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Jurisprudential-Political Analysis and Critique of the Relationship between the People and Leadership in the Political Thought of Martyr Muhammad Baqir Sadr

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Scientific Research Article history: Received: 2026-02-17 Received in revised form: 2026-05-05 Accepted : 2026-05-10 Available online: 2026-10-24 Keywords: Islamic government, Sadr, political jurisprudence, role of the people.	Objective: This study aims to analyze and critique the views of Martyr Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr concerning the role of the people in Islamic government and, in light of the need to reconsider the relationship between religion and the state, to elucidate the theoretical dimensions of his thought. Research Method: Employing a descriptive-analytical method and a critical approach, this study first examines Sadr's four foundational principles: "Human freedom from non-divine sovereignty, the general caliphate of the people, the central role of the people in establishing government and supervising the ruler, and the permanent obligation of consultation." It then critically evaluates his views by focusing on his key works, particularly caliphate of Man and Testimony of the Prophets. Findings: The findings indicate that two central propositions, "The universality of the right of caliphate for all and the Qur'anic indication of the ruler's obligation to consult with the people, "face challenges from the perspective of intra-religious foundations and criteria of argumentation and are therefore open to debate. Conclusion: Through a systematic and reasoned critique, this study contributes to addressing some of the gaps in theoretical studies of political jurisprudence and provides a useful basis for further developing discussions concerning the relationship between the people and structures of governance in Islamic political thought.

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Introduction

Government constitutes a fundamental requirement for every society. Throughout human history, this necessity has been widely acknowledged, resulting in the emergence of diverse governmental forms globally. These have included both religious and secular systems. A persistent challenge for governments has been to define the respective roles of the people and leaders, as well as the nature of their relationship. In the context of Shi'i Islam, the onset of the Occultation, the proliferation of various Islamic governments, and the global rise of democratic systems have prompted inquiry into the roles Islam assigns to the people and the ruler. Numerous Muslim scholars, especially in the contemporary era, have addressed this issue. Among these, Martyr Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr stands out for articulating foundational perspectives on the subject, though his views are dispersed across his works. This study aims to systematically organize and critically assess these foundations as presented in Sadr's writings.

Significance: The question of the role of the people and government represents a foundational concern shaping policy orientations and the operation of political systems. Analyzing this issue through the lens of Martyr Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr is particularly significant, given his innovative contributions to jurisprudence and theology, which have introduced new directions in Islamic political thought. A critical examination of Sadr's perspectives enhances understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the Islamic Republic and offers a basis for evaluating and potentially reforming its governance structures.

Historical tensions regarding the respective roles of the people and rulers have prompted many political systems to adopt secular approaches in pursuit of popular governance. In contrast, the Islamic Revolution of Iran demonstrated the feasibility of establishing a model, termed the "Islamic Republic," that integrates religious principles with recognition of the people's role in political decision-making. This model, distinct from both monarchical systems and Western democracies, necessitated a rigorous theoretical foundation. In "A Preliminary Jurisprudential Note on the Draft Constitution of the Islamic Republic," Sadr endeavored to articulate such a framework. Analyzing this framework is therefore crucial for comprehending the intellectual foundations of the Islamic Republic.

From this perspective, the significance of the present article can be explained through several fundamental dimensions:

- 1) Providing a more comprehensive understanding of Sadr's political theory and its potential in the field of religious democracy;
- 2) Critically analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of this theory in relation to the governance structure of the Islamic Republic;
- 3) Addressing an existing research gap, since no independent and systematic

study has thus far been conducted in this area;

- 4) Contributing to the advancement of theoretical discussions concerning the relationship among religion, popular government, and governance in contemporary Iran.

Accordingly, this article holds value not only for the field of Islamic political thought but also for advancing understanding of the theoretical foundations of the Islamic Republic and fostering the discourse on religious governance may have significant theoretical consequences. Martyr Sadr's political thought possesses considerable potential for elucidating the framework of the Islamic Republic; however, in the absence of precise and systematic analysis, these capacities may remain overlooked, while the theory of religious democracy may become vulnerable to superficial or distorted interpretations. Neglecting these theoretical foundations can create the conditions for the emergence of two extreme approaches: either a tendency toward authoritarian interpretations that marginalize the role of the people, or a tendency toward views that reduce religion to a symbolic level within the political system.

