hoovering

Pulling someone back after they've started to leave, through guilt, love, or fear.

How it shows here

- A person drifting from Shia community may be pulled back through mourning, majlis, Karbala, loyalty to Imam Husayn, and love for the Ahl al-Bayt.
- The emotional hook is often sacred grief: "After everything Husayn sacrificed, how can you walk away?"
- Family or community members may urge return during Muharram, Ashura (the tenth of Muharram, the day of Husayn's death), Ramadan, Arbaeen, or major gatherings when collective emotion is strongest.
- Doubt may be framed as betrayal not merely of Islam but of the oppressed truth, the Imams, the martyrs, and the bloodline of the Prophet.
- If the person questions clerical authority, ritual practices, or sectarian narratives, the response may be: "You are letting enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt affect you."

The strongest defense. Remembering Karbala is about justice, sacrifice, and spiritual loyalty.

The counter. Grief becomes hoovering when it is used to override conscience. If returning is framed as loyalty to Husayn and leaving is framed as betrayal of the oppressed, then the person is not being invited back. They are being emotionally cornered by martyrdom.

EVIDENCE GRADE

TAUGHT The moral weight of Karbala is taught continuously; pulling a drifting member back through it is done by family and community, not by written rule.

Stage 3 · Devalue

You are taught that you are broken, that your perception is unreliable, and that both exits from the trap lead back inside.

Your mourning was not sincere enough, your loyalty not tested enough, your commitment suspect. Sacrifice is the metric and it has no ceiling.

What it asks of you: A love that must keep proving itself is being farmed.

5 · Devaluation

Reducing your sense of worth so you become dependent on the institution for identity.

How it shows here

- Shia Islam can devalue through narratives of betrayal, loyalty, martyrdom, and unworthiness before the sacrifice of the Imams.

- The believer may be told that true devotion requires mourning, sacrifice, loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt, reverence for scholars, and rejection of enemies of the truth.
- Questioning rituals, clerical authority, sectarian history, or community pressure can be framed as betrayal of Imam Husayn or contamination by hostile narratives.
- The emotional standard is impossible: how can your discomfort matter compared with Karbala? How can your doubts matter compared with martyrdom?
- The individual self shrinks beneath sacred grief.

The strongest defense. Shia devotion to the Imams is about justice, love, and resistance to oppression.

The counter. Love of the oppressed becomes devaluation when living people are not allowed to name their own oppression. If every personal boundary is crushed under martyrdom memory, then grief is no longer remembrance. It is obedience training.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Devotion measured against the sacrifice of the Imams is taught in mourning sermons and devotional life; applying that measure to a member's doubts is communal practice.

6 · Gaslighting

Making you doubt your own experience so you trust the institution's interpretation instead.

How it shows here

- Someone questions clerical authority, ritual mourning, sectarian narratives, or political theology, and is told they are disrespecting the Ahl al-Bayt.
- A person says certain grief rituals feel emotionally overwhelming or manipulative, and the response is, "You do not understand love for Husayn."
- Criticism of leaders can be reframed as aiding enemies of the truth.
- Doubt becomes betrayal: not merely intellectual disagreement, but failure of loyalty to the oppressed Imams.

The strongest defense. Love for the Ahl al-Bayt is central to Shia spirituality and identity.

The counter. Love becomes gaslighting when it makes criticism impossible. If questioning a living cleric, ritual, or institution is treated as betrayal of martyrs, then sacred history is being used to overwrite present reality.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Recasting criticism of a living cleric as disrespect to the Ahl al-Bayt is communal practice, with no written rule; the reverence it draws on is taught, but the conduct is not.

7 · Double Bind

A trap where both options lead to compliance. No exit serves you.

How it shows here

- The Karbala narrative teaches that standing against corrupt authority is the highest devotion — yet questioning one's own clerical establishment is framed as betraying the Imams that very stand honors.
- Believers must emulate Husayn's refusal to submit, and simultaneously practice absolute taqlid (emulation) of a living marja. Resist illegitimate authority; never resist ours.
- Mourning must be sincere and voluntary — but insufficient public grief is read as insufficient love for the Ahl al-Bayt.

The strongest defense. Taqlid is like consulting a doctor; laypeople follow experts in every field.

The counter. Patients may seek second opinions, fire their doctor, and refuse treatment without being called traitors to medicine. When following the expert is mandatory and leaving him is betrayal, the analogy has quietly become a leash.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Both halves of the bind are taught: taqlid of a living marjaʿ as the ordinary structure of practice, and Karbala as the model of refusing illegitimate authority.

Stage 4 · Confuse

The rewards become unpredictable, the standard keeps moving, the answers stop meaning anything, and the accusation gets turned around.

Criticize clerical rule and you are serving foreign enemies. Object to the morality police and you are attacking Islam itself. The devout Iranian protester is recast as a Western agent.

What it asks of you: When your own people's protest is called foreign, ask who needs it to be.

8 · Intermittent Reinforcement

Unpredictable reward that creates addictive emotional dependency.

How it shows here

- The annual mourning cycle delivers guaranteed catharsis — collective weeping, belonging, meaning — concentrated in seasons the institution conducts, with the emotional year metered around its calendar.

- Intercession of the Imams pays out irregularly: the healed child is Husayn's blessing and becomes a public testimony; the unhealed child is a test, and the family gives more nazr (votive offering) next year.
- A cleric's or community's regard rises and falls with ritual visibility — who hosted, who wept, who walked — on a scale everyone feels and no one publishes.

The strongest defense. Mourning rituals are sincere love and historical memory, not engineered catharsis.

The counter. Sincerity and scheduling coexist. When the community's deepest emotional payouts run through institutional channels on an institutional calendar, and off-schedule grief or doubt earns coolness, love has been given a meter — whoever holds the meter holds the people.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT The mourning calendar and the intercession of the Imams are taught and observed; how regard rises and falls with ritual visibility is community practice, and no one publishes it.

9 · Moving the Goalposts

The standard of success keeps shifting so you can never arrive.

How it shows here

- Devotion begins with love for the Ahl al-Bayt. Then it becomes ritual mourning, majlis attendance, clerical deference, marjaʿ following, sectarian loyalty, and suspicion of criticism.

- A person honors Imam Husayn but questions a local cleric or ritual intensity. The goalpost moves: now true love requires silence, participation, and loyalty to the community's form of grief.
- Someone follows a marjaʿ but later is told their choice is weak, politically suspect, insufficiently pious, or not loyal enough to the oppressed truth.

The strongest defense. Love for the Ahl al-Bayt naturally deepens into practice and loyalty.

The counter. Love becomes goalpost-moving when the proof of love keeps expanding until it protects living authority. If questioning today's leaders is treated as betrayal of martyrs, devotion has been made impossible to complete.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The widening demands described here come from local communities, not from written rule; the love for the Ahl al-Bayt and marjaʿ following that they draw on are taught.

10 · Strategic Ambiguity

Language that sounds profound but means nothing specific — functioning as a shutdown to real questions.

How it shows here

- Loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt can mean love, mourning, ritual participation, clerical deference, political identity, or community conformity depending on context.

- Marjaʿ authority allows variation, but local communities may treat their preferred line as the only loyal one.
- Criticism of clerics can be separated from criticism of the Imams in theory, but fused with betrayal in practice.

The strongest defense. Shia tradition contains legitimate scholarly plurality and devotional diversity.

The counter. Diversity becomes ambiguity when the institution widens meaning for defense and narrows it for discipline. If love for Husayn becomes whatever leaders need it to mean, sacred grief has been made administratively useful.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Scholarly plurality among the marājiʿ is taught; narrowing loyalty to one local line is community practice.

11 · Projection

Accusing the outside world of the exact thing the institution practices.

How it shows here

- Shia communities may accuse critics of betraying the oppressed while silencing people currently oppressed by clerics, families, or communal pressure.
- A person questioning ritual intensity or clerical authority may be accused of disrespecting Husayn, while sacred grief is used to avoid accountability for living leaders.

- Sectarian narratives accuse others of historical betrayal while present-day dissenters are betrayed through shame and exclusion.
- Women or young people resisting control may be accused of aiding enemies of the faith.

The strongest defense. Shia identity centers justice, loyalty, and resistance to oppression.

The counter. A tradition of resisting oppression loses moral force when it cannot recognize oppression inside itself. If Karbala is used to silence the wounded, the memory of tyranny has been turned into a tool of tyranny.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Karbala is taught as the model of resisting oppression; turning it against critics inside the community is communal practice, and in Iran criticism of clerical rule is framed as serving foreign enemies (section 11).

12 · DARVO

Deny the wrongdoing. Attack the person who raised it. Reverse victim and offender.

How it shows here

- A person reports abuse or coercion by a cleric, family authority, ritual leader, or community institution. The response may deny the harm and then accuse the person of disrespecting scholars, the Ahl al-Bayt, or the legacy of Karbala.

- Criticism of clerical authority can be reframed as aiding enemies of the Shia community.
- A woman or young person naming control may be accused of dishonoring family, faith, and martyrs.
- The accused leader becomes a servant of the Imams under attack, while the harmed person becomes the traitor.
- Sacred grief is used to reverse the moral burden: "How could you cause division among the lovers of Husayn?"

The strongest defense. Shia communities protect sacred figures and scholars from slander.

The counter. Protecting sacred memory does not require protecting living abusers. If the language of Karbala is used to silence those harmed by current power, then the memory of the oppressed is being used to defend oppression.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Turning a complaint into an accusation against the person who raised it is observed community practice, with no written rule; the reverence for scholars and the Ahl al-Bayt it draws on is taught.

13 · Normalization / Desensitization

Practices that would seem extreme to an outsider feel normal to insiders because they were installed before critical evaluation developed.

How it shows here

- Repeated majlis gatherings, mourning rituals, lamentation, chest beating, Karbala narratives, and sacred grief can normalize intense emotional states as proof of loyalty.
- Believers may become desensitized to linking personal suffering with martyrdom, making ordinary boundaries feel petty compared with Husayn's sacrifice.
- Clerical authority and marjaʿ following become normalized as part of spiritual maturity, even when ordinary conscience is uneasy.
- Sectarian narratives can normalize suspicion of outsiders and make dissent feel like betrayal of the oppressed truth.

The strongest defense. Shia mourning preserves memory of injustice and loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt.

The counter. Sacred grief becomes desensitization when repeated exposure teaches people to override their own pain, doubts, or boundaries because someone else suffered more. Martyrdom memory should sharpen conscience, not numb it.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Muharram mourning, majlis and lamentation are taught and observed from childhood (section 11); the desensitization described here is their cumulative effect.

Stage 5 · Isolate

Your world narrows until every voice you hear is inside the system, and everything you came for now runs through a middleman.

Taqlid routes your practical questions to one office. Seminary students depend on stipends. In Iran, the state and the religion are the same apparatus, so there is no outside.

What it asks of you: If your marja‘ is wrong about something, what is the mechanism by which you would ever find out?

14 · Isolation

Shrinking your world until the only voices you hear are inside the system.

How it shows here

- Shia isolation can be built through sectarian identity, loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt, clerical networks, majlis culture, mourning cycles, family expectations, and suspicion of Sunni, secular, or Western narratives.
- The believer may be told that outsiders distort the history of the Imams and that only the community preserves the persecuted truth.

- Doubt may be framed as influence from enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt, making outside sources emotionally suspect before they are evaluated.
- Family and ritual life can narrow the person's world around Muharram, Ashura, Arbaeen, Ramadan, clerical guidance, and communal gatherings.
- Criticism of clerics or rituals may isolate the dissenter, because disagreement is treated not as interpretation but as disloyalty.

The strongest defense. Shia communities preserve a history of persecution and need spaces where that memory is honored.

The counter. Protected memory becomes isolation when it prevents people from examining living power. If outsiders are always enemies and insiders must prove loyalty through silence, the community has confused preservation with enclosure.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT The history of persecution and loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt are taught; treating outside sources as enemy influence is communal practice, and in Iran state censorship closes the outside (section 11).

15 · Triangulation

Inserting intermediaries between you and the thing you came for, so the institution is always in the middle.

How it shows here

- Shia triangulation often works through the Ahl al-Bayt, Karbala, marjaʿ authority, clerics, family elders, majlis gatherings, and sacred grief.
- A doubter may be told, "How can you leave the path of Husayn?" The argument is no longer about the specific issue; it is about loyalty to martyrdom.
- Clerical authority triangulates through marājiʿ (the plural of marjaʿ): if you question a ruling, the answer is not personal conscience but deference to a higher religious authority.
- Family and community triangulate during Muharram, Ashura, Arbaeen, and mourning gatherings, where collective emotion makes refusal feel like betrayal.
- The person is compared to loyal companions of Husayn versus those who abandoned truth under pressure.
- Criticism of a living institution can be framed as aiding enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt.

The strongest defense. Shia identity is rooted in loyalty to justice, the Imams, and sacred memory.

The counter. Sacred memory becomes triangulation when it is used to avoid present accountability. If questioning a cleric, family rule, or community practice is treated as betrayal of Husayn, then martyrdom has been turned into leverage over the living.

EVIDENCE GRADE

TAUGHT Taqlid routes practical questions through a single office by teaching rather than by statute.

Stage 6 · Extract

Now the harvest: your labor, your money, your identity, your silence, your children's schooling, your capacity to trust yourself.

A fifth of your surplus income goes to an office that publishes no audited ledger. Bonyads and shrine conglomerates sit outside parliamentary oversight. Seminary stipends make dissent economically fatal. Dress is compulsory and enforced by police. Object, and you are recast as a foreign agent.

What it asks of you: You pay khums to an institution that will not show you accounts, and the request for accounts is treated as impertinence rather than as a question.

16 · Flying Monkeys

The community enforces the institution's norms without being asked — mobilized by culture, not memos.

How it shows here

- A person questioning Shia rituals, clerical authority, or community pressure may be approached by family members, majlis organizers, clerics, and devout friends invoking Husayn, Karbala, and loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt.
- The concern sounds sacred: "How can you walk away from the oppressed Imams?" "Don't betray the truth after knowing it."
- During Muharram or Ashura, emotional gatherings can become pressure points where family and community try to pull the person back.
- Critics of clerics may be told by loyal community members that they are helping enemies of the faith.

The strongest defense. Shia communities care because loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt and justice is central.

The counter. Loyalty becomes FLYING MONKEY pressure when sacred grief is used by living people to silence living harm. If community members invoke martyrs to protect current authority, they are not defending Husayn. They are borrowing his blood to discipline dissent.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The pressure described here comes from family, majlis organizers, clerics and friends acting by custom; no written directive for it is recorded.

17 · Smear Campaign

Rewriting your character after departure to protect the institution from the implications of your leaving.

How it shows here

- Critics may be accused of disrespecting the Ahl al-Bayt, aiding enemies, weakening the community, or betraying Husayn.
- Those questioning clerics may be framed as arrogant, anti-clerical, influenced by hostile propaganda, or lacking love for the Imams.
- Women or youth resisting control may be described as corrupted by secularism.
- Community gossip can transform a real complaint into a loyalty failure.

The strongest defense. Shia communities protect sacred memory and communal survival.

The counter. Sacred memory becomes smear when it is used to discredit living people who report living harm. If criticism of a cleric becomes betrayal of Husayn, the institution has weaponized martyrdom against accountability.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> **DOCUMENTED** Recasting critics as disloyal is community practice; the court record on this page is the Special Court for the Clergy's conviction of Mohsen Kadivar for his writing (section 19) [30]. *(sourced)*

18 · Silent Treatment / Stonewalling

Refusing to engage with legitimate questions in order to maintain control.

How it shows here

- A person questions clerical behavior, ritual pressure, family control, or institutional misconduct and is told not to disrespect scholars or weaken the community.
- Concerns are redirected into loyalty language: "Remember Husayn," "do not divide the lovers of the Ahl al-Bayt."
- Families may refuse to engage a young person's doubts, instead waiting for Muharram, majlis, or emotional ritual life to pull them back.
- Silence is framed as reverence: do not speak against clerics, elders, or sacred institutions.

The strongest defense. Sacred communities must protect scholars and avoid slander.

The counter. Reverence becomes stonewalling when it makes living leaders unanswerable. If Karbala teaches justice, then silence around present injustice is not devotion. It is betrayal in devotional clothing.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Refusing questions about clerics and institutions is community practice, and no written rule directs it. The bonyads and shrine conglomerates operate outside parliamentary oversight (sections 7 and 9), but that is a structure of institutions, not the conduct this entry describes.

19 · Manufactured Consent

Creating the appearance of choice when the conditions of choice were shaped before you could evaluate them.

How it shows here

- A believer "chooses" clerical authority after being taught that marjaʿ following is responsible devotion and independent judgment is unsafe.
- Ritual participation in mourning may appear voluntary, but family, grief, loyalty, and communal identity make nonparticipation feel like betrayal.
- A person "chooses" silence about clerical harm because criticism is framed as aiding enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt.
- Devotion to Husayn is used to generate consent to present-day communal expectations.

The strongest defense. Shia practice is rooted in love, justice, and informed religious authority.

The counter. Love becomes manufactured consent when refusing a community demand is emotionally equated with betraying martyrs. If grief is used to make no unsayable, the yes is not pure devotion. It is sacred pressure.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Marjaʿ following is taught as responsible devotion; the pressure that shapes ritual participation and silence is familial and communal.

20 · Trauma Bonding

The wound and the bandage come from the same hand.