From a practical perspective, failure to address this issue also has significant consequences. In the absence of such research, the political system of the Islamic Republic may remain unable to draw adequately upon Sadr's theoretical legacy in responding to contemporary challenges, and policymakers may be unable to make appropriate use of this intellectual heritage. Furthermore, the lack of a critical examination of Sadr's thought may perpetuate stereotypical perspectives on the Islamic Republic and limit opportunities for reform and reconsideration in the field of governance. Likewise, the absence of a reasoned and coherent articulation of the theory of religious democracy may weaken the capacity for scholarly defense of the Islamic Republic model at the international level and reduce the possibility of presenting it as an alternative model to secular or monarchical systems.

Accordingly, the present study is of considerable importance. A careful examination of Martyr Sadr's thought can both enrich theoretical discussions in the field of religious democracy and contribute to strengthening the foundations of governance in the Islamic Republic. In this way, the study not only addresses the existing scholarly gap but also creates an opportunity to establish a connection between Islamic political theory and the evolving needs of contemporary society.

Research Objective: The present study seeks to inductively identify and formulate Martyr Sadr's views concerning the role of the people and the leader in Islamic government and subsequently subject these views to critical examination.

Research Question and Hypothesis: This is an exploratory study and, therefore, does not involve hypothesis testing. The main research question is: 'What

are the principal roles of the people and the leader in Islamic government?’ The subsidiary questions are: ‘What scriptural evidence does Martyr Sadr provide for establishing the role of the people in religious government?’ ‘What is the scope of the leader’s authority in religious government?’ ‘What rational and/or transmitted evidence, according to his own statements, supports his position?’

Research Method: This study employs a library-based research method and is based on Martyr Sadr’s writings. Particular emphasis is placed on his two works, “The Caliphate of Man” and “The Testimony of the Prophets.”

1. Literature Review

Research related to the political foundations of Martyr Sadr’s thought can be divided into two groups.

Studies published in other journals concerning Martyr Sadr’s political views can likewise be classified into two categories:

1.1. Comparative Studies

Mousavi and Doroudi (2012 AD/1391 SH) compared the position of the people in the thought of Martyr Sadr and Imam Khomeini. Shahrokhi (2011 AD/2011 AD/1390 SH) likewise conducted a comparative study of the thought of Martyr Sadr and the Supreme Leader on the same subject.

1.2. Independent Studies

Pour Masoud (2008 AD/1387 SH) wrote an article examining the foundations of Martyr Sadr’s political thought in general.

Unlike the first group of studies, the present research does not seek to conduct a comparative analysis; rather, it offers an independent and critical examination of Martyr Sadr’s thought concerning the issue addressed in this article. Furthermore, the studies in the first group focus exclusively on the role of the people, whereas the present article also examines Martyr Sadr’s views concerning the role of the leader. The article belonging to the second group examines Martyr Sadr’s political thought in its entirety and in general terms; by contrast, the present article focuses specifically on the roles of the people and the leader in government.

2. Conceptual Foundations

The concept of “Government” is linguistically derived from the root (*h-k-m*), which originally referred to judging, settling disputes, and restraining individuals from committing injustice (Shartūnī, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 1, 698). Early sources explicitly state that “The principle of government is to restrain a person from injustice.” This meaning is also illustrated by the expression “*Hakamat al-Lijām*,”

which conveys the idea of restraining and preventing uncontrolled movement (Zabīdī et al., 1993 AD/1414 AH: 16, 160; Azharī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 4, 69). Thus, the fundamental meaning of government is rooted in restraint, prevention, and adjudication.

The term gradually expanded from its individual and judicial meaning into the political and social spheres. Dictionaries have defined government as an authority responsible for administering and managing the affairs of society, as in the definition “The governing body in a country” in *“al-Mu‘jam al-Mufaṣṣal fī al-Jumū‘”* (Ya‘qūb, 2004 AD/1425 AH: 1, 147) or as the group of those possessing authority and ministers in *al-Munjid* (Group of Authors, 2000: 3, 312). *Ibn Manẓūr* likewise defines “Government” in terms of adjudication and determining “Compensation for bodily injuries,” in cases where no fixed amount of *Dīyah* has been prescribed and the ruler determines the amount of compensation through analogy (Ibn Manẓūr, n.d.: 12, 145).