How it shows here

- Shia spaces can bond through sacred grief: Karbala, martyrdom, mourning, loyalty, and the pain of betrayal.
- The believer is emotionally immersed in suffering, then receives belonging through collective mourning, majlis, family warmth, and loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt.
- Personal pain is dwarfed by Husayn's sacrifice, then soothed by identification with the oppressed truth.
- If the person doubts, the fear of betraying martyrs pulls them back into the same emotional field.

The strongest defense. Shia mourning preserves justice, memory, and love for the Prophet's family.

The counter. Sacred grief becomes TRAUMA BONDING when the community uses sorrow to attach people to present authority. If leaving a harmful environment feels like abandoning Husayn, grief has been converted into a leash.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Karbala mourning is taught and observed; the attachment it produces to present authority is community practice, with no written rule.

21 · Learned Helplessness

Teaching you that your own judgment is unreliable until you stop trusting it entirely.

How it shows here

- A person questions ritual intensity, clerical authority, or family control and is repeatedly met with grief, loyalty, martyrdom, and accusations of betrayal.
- They learn that no objection can stand against Karbala.
- A young person tries to set boundaries but is told their discomfort is nothing compared with Husayn's suffering.
- Eventually they stop naming their own pain.

The strongest defense. Shia devotion teaches endurance, justice, and loyalty to the oppressed.

The counter. Endurance becomes LEARNED HELPLESSNESS when living people are trained to minimize their pain under sacred suffering. If martyrdom memory silences present abuse, justice has been reversed.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Minimizing a member's pain against Husayn's suffering is pastoral and family practice; no written rule directs it.

22 · Benevolent Control

Control wrapped in the language of care, so that resisting the control feels like rejecting the love.

How it shows here

- Clerical authority, marjaʿ following, mourning rituals, and community loyalty may be framed as protection of the path of the Ahl al-Bayt.
- Questioning a cleric or ritual may be treated as spiritual danger, not ordinary disagreement.
- Family pressure may be presented as love: "We only want you to remain loyal to Husayn."
- Sacred grief becomes a protective enclosure: stay close to the community so you do not lose the truth.

The strongest defense. Shia guidance preserves loyalty, justice, and connection to the Imams.

The counter. Loyalty becomes BENEVOLENT CONTROL when living authorities borrow sacred suffering to manage dissent. If care for your soul requires silence about clerical or family control, the protection is protecting power.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Clerical and family direction framed as protection is pastoral and family practice, and no written rule directs it. Compulsory dress, enforced by the morality police under Iranian law (sections 10 and 11), is a statutory counterpart that this entry does not describe.

23 · Infantilization

Positioning the adult believer as permanently childlike and dependent on institutional authority.

How it shows here

- Marjaʿ following can become a structure where adult moral judgment is outsourced to clerical authority.
- Emotional loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt may be used to portray dissenters as immature or ungrateful.
- Young people questioning family or ritual expectations may be treated as spiritually childish.
- Women may be managed through modesty, marriage, and family honor framed as protection.

The strongest defense. Religious authority helps believers follow complex law responsibly.

The counter. Authority becomes INFANTILIZATION when conscience is never trusted. If adults must remain spiritually dependent on clerics and family elders to be legitimate, devotion has been organized as dependency.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CODIFIED Taqlid, under which a believer who is not a jurist follows a qualified jurist in practice, is set out in the marājiʿ's practical manuals; the managing of women and young people described here is family and community practice.

24 · Identity Erosion

Gradually replacing your identity with a role the institution provides, until you can't separate who you are from where you belong.

How it shows here

- Shia identity can become organized around Karbala, mourning, loyalty, martyrdom, clerical guidance, and devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt.
- Personal pain may be minimized beneath sacred grief: "What is your suffering compared with Husayn?"
- Questioning community practice may become identity betrayal rather than ordinary disagreement.
- The believer's self becomes defined by loyalty: loyal to the Imams, loyal to mourning, loyal to marjaʿ, loyal to family, loyal to the oppressed truth.
- The person may no longer know whether they are grieving freely or performing belonging.

The strongest defense. Shia devotion preserves justice, memory, and love for the Prophet's family.

The counter. Sacred memory becomes IDENTITY EROSION when it consumes the living person's voice. If your own pain, doubt, and boundaries must disappear under martyrdom memory, then grief has become an identity machine.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The devotional identity described here is formed through mourning, ritual and family life; no written rule requires it.

25 · Spiritual Bypassing

Using spiritual language to avoid engaging with real pain, real questions, and real accountability.

How it shows here

- Personal suffering is bypassed through Karbala: "Remember what Husayn endured."
- Community harm is bypassed through loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt.
- Criticism of clerics may be framed as betrayal of the oppressed truth.
- Grief rituals can bypass direct confrontation with current abuse.
- The person's own pain is minimized beneath sacred martyrdom.

The strongest defense. Karbala teaches resistance to injustice and solidarity with the oppressed.

The counter. Karbala becomes SPIRITUAL BYPASSING when it silences the oppressed in the present. If martyrdom memory is used to make living victims endure quietly, the story has been inverted.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Answering present harm with Karbala is pastoral and communal practice; no written rule directs it.

26 · Financial Control

Extracting money through spiritual obligation while offering no transparency about where it goes.

How it shows here

- Shia financial control may appear through khums, mosque donations, shrine donations, majlis sponsorships, clerical networks, religious schools, and community charity.
- Sponsoring rituals or mourning gatherings can become a status marker.
- Clerical authority may be strengthened by financial channels that ordinary believers are discouraged from questioning.
- Families may spend heavily on religious events, weddings, and communal expectations to preserve honor.

The strongest defense. Religious giving supports scholars, charity, shrines, education, and remembrance.

The counter. Giving becomes FINANCIAL CONTROL when money is wrapped in sacred loyalty. If questioning financial authority is treated as disrespecting the Ahl al-Bayt or weakening the community, devotion has been used to protect the ledger.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CODIFIED Khums, including the portion payable to the marjaʿ, is set out in published fiqh manuals (Sistani, *Islamic Laws* [39]). *(sourced)*

Stage 7 · Discard

You become expensive — too many questions, too much independence — and the urgency ramps up until you are removed.

The removal comes through imprisonment, morality policing and exposure to apostasy charges. Clerics and seminarians lose stipend, housing and standing at once.

What it asks of you: The fastest punishments went to the people who said something true in public.

27 · Manufactured Crisis

Creating urgency to suppress critical thinking and generate loyalty.

How it shows here

- Shia communities may manufacture crisis through narratives of enemies, betrayal, historical oppression, clerical attack, and loss of loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt.
- Criticism of a cleric or ritual may be framed as weakening the oppressed truth.

- A young person's doubt becomes a crisis of loyalty to Husayn.
- Muharram emotion may intensify urgency: return now, mourn now, prove loyalty now.

The strongest defense. Shia memory preserves resistance to oppression and vigilance against injustice.

The counter. Vigilance becomes MANUFACTURED CRISIS when living dissenters are treated as enemies. If every critique is folded into the cosmic drama of betrayal, sacred history is being used to panic people back into conformity.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> TAUGHT Permanent mobilization framing around Karbala and external threat is delivered from state-aligned pulpits; no document is named for it on this page.

28 · Discard

Removing members who become too costly — too many questions, too much independence, too visible a contradiction.

How it shows here

- A person questioning clerics, mourning culture, or community pressure may be treated as disloyal to the Ahl al-Bayt.
- Criticism of living authority can be recoded as betrayal of Husayn.
- The person who once belonged through grief may be excluded through grief: "How could you abandon this?"

- Family and community may withdraw warmth during rituals where belonging is most emotionally charged.

The strongest defense. Shia communities protect loyalty to sacred truth and memory.

The counter. Loyalty becomes DISCARD when sacred memory is used to exile the living. If questioning a cleric makes someone a traitor to martyrs, then martyrdom has been turned into a gate.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CONTESTED In Iran the consequences are statutory; in diaspora communities they are familial. Treating the two as one would be a misuse of the grade.

Stage 8 · Replace

Your seat is filled before the door shuts, and nobody is responsible for any of it because the authority was attributed to God.

The majlis continues, the mourning continues, the seat is filled. And the authority is the Imam's deputy's, which is God's — a chain that ends somewhere unavailable for questioning.

What it asks of you: Husayn refused an unjust ruler who claimed divine sanction. Ask what has changed except the direction the claim points.

29 · Replacement

Your seat is filled before the door closes behind you.

How it shows here

- A person who questions ritual intensity is replaced by someone more visibly devoted in mourning spaces.
- A critic of clerical authority is displaced by a more loyal voice.
- Families compare a doubting child to another who attends majlis, mourns properly, and follows the community line.
- The community uses faithful mourners as proof that dissenters are deficient.

The strongest defense. Devotion naturally differs; communities honor those who are committed.

The counter. Honor becomes REPLACEMENT when public devotion is used to erase private harm. If the more emotional mourner replaces the more honest questioner, grief has become a loyalty audition.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL Replacing a questioner with a more visibly devoted mourner is community practice; no written rule directs it.

30 · Plausible Deniability

The institution is never responsible, because the authority is attributed to God — who isn't available for cross-examination.

How it shows here

- A cleric or community may pressure loyalty through Karbala, Husayn, and the Ahl al-Bayt, then deny coercion by saying, "It is only love."
- Criticism of living clerics can be treated as betrayal of sacred figures, while leaders deny equating themselves with the Imams.
- Ritual mourning may be socially expected, but refusal is framed as lack of devotion rather than an explicit rule violation.
- Khums, donations, majlis sponsorship, and clerical allegiance may carry social weight, while official language frames them as voluntary devotion.
- Family pressure around gender, marriage, and community loyalty can be dismissed as culture.

The strongest defense. Love for the Ahl al-Bayt is devotional, not coercive. Clerics differ; no one authority represents all Shia. Culture should not be confused with religion.

The counter. Love becomes PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY when sacred grief is used to make refusal feel like betrayal. Decentralized clerical authority can diffuse responsibility while preserving deference. Culture cannot be disowned when religious symbolism gives it emotional force.

EVIDENCE GRADE

CULTURAL Denying coercion as 'only love' or as culture is observed community practice, and no written rule directs it. Velayat-e faqih is constitutional law in Iran, but it is the structure of authority (section 10), not the denial this entry describes.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Count grades, not names. A long list of Contested entries says something very different from a short list of Codified ones. A bias to watch for in yourself: people rate the same pressure as "normal" when their own group applies it and as "manipulation" when another group does. Before you judge an entry, try imagining it applied by a group you distrust. Does it look different?

13

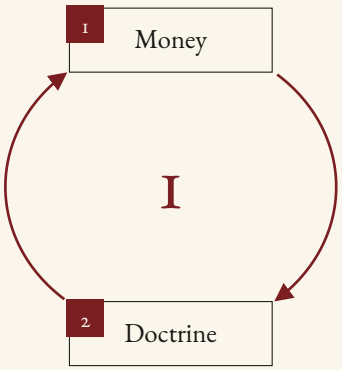
The loops

BEFORE YOU READ

How the techniques connect into cycles. A single practice can look harmless on its own. The loops show how one step feeds the next, so that, for example, a newcomer's welcome turns into an obligation.

> The seven loops below show how the practices connect, so that each step makes the next one easier and the last step feeds the first. The loops are analysis built from findings recorded elsewhere on this page PATTERN OBSERVED; each step names the section or technique where its fact is recorded.

1 · Money to Doctrine to Money



Khums funds the seminaries that train the clerics who teach that khums is owed, to offices that publish nothing.

How it runs.

1. Khums is taught as a religious obligation: a fifth of annual surplus income, half of it (the sahm-e Imam) payable to the marja'"s office as the Imam's deputy (sections 1 and 9).
2. The offices receive it with no audited public accounting required (sections 9 and 14).
3. The money pays seminary stipends, on which thousands of students depend (section 9, khums to clerical network).

4. Those students become the clerics and prayer leaders who depend on the network for stipend and standing, and who are asked to echo the line (section 18).
5. They teach the next generation that khums is owed, and taqlid routes the follower's practical questions back to the same office (sections 11 and 14).

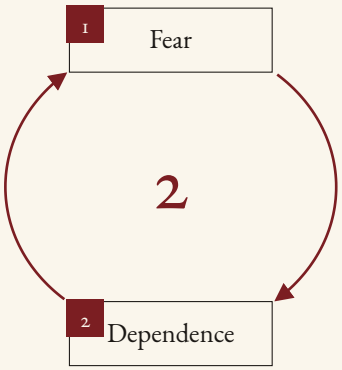
Techniques that feed it. 26 · Financial Control, 2 · Weaponized Generosity, 23 · Infantilization, 18 · Silent Treatment / Stonewalling.

Why it closes. The office that receives the money also funds the training of the people who teach the obligation, and taqlid gives the follower no standing to audit the followed, including on the money (section 14). The payer cannot see where the money goes, and the question is treated as one that is not asked (section 2).

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens wherever accounts are published. Section 14 records that where a marjaʿ's network runs a registered charity abroad, that charity files accounts, and section 8 names charity regulators as the bodies that can compel an answer in the diaspora. Section 20 names published, audited accounts of a marjaʿ's khums office as a change that would revise this page. A payer can ask for accounts before paying. This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. In section 2, Nasrin asks her father whether anyone ever sees where the khums goes, and he says that is not a question one asks.

2 · Fear to Dependence to Fear



Loss of the Imams' intercession is installed as the cost of leaving, relief comes through devotional participation, and parents transmit it.

How it runs.

1. The intercession of the Imams and the future vindication of the oppressed are taught continuously (stage 2; technique 3).
2. Leaving is taught to cost that intercession, with eternal consequence (section 15).
3. Relief comes through devotional participation: the annual mourning cycle delivers catharsis and belonging on the institution's calendar (technique 8).
4. Doubt is framed as betrayal of Husayn and the martyrs, so the fear returns whenever a person questions (techniques 4 and 20).
5. Children are introduced to mourning rituals and grief narratives very young, and the family carries the next generation into the same cycle (section 11; technique 13).

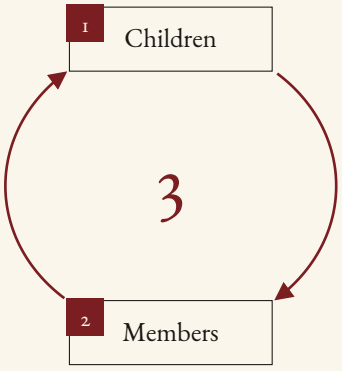
Techniques that feed it. 3 · Future Faking, 8 · Intermittent Reinforcement, 20 · Trauma Bonding, 4 · Hoovering, 13 · Normalization / Desensitization.

Why it closes. The relief on offer comes through the same devotional life that defines the cost of leaving. Each season of mourning answers the fear and renews the bond that makes leaving costly.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens where grief for Husayn is held apart from loyalty to present authority. The tradition supplies that separation itself: Karbala as a template for resisting corrupt power, including clerical power (section 4), and senior clerics who ruled against tatbir despite popular resistance (section 20). This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Technique 8 describes the unhealed child treated as a test, and the family that gives more nazr (votive offering) the next year.

3 · Children to Members to Children



State curriculum, seminary stipends, and school dress rules attach identity before evaluation and make dissent unaffordable.

How it runs.

1. In Iran, school curricula, hijab rules for girls from age 7 in school and ideological instruction are state-mandated (section 11).
2. Mourning rituals introduce children to grief narratives very young, and in some contexts children take part in self-flagellation (section 11).
3. Seminary tracks recruit adolescents into stipend-dependent careers (section 11).
4. The stipends make independence unaffordable, and dissent ends a career (section 18); a cleric or seminarian who leaves loses stipend, housing and status (section 15).
5. Those students become the clerics and prayer leaders who form the next generation (section 18).

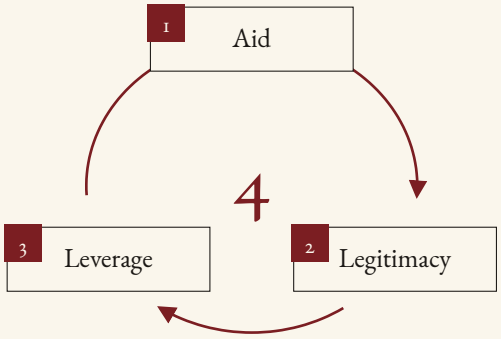
Techniques that feed it. 13 · Normalization / Desensitization, 19 · Manufactured Consent, 23 · Infantilization, 26 · Financial Control.

Why it closes. Identity is attached before the child can evaluate it, and the career it leads to is paid for by the network the career serves. By the time a seminarian can weigh the teaching, leaving costs livelihood and standing at once.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens where schooling is separated from state ideological instruction, and where a seminarian's support does not depend on silence; section 18 names a stipend conditioned on silence as the point where a student could refuse. Senior clerics' rulings against tatbir show that the hierarchy can withdraw a practice that reaches children (section 20). This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Section 18 records seminary students who study on stipends that make independence unaffordable and who see the financial architecture of loyalty from inside it.

4 · Aid to Legitimacy to Leverage to Aid



Transnational welfare networks deliver clinics and schools abroad and convert them into political influence.

How it runs.

1. Transnational religious-social networks provide clinics, schools and welfare in other countries (section 16).
2. The provision converts into political influence over those communities (section 16).
3. In Lebanon, Hezbollah's social network of schools, hospitals and the Al-Qard Al-Hassan lending association delivers real services and binds communities to a party with an armed wing (section 16).
4. At home, bonyads and shrine conglomerates are tax-exempt, answerable to the Supreme Leader rather than parliament, and financed by devotional giving (sections 9 and 16).
5. In Iraq, a 2014 religious call to arms became a state salary line for armed factions, several of them aligned with Iran (section 7).