This function demonstrates that, in jurisprudence, government is grounded in regulation, determination, and the establishment of justice. In the contemporary sense, government encompasses the ministerial apparatus, affiliated institutions, state-owned banks, and the formal administrative structure of the country (Daghim et al., 2006: 1, 114; Sarur, 2008 AD/1429 AH: 1, 75; Ghadiri, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 1, 139). In jurisprudence, “Government” also refers to *“al-Arsh,”* that is, financial compensation for offenses for which no specific amount has been prescribed by Islamic law: “Whatever has no legally prescribed amount is subject to *Arsh*, known as government.” (Sarur, 2008 AD/1429 AH: 1, 75)

Political thinkers regard government as an institution formed through the association of people for the purpose of fulfilling natural requirements and safeguarding the public interest, with the objectives of protecting the homeland, ensuring citizens’ security, and guaranteeing individual rights (Jihami, 2006: 1, 1119). Government may take an individual, consultative, or collective form. From a philosophical perspective, government is established to protect personal freedom and provide a minimum level of social security and should not interfere in people’s lives beyond what is necessary (Anṭūn, n.d.: 2, 20; Aḥmad al-Sayyid, 2021: 5, 21). This institution has both a positive function, organizing institutions, and a negative function, limiting harms and adjudicating violations (Kamāl al-Ḥājj, n.d.: 12, 1120). An analysis of the term in its technical sense demonstrates that government refers to a broad institution responsible for maintaining justice, security, individual freedom, and public order (Daghim et al., 2006: 1, 114).

The term “Islamic Government” is subsequently introduced as a political institution established to implement Islamic sovereignty and realize the objectives of the Shari‘ah (Arasta et al., 2014 AD/1393 SH). The linguistic and technical

meanings of government indicate that Islamic government is an organized structure centered on justice and governed by rights. Such a government is necessary for implementing the comprehensive teachings of Islam in the social, economic, political, and cultural spheres, and the systematic realization of religious values is not possible without it.

The distinctive feature of Islamic government lies in the connection between the political structure and the Shari'ah, such that it operates in three key domains: "Protecting individual rights and freedoms, implementing justice and the laws of the Shari'ah, and coordinating the administration of society. Accordingly, Islamic government is regarded as a comprehensive institution for realizing justice, order, and progress on the basis of the rulings of the Shari'ah."

3. Formulation of Martyr Sadr's Theory Concerning the Role of the People in Islamic Government and Its Arguments

3.1. Human Freedom

In the exegetical thought of Martyr Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr, the third verse of Surah *al-Insān*, "Indeed, We have shown him the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful," constitutes one of the important foundations for explaining the relationship between human freedom and divine sovereignty. Drawing on the Qur'an's monotheistic foundations, Martyr Sadr regards real and intrinsic sovereignty as belonging exclusively to Almighty God and maintains that no being, including the human being, can possess independent and intrinsic sovereignty (Sadr, 2013 AD/1434 AH: 18-21). Within this framework, divine sovereignty is not merely a theological principle but an ontological foundation arising from the complete dependence of all beings upon God. Since the existence, subsistence, and all aspects of the existence of created beings depend upon God's will and bestowal, no being can possess existential independence or intrinsic authority over others. Therefore, attributing intrinsic sovereignty to the human being or to any other creature would amount to disregarding the existential relationship between the Creator and the created and would consequently be incompatible with the principle of monotheism.

This exegetical interpretation has also received attention from some other Qur'anic commentators, who, by emphasizing the exclusive nature of true sovereignty as belonging to God, have likewise rejected any form of independent human authority (Makarem Shirazi, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 27, 449; Qaraati, 2009 AD/1383 SH: 1, 177).

Within such a framework, human freedom acquires a particular meaning. From the Qur'anic perspective, the human being is endowed with free will and the capacity to choose, but this freedom acquires its meaning within a monotheis-

tic framework. In other words, human freedom means liberation from every form of self-grounded and independent non-divine sovereignty, rather than absolute freedom from every constraint and obligation. While free, the human being remains accountable before God and chooses, through own will, the path of guidance or misguidance. Accordingly, in this perspective, freedom is defined within the framework of accepting divine sovereignty, rather than in opposition to it.