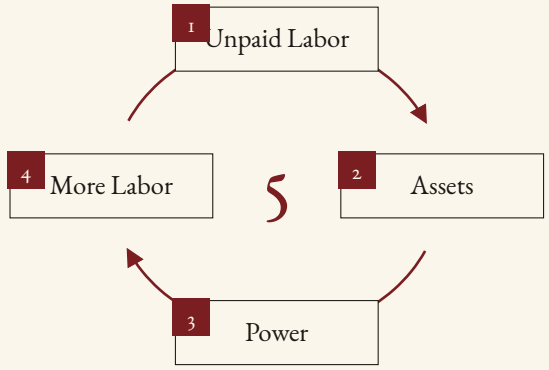
Techniques that feed it. 2 · Weaponized Generosity, 22 · Benevolent Control, 26 · Financial Control, 30 · Plausible Deniability.

Why it closes. The services are real, so the people who receive them have reason to stay loyal to the provider, and that loyalty is the influence the services secure. Each step makes the next easier, and the last step returns to the first.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens where a state or another provider offers the same services, and where regulators act on the channel: the US Treasury designated Al-Qard Al-Hassan in 2007 (section 16), and the UK Charity Commission opened a statutory inquiry into the Supreme Leader's UK office (section 19). This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Section 16 records Hezbollah's schools, hospitals and lending association in Lebanon, which deliver real services and bind communities to a party with an armed wing.

5 · Unpaid Labor to Assets to Power to More Labor



Devotional giving and shrine income build conglomerates that answer to one appointed office.

How it runs.

1. Pilgrims and the devout give at the shrine cities of Karbala, Najaf, Mashhad and Qom, and the donation flows are unaudited (section 9).
2. Astan Quds Razavi, the Imam Reza shrine conglomerate, is one of the largest economic entities in Iran, tax-exempt and outside parliamentary oversight (section 7).
3. Its custodian is appointed, and removable, only by the Supreme Leader (section 7). Setad, the conglomerate under the Leader's office, was valued at about $95 billion in 2013 (section 9).
4. Bonyad and shrine employees administer the accounts and are asked to treat them as charitable (section 18).
5. The shrines draw further pilgrimage and giving; Arbaeen drew about 21 million people in 2025 (section 9).

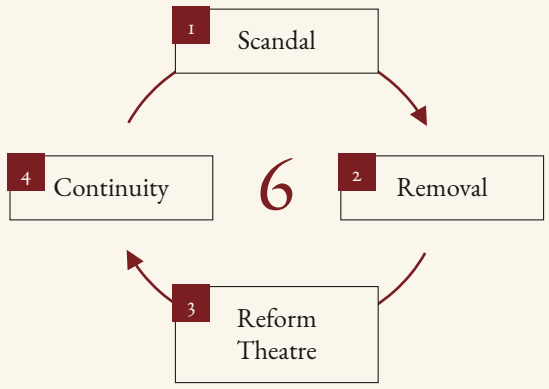
Techniques that feed it. 26 · Financial Control, 18 · Silent Treatment / Stonewalling, 2 · Weaponized Generosity, 30 · Plausible Deniability.

Why it closes. Those who give hold no office that controls the assets, and the one office that does answers to no parliament; section 14 records that the largest economic entities in the country are exempt from the oversight of the parliament the people elect.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. Section 20 names published, independently audited accounts of a major shrine conglomerate as a change that would revise the page's financial findings. That lies with the Supreme Leader, who appoints the custodian; the employees who keep the books are the tier that sees the holdings (section 18). This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Arbaeen drew about 21 million people in 2025 by the shrine authorities' own electronic count, a figure no one independently audits (section 9).

6 · Scandal to Removal to Reform Theatre to Continuity



An enforcement death produces a temporary relaxation, not a change in the enforcement authority.

How it runs.

1. In September 2022 Mahsa Amini, 22, died in the custody of Tehran's morality police after arrest for her hijab (section 19).
2. The largest protest wave in decades followed, including devout Iranians; the state response included mass arrests and deaths, and the UN fact-finding mission found that some violations in the crackdown amounted to crimes against humanity (section 19).
3. Enforcement continued with periodic relaxation (section 19).
4. A harsher hijab law passed and was paused in December 2024, while the existing rules stayed in force (sections 8 and 19).
5. No senior cleric lost office, and the office of the Supreme Leader, the shrine custodianships and the bonyad boards still hold the chair (section 14).

Techniques that feed it. 22 · Benevolent Control, 27 · Manufactured Crisis, 30 · Plausible Deniability, 17 · Smear Campaign.

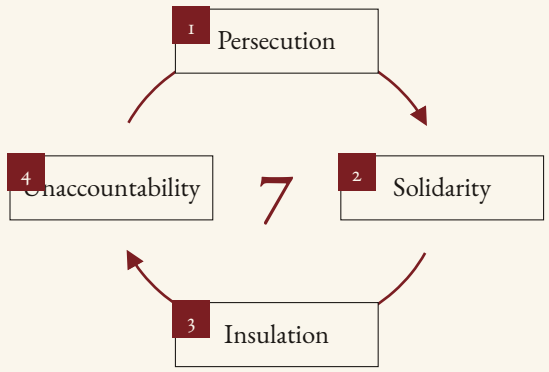
Why it closes. The relaxation answers the protest without reaching the authority that sets the rule. The Leader's own Guardian Council vets the candidates of the only body that could, on paper, remove him (section 7).

Where it could be broken, and by whom. Section 7 names the Assembly of Experts as the only body that could remove the Leader; in thirty-seven years it never has. Outside Iran, UN mechanisms report but have no power to compel (section 22). Section 14 predicts that the next enforcement death will

produce visible leniency, a commission and no change to who holds power. This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Section 14 records it in two sentences: a woman died in the custody of officers enforcing a religious rule, and no senior cleric lost office.

7 · Persecution to Solidarity to Insulation to Unaccountability



Real persecution of Shia populations elsewhere is invoked to reframe Iranian protesters as foreign agents.

How it runs.

1. The persecution of Shia is real and current, from the killing of Hazara in Balochistan to the torture of Bahraini protesters found by the state's own 2011 inquiry (sections 3, 16 and 19).
2. Criticism of clerical rule is framed as serving foreign enemies (section 11).
3. Critics inside the community are told they are aiding enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt (techniques 6, 12 and 17).
4. The devout protester is recast as a Western agent (stage 4), and the state's punishments are described as "national security matters" (section 3).
5. Findings against the institution are received as hostility, and nothing changes inside.

Techniques that feed it. 17 · Smear Campaign, 11 · Projection, 12 · DARVO, 27 · Manufactured Crisis, 14 · Isolation.

Why it closes. The more criticism arrives, the more it can be read as proof of a hostility the community already knows is real. Each finding strengthens the solidarity that protects the institution from the finding.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. Section 3 gives the answer the loop cannot absorb: the critique on this page is the Najaf critique, and the protesters were Iranian, many of them devout. It weakens when internal dissent is heard as religious, as with the Najaf rejection of clerical rule and

Kadivar's critique from inside Shia jurisprudence (sections 20 and 21). This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Mohsen Kadivar, a mujtahid (a jurist qualified to derive rulings) who wrote a theological critique of rule by the jurist, was convicted by the Special Court for the Clergy and served about 17 months in Evin Prison (section 19).

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The loops explain why good people stay in arrangements they would never sign up for from scratch. The more you have already put in, the harder it is to walk away. Researchers call this the sunk-cost effect (Arkes & Blumer, 1985), and it works on time, money and relationships alike. Ask yourself: if you were starting today, knowing what you know, would you join?

The seven loops below show how the practices connect, so that each step makes the next one easier and the last step feeds the first.

14 Say versus do

BEFORE YOU READ

Direct, checkable comparisons: a public statement on one side, the documented record on the other, and the receipt that links them. This is the most falsifiable section on the page, because each row either matches its source or it doesn't.

What they say, what the record shows

THEY SAY	THE RECORD SHOWS	RECEIPT
Karbala teaches resistance to unjust rulers.	The commemoration is administered by the ruler, and used to mobilize for state projects.	ACADEMIC SOURCE
Clerical rule protects the people from corruption.	The largest economic entities in the country are exempt from the oversight of the parliament the people elect.	ACADEMIC SOURCE
Hijab is a matter of faith and dignity.	It is enforced by police, and a young woman died in their custody.	GOVERNMENT REPORT

This is simply Shia Islam.	Najaf, the tradition's senior center, rejects clerical rule outright.	ACADEMIC SOURCE

Accountability or theatre?