This premise leads to important conclusions in the field of Islamic political thought, particularly concerning the concept of legitimacy and the nature of Islamic government. The first conclusion is that political legitimacy cannot be based solely on the individual or collective will of human beings. If intrinsic and independent sovereignty belongs to God, no individual or group can, on its own authority, claim dominion and power over others. Consequently, political authority can be justified only insofar as it is in some way connected to divine sovereignty and defined within its framework. This indicates that legitimacy in an Islamic political system has a divine foundation and that human will alone cannot constitute its ultimate source.

The second conclusion is that although human government in the social and political sphere is necessary for regulating social relations and administering society, it cannot be understood as implying intrinsic ownership or inherent authority of human beings over one another. From this perspective, human government possesses a representative or fiduciary nature; that is, rulers are authorized to exercise power only insofar as they represent and implement divine criteria and values. Thus, political authority is understood not as an intrinsic right of rulers but as a responsibility directed toward realizing justice and implementing divine standards in society.

The third conclusion concerns the relationship between human freedom and the structure of political power. When the human being is regarded as free from non-divine sovereignties, every form of self-grounded authority that seeks to exercise independent dominion over human beings is, in effect, rejected. This principle has a direct impact on the structure and nature of Islamic government, because such a government cannot regard itself as independent of divine criteria or claim legitimacy on its own authority. Rather, it must continually define its legitimacy and exercise of power in relation to divine sovereignty.

On the basis of this premise, important practical implications can also be envisaged for the administration of an Islamic society. For example, legislation in an Islamic government cannot be based solely on human will; rather, it must be evaluated in light of divine standards and guidance. Likewise, executive and judicial institutions are required to align their conduct with the limits, values, and objectives derived from divine sovereignty. At the same time, this perspective

does not reject popular participation in the administration of society; rather, it considers such participation necessary, with the qualification that it must take place within a framework in which ultimate legitimacy is attributed to God.

Moreover, such a foundation makes it possible to critique and evaluate government. If the source of legitimacy is divine sovereignty, any government that distances itself from divine standards or fails to realize them will be deprived of the foundation of its legitimacy. Accordingly, divine standards function as criteria for assessing governmental performance and provide the basis for political accountability and answerability.

The overall implication of this analysis is that Martyr Sadr's interpretation of the third verse of Surah *al-Insān* presents a conception of Islamic government in which God is the true source of sovereignty. At the same time, human beings administer society only within the framework of acting as representatives of divine standards. On the one hand, this perspective safeguards human freedom from non-divine forms of domination; on the other, it reminds human beings of their responsibility before God and divine standards. Consequently, within this framework, Islamic government must simultaneously adhere to two principles: "Fidelity to divine sovereignty and the establishment of social and political mechanisms for participation, oversight, and accountability in the administration of society.

3.2. Caliphate

Martyr Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr, citing verse 39 of Surah *al-Fāṭir*, extends the scope of the divine caliphate referred to in verse 31 of Surah *al-Baqarah* beyond the person of Prophet Adam and regards it as a general status pertaining to humankind. In his formulation, the verse "It is He who has made you successors [vicegerents] upon the earth" (*al-Fāṭir*:39) indicates that the addressee of caliphate is "The Human Species" and that this status is not restricted to a particular individual; rather, all human beings share in the principle of caliphate (Sadr, 2011 AD/1432 AH: 9-10). Thus, divine caliphate is a species-wide reality rather than an individual privilege.

According to this interpretation, the fundamental distinction between human beings and other creatures is rooted precisely in this reality of caliphate. Martyr Sadr does not regard the human being merely as a rational or free-willed creature; rather, he describes the human being as a "Caliphate," a being whose essential distinction from other creatures is manifested in the structure of their caliphate (Sadr, 2011 AD/1432 AH: 16). Within this framework, caliphate is neither a ceremonial title nor an abstract privilege; rather, it constitutes an "Ontological-normative Status" that determines the human being's position within the order of existence and their relationship with God and the world.

In Martyr Sadr's formulation, true and ontological caliphate belongs to God, whereas its historical and social realization takes place through human succession. The human being assumes the position of vicegerent through "Divine Appointment and Delegation," and this status derives its meaning not from human self-grounding but from divine appointment (Sadr, 1979: 3). Therefore, human caliphate does not entail diminishing God's sovereignty; rather, it represents the human and earthly manifestation of the realization of the divine will. In fact, the divine will is actualized throughout history and society in the form of human responsibility and obligation.

From this perspective, the duty of the human vicegerent is to act on earth in accordance with the attributes of divine action; that is, to prevent injustice, transgression, and corruption and to establish justice and benevolence in individual and social relations (Sadr, 2011 AD/1432 AH: 20). This resemblance does not imply similarity in essence; rather, it signifies "Embodying and cultivating oneself in accordance with divine values." Caliphate thus has two complementary dimensions: "First, the right to participate in and exercise agency over the world; and second, the duty of accountability before God. The human being is a vicegerent, but a responsible and accountable vicegerent."

Martyr Sadr's view in this regard is not unprecedented. Some contemporary exegetes have likewise concluded, in their analysis of the verses concerning divine caliphate, that the addressee of caliphate is humankind as a whole rather than Adam exclusively (Mousavi, 2012 AD/1433 AH: 13, 168; Naqavi Qayini, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 14, 235). This convergence indicates that a species-wide interpretation of caliphate has a credible basis in the contemporary exegetical tradition. This understanding of caliphate has important theoretical implications within Martyr Sadr's intellectual system. First, human identity is defined on the basis of the mission of caliphate rather than merely in terms of natural capacities. The human being is a creature summoned by a divine mission to administer the earth and organize social life on the basis of justice and benevolence. Consequently, human dignity derives its meaning in relation to responsibility rather than independently of it.

Second, human moral and social responsibility follows directly from the human being's status as God's vicegerent. Since the human being is God's vicegerent, they are obligated to organize the social order around the rejection of injustice and the realization of justice. From this perspective, justice is not a conventional matter or the product of social agreement; rather, it is a requirement of the status of caliphate and a reflection of the divine will in the social sphere. Accordingly, injustice is not merely a violation of human rights; it constitutes a betrayal of the status of caliphate and a departure from the divine mission.

Third, caliphate in Sadr's thought has a collective character. Since the address in the verse from Surah *al-Fāṭir* is directed to "You" as humankind, it follows that caliphate is a shared and universal responsibility and that no individual bears it in an absolute sense on their own (Sadr, 2011 AD/1432 AH: 9-10). This interpretation provides a basis for understanding the role of the *Ummah* in realizing divine objectives and moves beyond pure individualism. Thus, human social and political responsibility acquires a shared character, with each individual participating, in relation to others, in a broader collective mission.

On the basis of these premises, divine caliphate becomes a theoretical foundation for understanding the position of the human being within the order of existence as well as the basis of human responsibility in the social and political spheres. The human being is not merely an exceptional creature but also the bearer of a mission that must be manifested in social and political structures. The realization of justice and benevolence and resistance to injustice constitute the most important practical manifestations of this mission, and the human being is accountable before God for fulfilling it (Sadr, 2011 AD/1432 AH: 20).

Finally, some researchers have used the expression "Popular Divine Legitimacy" to describe this theory (Shahrokhi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 37).

However, such terminology does not fully correspond to Martyr Sadr's foundations, because he regards God exclusively as the source of legitimacy and assigns the people a role in its realization and actualization, rather than in its origination. Any terminology that suggests a duality in the source of legitimacy would be inconsistent with this principle. Therefore, theoretical precision requires the use of terminology that does not compromise the exclusivity of God as the source of legitimacy and that explains the role of the people within the framework of realizing and implementing divine sovereignty.

3.3. The Role of the Imam and the Leader in Islamic Government

Martyr Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr is one of the most prominent Islamic thinkers who ground the question of sovereignty fundamentally in monotheism and the absolute sovereignty of God. He emphasizes that the right of sovereignty, at the ontological and intrinsic level, belongs exclusively to God (Sadr, 2011 AD/1432 AH: 20-26). According to his view, no being other than God can independently and intrinsically claim authority over others, because all forms of power in the universe derive from divine existence and will. This belief follows from the principle of monotheism and, within the Islamic worldview; independence in sovereignty can be conceived only with respect to God.