Last time the chair ran. A woman died in the custody of officers enforcing a religious rule. No senior cleric lost office.

Who holds the chair now. The office of the Supreme Leader, the shrine custodianships and the bonyad boards hold it.

Prediction. The next enforcement death will produce a period of visible leniency, a commission, and no change to who holds the power.

Words used here

TERM	WHAT IT MEANS INSIDE	WHAT IT DOES	SAID PLAINLY
Taqlid	It means following a qualified jurist in matters of practice.	It is a coherent and scholarly system. Its accountability property is that the follower has no standing to audit the followed, including on the money.	'You defer, and deference does not come with a right to ask.'
Khums	It is the obligatory fifth, half of which goes to the marjaʿ's office.	It is a religious obligation with no audited public accounts required anywhere in the system. Where a marjaʿ's network runs a registered charity abroad, that charity files accounts — proof the audit is possible.	'A fifth of your surplus, and no receipt.'

A woman died in the custody of officers enforcing a religious rule.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Test one row yourself. Pick a "they say" line you have actually heard said in person, then read the receipt. If the record matches the statement, this page is wrong about that row, and you should tell us. If it doesn't, what does it mean that you had never seen the receipt?

15 Cost & cover

BEFORE YOU READ

What leaving actually costs here, in family, work, housing, money and legal status, and how each of those costs is officially denied. Where the cost is low, the page says so plainly.

What leaving costs

- In Iran, the state apparatus enforces religious compliance through morality policing and exposure to apostasy and blasphemy charges.
  GOVERNMENT REPORT · UN human rights reporting
- Diaspora and communal costs mirror Sunni patterns, and leaving devotional culture reads as betraying Husayn and the family's dead.

The ledger of exit

COST	DOCUMENTED?	DETAIL	THE USUAL DENIAL
State punishment (Iran)	Yes	The state uses morality policing, exposure to apostasy charges and the imprisonment of critics.	These are national security matters.
Family and community	Yes	Devotional culture is family-centered; leaving reads as betraying the martyrs	Nobody forces belief in Shiism.
Livelihood	Yes for clerics and seminarians	Clerics and seminarians lose stipend, housing and status.	They chose another path.
Spiritual threat	Yes	Leaving means the loss of the Imams' intercession, with eternal consequence.	A statement of doctrine, not a threat.

How the cost is denied

CHANNEL	LEVEL	NOTE
Explicit policy	Low	In Iran the control is constitutional and statutory — the receipts are published law.
Informal enforcement	Medium	Outside Iran, family and community devotion carries the enforcement.
Leadership distance	Medium	Marja‘ offices can disclaim the state; the state can disclaim any single marja‘.
Doctrinal ambiguity	Medium	Quietist versus activist readings let each disown the other's consequences.
Cultural outsourcing	Medium	Enforcement is attributed to Iranian culture or to security policy rather than religion.
Volunteer enforcement	High	Basij-style (after Iran's volunteer militia) volunteer enforcement and family policing are structural features.
Sacred secrecy	Medium	Clerical courts and shrine finances operate without public disclosure.
Exit cost denial	Medium	Officially belief is free; the penal code and the morality police are the correction.

In Iran, the state apparatus enforces religious compliance through morality policing and exposure to apostasy and blasphemy charges.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

In Iran, the state itself enforces religious compliance. Elsewhere the cost is emotional as well as social: the page notes that stepping back from devotional culture can feel like betraying Husayn and the family dead. That is a powerful bond. Could someone in your family keep mourning Husayn and still question the clerics who claim to speak for him?

16 The ledger

BEFORE YOU READ

The balance sheet. It shows who benefits, who pays, and what leverage flows back to the institution in return for what it gives.

Who benefits

- The Iranian state and its clerical-security elite benefit, with religion as constitution, bonyads as off-budget wealth and the martyrdom narrative as mobilization fuel. **ACADEMIC SOURCE / INVESTIGATIVE REPORT**
- Marja‘ offices benefit, collecting khums, and their networks pass on by hereditary-adjacent succession.
- Ritual economies around mourning seasons and shrine cities benefit.

Money out, leverage back

- Iranian bonyads and shrine conglomerates — including one of the largest economic entities in the country — are tax-exempt, answerable to the Supreme Leader rather than parliament, and financed by devotional giving. Religion is the balance sheet. **ACADEMIC SOURCE / INVESTIGATIVE REPORT**
- Transnational religious-social networks provide clinics, schools, and welfare in other countries, and the provision converts into political influence over those communities. Aid that arrives with an ideology attached is not neutral aid. **ACADEMIC SOURCE**
- Shrine city pilgrimage economies — Karbala, Najaf, Mashhad, Qom — move large donation flows through administrations appointed from above, and no published accounts of those flows are cited on this page.
- In Lebanon, Hezbollah's social network — schools, hospitals, and the Al-Qard Al-Hassan lending association, designated by the US Treasury in 2007 — delivers real services and binds communities to a party with an armed wing. **REGULATORY FILING** · US Treasury designation

Who pays

- Iranian women pay, under compulsory dress and unequal personal-status law.

- Protesters and dissenters pay, including devout ones, who have been killed and imprisoned since 2017. GOVERNMENT REPORT
- Bahá'ís, Sunnis and other minorities in Iran pay, facing systematic discrimination.
- LGBTQ Iranians pay, under capital statutes.
- Ordinary payers of khums pay, funding offices they cannot audit.
- Shia minorities elsewhere pay: the Hazara in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Shia citizens of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province and of Bahrain, where the state's own 2011 Independent Commission of Inquiry documented torture and mass dismissals of protesters. GOVERNMENT REPORT

Sources for this section: 5 10 11

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Find yourself in this table. Are you among those who benefit, those who pay, or both? Most readers are both. The question is whether the exchange was ever explained to you in these terms, and whether you would agree to it if it had been.

17 Who gets hurt most

BEFORE YOU READ

Where the weight lands hardest, and what it compounds with: poverty, childhood, gender, a lack of civil alternatives. This is the human stakes stated plainly.

Where the weight lands

The costs in section 15 do not fall evenly. They fall hardest where religious law is state law, and on those with the least power inside the community and the fewest places to go outside it. The table names who carries the most, how, and what makes it worse.

WHO	HOW	WHAT IT COMPOUNDS WITH
Iranian women	Dress is compulsory and enforced by police, and their testimony, inheritance, custody and travel rights are unequal.	It compounds with imprisonment for protesting it.
Protesters, including devout ones	They have been killed and imprisoned since 2017.	It compounds when their families are prosecuted for speaking.

Bahá'ís, Sunnis, and other minorities in Iran	They are systematically excluded from education, employment and legal protection.	It compounds with the lack of any domestic recourse.
LGBTQ Iranians	They face capital statutes.	It compounds when families report them.
Ordinary khums payers	They pay a fifth of surplus income to offices that publish no audited accounts.	It compounds where asking is treated as impertinence.
Girls in the Dawoodi Bohra community	Khatna (female genital cutting) has been examined in criminal courts, in the first US federal FGM prosecution (Detroit, 2017), whose FGM counts were dismissed in November 2018 when the 1996 federal law was ruled unconstitutional (Congress replaced it in 2021) and whose remaining charges were dismissed in September 2021 [43] [44] [45], and in Australia's first FGM prosecution (convictions in 2015, quashed on appeal in 2018; the High Court allowed the Crown's appeals and clarified the law in 2019; retrials were ordered in 2020, and the Crown then abandoned the case) [46] [47] [48].	It compounds with social boycott, available against families who refuse; Maharashtra outlawed social boycott generally by an Act dated 2016 that received assent in 2017 [7].

Sources for this section: [7] [43] [44] [45] [46] [47] [48]

The table names who carries the most, how, and what makes it worse.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The table names Iranian women under compulsory dress, with unequal testimony, inheritance, custody and travel rights; protesters, many of them devout, killed and imprisoned since 2017, and their families prosecuted for speaking; and Bahá'ís, Sunnis and other minorities in Iran. If you are outside Iran, what do you owe the believers inside who are paying this price?

18 The middle tiers

BEFORE YOU READ

The people in the middle: local clergy, teachers, officials and volunteers who apply rules they did not write. The section exists so that an institution is not collapsed into a monolith, and so that people in the middle can see their own position in it.

Most of the tradition's daily work is done below the marjaʿ and the Leader, by people who see decisions without making them. Neighborhood clerics, seminary students, majlis organizers and the employees of the bonyads and shrines each carry part of the load, and each stands at one point where the next request could be declined. The table sets out what each tier does, what it sees, what it is asked to do and where it could refuse.