Numerous Qur'anic indications support this premise. In verses dealing with guardianship and governance, sovereignty is consistently attributed to God, who

is presented as the ultimate source of this authority. For example, verses 251, 247, 213, 124, and 87 of Surah *al-Baqarah*, as well as other verses from various surahs, including *Āli ‘Imrān*, *al-Nisā’*, *Ibrāhīm*, *al-Aḥzāb*, *al-Ḥadīd*, and *Saba’*, all support the attribution of guardianship to the Divine Essence. In these verses, the right to govern ultimately originates from God, and every other form of sovereignty must derive its authorization from Him.

According to Imami principles, the divine right of sovereignty is subsequently entrusted to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and then to the Imams of the Prophet’s Household (peace be upon them). As divine successors, the Imams are entrusted with guiding and leading the Islamic *Ummah*, and their political and religious legitimacy derives from divine appointment. During the Occultation, this authority is transferred to the jurists. On the basis of the *Tawqī’ Sharīf* attributed to the Imam *al-Hujjah* (AJ), the jurists, as the general deputies of the impeccable Imam, assume responsibility for guiding society and must protect society from injustice and deviation and realize divine justice on the basis of divine criteria (Ḥurr ‘Āmilī, 1995 AD/1416 AH: 27, 140).

The structure of Islamic sovereignty in Martyr Sadr’s thought rests upon three levels of guardianship : “First, absolute divine guardianship as the foundation of true sovereignty; second, the guardianship of the impeccable Imam as one appointed by God; and third, the *Wilāyat al-Faqīh* during the Occultation as a form of representation on behalf of the impeccable Imam. This hierarchical structure does not imply multiple sources of legitimacy; rather, it represents the continuation and delegation of divine authority throughout human history.” At every level, the legitimacy of government derives from its attribution to God rather than from human will.

This view leads to several conclusions. First, political legitimacy in Islam cannot originate from a social contract or majority vote unless the will of the people is understood within the framework of divine sovereignty. Thus, human will has value in social legislation, but it cannot independently constitute the source of legitimacy. Second, the structure of Islamic government must define itself in relation to its divine source, and no authority, even a religious or scholarly one, can independently claim legitimacy. Third, during the presence of an impeccable Imam, political and religious authority belongs to him; during the Occultation, a qualified jurist, on the basis of general deputyship, assumes responsibility for guiding and safeguarding the Islamic system and must work to ensure justice, preserve the public interest, and prevent social deviation.

In explaining the position of the people within divine government, Martyr Sadr adopts a nuanced approach. In his analysis of the principle of “Caliphate,” he points out that the responsibility for establishing government on earth has been

entrusted to the people (Sadr, 2011 AD/1432 AH: 20). In his view, if human beings could establish divine sovereignty without the need for a prophet or an Imam, there would be no need for the mission of the prophets, and only God would remain as the true Sovereign. This formulation demonstrates the importance of the role of the people in realizing divine government. On this basis, the people are not merely the addressees of divine caliphate; they are also the principal agents in its realization. Within this intellectual framework, Martyr Sadr regards the administration of society's affairs as the responsibility of the people and maintains that they are obligated to promote justice on the basis of divine criteria and to stand against injustice. From his perspective, society is not merely subject to the will of the ruler; rather, as the *Ummah* that is God's vicegerent, it is itself obligated to establish the divine order.

Nevertheless, Martyr Sadr makes a precise distinction between the general responsibilities of the *Ummah* and the position of religious authority. In his view, religious authority must safeguard the correct course of the community and prevent society from deviating. This responsibility falls within the framework of the religious authority's duty of "Commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong"; accordingly, the religious authority functions not merely as a supervisor of the *Ummah's* course but also as a guarantor of the soundness of the government's trajectory. On this basis, the jurist's supervisory role derives from his divine responsibility to safeguard justice.

This division of responsibilities between the *Ummah* and the religious authority establishes a model of balance between popular participation and religious guidance, which Martyr Sadr presents as a theoretical foundation of Islamic government. Within this model, popular participation is not merely a right but also a duty, while the jurist's supervisory role derives its meaning from his divine responsibility. From a practical perspective, the implications of this view are highly significant. The Islamic project must ultimately be oriented toward God, and its realization is impossible without the active role of the *Ummah*. The religious authority should function as a guardian of values rather than as a substitute for the people in executive affairs. This balance among divine authority, popular participation, and religious oversight can prevent despotism and undesirable transformations within the structure of Islamic government.