ROLE	DOES	SEES	IS ASKED TO	COULD REFUSE
Neighborhood clerics and prayer leaders	Serve the community and depend on the network for stipend and standing	That dissent ends a career	Echo the line	Deliver a political sermon
Seminary students	Study on stipends that make independence unaffordable	The financial architecture of loyalty from inside it	Wait their turn	Accept a stipend conditioned on silence

Majlis organizers and mourning-ritual hosts	Run the devotional life that carries the whole community	When grief is being harvested for mobilization	Host the approved speaker	Hand the microphone to a state recruiter at a mourning gathering
Bonyad and shrine employees	Administer the accounts	The holdings	Treat them as charitable	Keep books they know will never be published

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

If you are a local leader, a teacher or a volunteer, this section is about you. It is not an accusation: most of the people who carry out a rule did not write it. But the middle tier is also where a rule is most often quietly softened, or quietly enforced. Which do you do, and what would happen to you if you chose differently?

19 Documented cases

BEFORE YOU READ

Named, dated, sourced incidents: court records, government inquiries, regulators' findings and on-the-record reporting. Read the outcome lines in particular. They show what actually changed, if anything.

The death in custody (Iran, 2022–2024)

WHEN: 2022–2024

WHAT: Mahsa Amini, 22, died in the custody of Tehran's morality police in September 2022 after arrest for her hijab. The UN's independent fact-finding mission found her death unlawful and the state responsible, and found some violations in the crackdown on the protests that followed amounted to crimes against humanity [9].

RECORD: UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran (March 2024) [9]

OUTCOME: A harsher hijab law passed and was then paused in December 2024 [24]. Enforcement continued with periodic relaxation, and no senior cleric lost office.

TACTICS: 30 · Plausible Deniability, 17 · Smear Campaign, 22 · Benevolent Control, 27 · Manufactured Crisis

GRADE: DOCUMENTED

The state's own inquiry (Bahrain, 2011)

WHEN: 2011

WHAT: After mainly Shia protests, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry — set up by the king — found systematic mistreatment of detainees amounting to torture, and mass dismissals of workers [10].

RECORD: *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (23 Nov 2011) [10]

OUTCOME: A rare case of a state publishing findings against itself; the report's own recommendations measure what followed [10].

TACTICS: —

GRADE: DOCUMENTED

The cleric jailed for his writing (Iran, 1999–2000)

WHEN: 1999–2000

WHAT: Mohsen Kadivar, a mujtahid who wrote a theological critique of rule by the jurist, was convicted by the Special Court for the Clergy and served about 17 months in Evin Prison [30].

RECORD: Special Court for the Clergy (April 1999) [30]

OUTCOME: He left Iran and became a professor of Islamic studies in the United States [30].

TACTICS: 17 · Smear Campaign, 18 · Silent Treatment / Stonewalling, 6 · Gaslighting

GRADE: DOCUMENTED

The Leader's UK office and the charity regulator (United Kingdom, 2022–2025)

WHEN: 2022–2025

WHAT: The Charity Commission opened a statutory inquiry into the Islamic Centre of England — the Supreme Leader's representative office in the UK — after its trustees failed to comply with an earlier warning, and in May 2023 appointed an interim manager to run the charity in place of its trustees [27] [40].

RECORD: Charity Commission statutory inquiry (opened Nov 2022) [27]; interim manager appointed 4 May 2023 [40]; section 84 order, 16 May 2025 [41]

OUTCOME: The mosque closed in May 2023 over insurance and reopened at the end of July 2023 [42]. In May 2025 the Commission ordered governance reforms and discharged the interim manager; the inquiry remains open [41].

TACTICS: 26 · Financial Control, 30 · Plausible Deniability

GRADE: DOCUMENTED

Sources for this section: 9 10 24 27 30 40 41 42

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

These are not hypotheticals. Four documented cases on this page rest on a named record. The most common reaction to documented cases is "that was them, not us." Before settling on that, read the outcome lines. Did anything change in the structure that allowed each case to happen, or did one person leave while the structure stayed?

20 Precedent

BEFORE YOU READ

What has already been broken once, somewhere, and what would count as real change here. It is a benchmark, not a prediction.

It has been broken before

WHAT	WHO	WHEN	WHAT IT COST
The Najaf quietist rejection of clerical rule	Senior marjaʿiyya	Sustained	It has cost political marginalization in Iran.
Rulings by senior clerics — including a 1994 fatwa by Ayatollah Khamenei and rulings by Grand Ayatollah Fadlallah — prohibiting or discouraging tatbir (blade self-cutting)	Marjaʿ rulings	1990s onward	The rulings have met popular resistance.
Mass protest by believers against clerical governance	Iranians, many of them devout	2017–present	It has cost deaths, imprisonment and exile.

What would change this page

Published, independently audited accounts of a major shrine conglomerate or a marja''s khums office would revise the financial-opacity findings overnight.

Sources for this section: [18]

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Some rows here record a change that has already happened somewhere; others name what would count as change here. When you are told something "can't change", it is fair to ask: can't, or won't? And who decided?

21 Voices from inside

BEFORE YOU READ

People from inside Shia Islam who raised the hard question publicly, often at real cost. They answer the objection that criticism only ever comes from outsiders.

- **Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri.** He was Khomeini's designated successor, and in 1988 he condemned the execution of thousands of prisoners; he lost the succession and was later under house arrest from 1997 to 2003 [29].
- **Mohsen Kadivar.** He is a mujtahid whose critique of *velayat-e faqih* is written from inside Shia jurisprudence, and he was jailed for it [30].
- **Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.** He is the quietist marjaʿ, holds no state office, and condemned the killing of Iraqi protesters in 2019 [19].
- **Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah.** He was a senior Lebanese marjaʿ who opposed tatbir, the blade rituals of Ashura [18].
- **Narges Mohammadi.** She is an Iranian human-rights defender who has been imprisoned, and she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2023 [21]. She was re-arrested in December 2025 and sentenced in February 2026 to a further seven and a half years in prison, a verdict that can be appealed [49].

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Were these people traitors, or the most loyal members their tradition had? Most were treated as the first at the time, and some are honored as the second now. If someone in your community raised one of these questions tomorrow, how would they be treated, and by you?

22 Regional variants

BEFORE YOU READ

The same tradition under different governments. What a member can say, leave, marry or inherit depends heavily on the state, and these cards show how differently it plays out.

Iran

APEX: The Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei since March 2026, is chosen by the Assembly of Experts [1][2][3].

LAW: Leaving Islam can carry the death penalty [37], hijab is compulsory [24], and same-sex acts are punishable by death [12].

DOCUMENTED: The record includes the UN fact-finding mission on the 2022 crackdown [9] and Setad's holdings [14].

EXIT: Leaving carries the highest legal risk for Shia on this page.

REGULATOR: There is no independent regulator; UN mechanisms report [9].

TELL: It is the only state on earth where the answer to "who holds the top clerical office?" is also the answer to "who commands the army?" [1].

Iraq

APEX: There are two poles: the Najaf marjaʿiyya, outside the state, and the parties and armed factions inside it [4][19].

LAW: A 2025 amendment lets Shia families choose a Jaʿfari personal-status code [8][13]; the PMF was made a state body by law in 2016 [4].

DOCUMENTED: Sistani's sermons helped bring down a government in 2019 [19]; HRW on the 2025 code [13].

EXIT: Leaving brings family and community costs; Shia families may now opt into a Jaʿfari family code [8][13].

REGULATOR: Iraq's courts regulate; the Najaf authorities hold moral, not legal, power [19].

TELL: The most powerful Shia voice in Iraq holds no office and cannot be removed — and that is exactly why his word carries.

Lebanon

APEX: Sect-based religious councils lead, and Ja'fari courts decide Shia personal status [25].

LAW: There is no civil marriage; each sect's courts decide marriage, divorce and custody [25]; the Ja'fari courts have no clear minimum marriage age [26].

DOCUMENTED: Human Rights Watch has documented discrimination in all of Lebanon's religious personal-status systems [25].

EXIT: To marry outside the system, couples marry abroad.

REGULATOR: The religious courts regulate themselves [25].

TELL: A state that assigns every citizen a sect and a sect's court: the exit from religious law is a plane ticket.

Bahrain

APEX: A Sunni monarchy rules over a Shia-majority population [10].

LAW: —

DOCUMENTED: The 2011 independent inquiry found torture [10].

EXIT: Not a religious-law question here; the cost of dissent is political [10].

REGULATOR: The inquiry itself was the regulator's work, commissioned by the king [10].

TELL: A government commissioned an inquiry that found against it. That is the precedent; what happened next is the test.

Pakistan

APEX: Community clerics and trusts lead; there is no state religious office for Shia.

LAW: Blasphemy and sectarian-hatred laws apply to all Muslims.

DOCUMENTED: The record documents the killing of Hazara Shia in Balochistan [11].

EXIT: —

REGULATOR: The police and courts are the regulators, and their failure to protect is the finding [11].

TELL: Most of the harm on this card is done to Shia, not by their institutions.

United Kingdom

APEX: Independent mosques and foundations lead; the Islamic Centre of England, the Supreme Leader's representative office, is a registered charity whose governing document required one trustee to be his UK representative until the Charity Commission removed that requirement in 2025 [27] [41].

LAW: Charity law applies to religious charities [27].

DOCUMENTED: The Charity Commission appointed an interim manager to the Islamic Centre of England in place of its trustees in May 2023, and ordered governance reforms in May 2025 [27] [40] [41].

EXIT: Leaving is legally free, and support services exist [33] [34].

REGULATOR: The Charity Commission is the regulator [27].

TELL: It is the only jurisdiction on this page where a regulator took the Leader's own office out of its trustees' hands, because it was a charity.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

This page covers Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, Pakistan and the United Kingdom. Your country changes what this tradition can do to you, and what you can do about it. If you live somewhere not listed, ask which of these cards your country most resembles. If you are a voter, note that each of these arrangements was chosen by a government.

23 The questions

BEFORE YOU READ

The six questions the documented record could not resolve. Each is set out below: why it is being asked, and a concrete example already on this page that it points back to.

QUESTION 1 OF 6

You pay a fifth of your surplus income to an office. Ask for the accounts. Then ask why the request itself is treated as impertinent.

WHY THIS IS ASKED

A sacred obligation paid to an office, with no required audit, rests entirely on trust. The question asks for the accounts, and notices how the request is received.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The money section records that khums is a 20% levy on annual surplus income, half of which goes to the marja‘'s office, and that "no audited public accounting is required."

QUESTION 2 OF 6

Husayn died refusing an unjust ruler. Explain how a system in which the ruler is the chief jurist is not the thing he refused.

WHY THIS IS ASKED

Karbala is the tradition's central story of refusing an unjust ruler. The question asks whether a state in which the ruler is also the chief jurist has become the thing Husayn refused.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The say-do table sets "Karbala teaches resistance to unjust rulers" beside the record: the commemoration is administered by the ruler and used to mobilize for state projects.

QUESTION 3 OF 6

If clerical rule is Islam, why does Najaf — the tradition's senior center — reject it?

WHY THIS IS ASKED

If the tradition's own senior center rejects clerical rule, then clerical rule is one contested theory, not the faith itself. The question uses the tradition's internal disagreement as evidence.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The history section records that Khomeini's velayat-e faqih was "a scholarly theory contested by many senior clerics, including quietists in Najaf," before it was written into a constitution.

QUESTION 4 OF 6

A woman died in the custody of officers enforcing a religious rule. Which cleric lost his position over it?

WHY THIS IS ASKED

If a death in custody while enforcing a religious rule costs no cleric his position, the rule is being enforced without accountability. The question asks who, if anyone, was held responsible.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The cases section records that Mahsa Amini, 22, died in the custody of Tehran's morality police in September 2022, and that the UN's independent fact-finding mission found her death unlawful and the state responsible.

QUESTION 5 OF 6

Why are the largest economic entities in a religious state exempt from the parliament its citizens elect?

WHY THIS IS ASKED

In a system where citizens elect a parliament, the biggest economic actors being exempt from it shows where power actually sits. The question asks who decided that.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The structure table records that Astan Quds Razavi, the Imam Reza shrine conglomerate, has a custodian appointed by the Supreme Leader, and is "tax-exempt and outside parliamentary oversight."

QUESTION 6 OF 6

You were taught that internal criticism serves foreign powers. Notice that this is the exact argument Yazid's court (the court of the Umayyad caliph whose forces killed Husayn) would have made.

WHY THIS IS ASKED

The question turns the tradition's own history against the silencing argument. The court of Yazid also called dissent a service to the enemy.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The forefront section notes that the critique on this page is the Najaf critique, and that the protesters were Iranian, many of them devout. The cases section records Mohsen Kadivar, a mujtahid who served about 17 months after the Special Court for the Clergy convicted him for his theological writing.

In closing

No tradition in this codex has a better internal weapon than yours. Karbala is not a story about obedience; it is a story about a man who looked at overwhelming religious-political authority and said no, and lost, and was right. That is your inheritance, and it does not belong to the government.

You can weep every Muharram and refuse every man who monetizes it. In fact, if the story means anything, that is what it requires.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Choose one question and ask it this month, out loud, to a real person who could answer it. Then write down what happened. Were you answered, redirected, or told that asking was the problem? Whichever it was, the response is information.

24 Leaving safely here

BEFORE YOU READ

Practical, non-theological guidance for someone who needs to step back or step away safely. It is a safety document, not an argument.

Practical guidance, not legal advice.

1. **Where you are decides the risk.** In Iran leaving Islam can carry the death penalty [37]; in the UK it is legally free [33].

2. **Do not announce, especially online, in Iran.** A cleric was convicted for what he wrote [30], and the UN fact-finding mission found crimes against humanity among the violations in the 2022 crackdown on protesters [9].
3. **Know your family-law exposure.** In Lebanon, marriage, divorce and custody are decided by each sect's religious courts [25]; in Iraq, Shia families may opt into a Ja'fari code [13].
4. **Secure documents and money** in your own name before any disclosure.
5. **If honour or forced marriage is invoked,** use specialist services [31] [38].
6. **Find your people quietly.** Use vetted ex-Muslim communities, or Muslim peer helplines if you are staying [34] [36].

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Even if this section is not for you, it may be for someone you know. Most people who leave a high-demand community say that the first person who listened without trying to argue them back mattered more than anything else. Could that person be you?

25 Where to get help

BEFORE YOU READ

Organizations that can help, each checked directly against its own site, with the date of the check. Nothing here is endorsed beyond that check.

Checked 2026-09-27. Services change; check the organization's own site.

ORGANIZATION	FOR	WHERE	CONTACT
Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI)	Shelters for women at risk of honour killing and violence	Iraq	Via website [31]
Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO)	Death-penalty cases; human-rights defenders	Iran (based in Oslo)	Via website [32]
Faith to Faithless (Humanists UK)	People leaving high-control religion	UK	**0800 448 0748** (freephone; Monday 10:00–13:00, Wednesday 10:00–13:00, Thursday 16:00–19:00 UK time) [33]
Ex-Muslims of North America	Local affiliate support groups (listed on its site); emergency fund	US, Canada	Online application [34]

Humanists International — Humanists at Risk	People facing prosecution for apostasy or blasphemy	Global	Casework [35]
Naseeha	Muslim peer mental-health helpline	North America	**1-866-627-3342**, 24/7 [36]
Karma Nirvana	Honour-based abuse, forced marriage	UK	**0800 5999 247** (Mon–Fri 9am–5pm) [38]

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Save one contact now, before anyone needs it: **Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI)** (shelters for women at risk of honour killing and violence; Iraq). People in crisis rarely have the energy to research options. Having a name ready is one of the most useful things you can do for someone else.



26

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BEFORE YOU READ

Every numbered citation on this page, with a named, checkable source. Spot-check a few before trusting the rest; that is the honest way to read any page in this book, including this one.

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WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Don't take this page's word for anything either. People tend to believe a claim more the more often they have heard it, whether or not it is true; this is the "illusory truth effect" (Hasher, Goldstein & Toppino, 1977). Spot-check three citations at random. If any fails, tell us, and it will be corrected and logged.

27 What changed on this page

BEFORE YOU READ

A dated log of what changed on this page: corrections, additions and new sources. Changes are logged in public rather than made quietly.

- **2026-10-03:** Corrected the account of the Islamic Centre of England (the Charity Commission appointed an interim manager rather than removing the trustees, the mosque reopened, and the inquiry is still open); gave sourced, correct accounts of the two female genital cutting prosecutions; changed the khums claims to match the source; regraded eight techniques and recounted the grades; named the second apex of authority in the first table; corrected the Iraq family-law and pilgrimage statements; added Narges Mohammadi's 2026 sentence, the 2026 Arbaeen figure and the Faith to Faithless number; merged a duplicated case and removed claims the sources did not support.
- **2026-09-27:** Checked against the sources and corrected: the Supreme Leader is Mojtaba Khamenei, chosen in March 2026 after his father was killed; population corrected to 200–260 million; Iraq's 2025 Jaʿfari code added.
- **2026-09-27:** Added Branches, Law & state, Money in numbers, three new documented cases, Voices from inside, six regional cards, Leaving safely and Where to get help.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

This page keeps a public log of its own changes, mistakes included. Does the institution you belong to, give to, or were raised in keep one like it? If not, how would you know what it got wrong, and when?

Colophon

Set in EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License), regular, italic and bold, with true small capitals and old-style figures in text and lining tabular figures in tables. Laid out with Paged.js in Chromium from the same Markdown that feeds the website. US Letter, single-sided, tagged for accessibility and checked against PDF/UA-1 with veraPDF. Built 2026-10-27. Text checked 2026-10-03.

Palette: ink, oxblood, gold, cream, rule. Seven type sizes. Rules of 0.4 pt and 2 pt only.