Ultimately, in Martyr Sadr's thought, divine sovereignty is recognized as the foundation of political legitimacy, and all forms of human power can be understood only in light of this sovereignty. This conception contributes to the realization of monotheism in the political sphere and to the continuity of leadership of society during the Occultation, while establishing a connection between the theological foundations of Shi'i Islam and the practical structure of Islamic govern-

ment. In his work entitled “A Preliminary Jurisprudential Note on the Draft Constitution of the Islamic Republic,” Martyr Sadr sought to apply these foundations in the form of an Islamic constitution and demonstrate how divine sovereignty, the active role of the *Ummah*, and the religious authority could simultaneously be preserved within the organization of Islamic government.

3.4. The Obligation of the Ruler to Consult the People

The third foundation advanced by Martyr Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr concerning government is the principle that the ruler is obligated to consult the people in all periods and circumstances. Some researchers have referred to this principle as the “Utilization of collective intelligence.” (Pourfard, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 163) Martyr Sadr does not regard this obligation as being specific to the period of the Occultation and the rule of jurists; rather, he considers it applicable to all levels of leadership within the Islamic system. Even the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the impeccable Imams (AS), despite their impeccability and perfect knowledge, were required to consult the people. Drawing on verse 159 of Surah *Āli ‘Imrān*, “And consult them in the matter,” he regards this ruling as permanent and comprehensive and, like some other jurists, considers the verse indicative of the obligation of consultation under all circumstances and for all rulers (Sadr, 2011 AD/1432 AH: 22-24; Montazeri, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 2, 32; Marefat, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 1, 95; Mousavi Khalkhali, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 154).

On this basis, consultation is neither an ethical and merely ornamental recommendation nor a temporary ruling pertaining to a particular historical period; rather, it is a religious, political, and social obligation that must remain operative throughout all periods of Islamic government. In Martyr al-Sadr’s view, the administration of an Islamic society cannot rest solely on the opinion of a single individual, even if that individual is impeccable Imam, but requires the participation, presence, and involvement of the people in the decision-making process. The principle of consultation is, in fact, the cornerstone of a participatory structure of government, realized through mechanisms such as councils, public participation, and the utilization of collective intelligence.

At this point, a fundamental question arises: “If consultation in ordinary human practice serves to compensate for ignorance or supplement information, how can consultation be considered obligatory for the Prophet or an impeccable Imam who possesses complete divinely bestowed knowledge and is protected from error? In other words, if the rationale for consultation is to remedy ignorance, requiring it of an impeccable person would appear contradictory.”

Martyr al-Sadr offers a different basis in response, demonstrating that the principle of consultation in this verse does not concern an “Epistemological Ra-

tionale” but rather a “Social and Political Rationale.” He explicitly maintains that consultation does not mean supplementing the knowledge of the impeccable, but rather involving the people in the mechanisms of government so that they develop a sense of responsibility toward the destiny of society and regard themselves as participants in the administration of public affairs. He explicitly states: “Consultation may be required for the purpose of involving the people in government.” (Sadr, 2011 AD/1432 AH: 22-24; Marefat, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 1, 95; Montazeri, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 1, 170; Hosseini Tehrani, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 3, 200)

Thus, even if a ruler is epistemologically independent of consultation, he remains obligated to consult at the social and political level, because consultation serves as an instrument connecting the ruler and the *Ummah* and as a mechanism for public participation, rather than as a means of compensating for any deficiency in the ruler’s knowledge.

Within this framework, the people are not merely the recipients and executors of the ruler’s laws and commands; rather, they constitute the executive arms of government and genuine partners in determining their own social destiny. Indeed, by linking the principle of consultation with the idea of “General Caliphate,” Martyr Sadr elevates the status of the people from mere obedience to “Divine Caliphate on Earth.” He maintains that sovereignty intrinsically belongs to God, but that this right is delegated to the *Ummah* at the level of implementation so that, as God’s vicegerent, it may establish equity and justice in society. On this basis, if the *Ummah* is capable of realizing justice and divine order without the direct and continuous intervention of an impeccable authority, the philosophy of the mission of the prophets can likewise be understood within this framework from the perspective of political philosophy. The ultimate objective is to entrust the conduct of affairs to responsible and conscious human beings who, under divine guidance, have acquired the capacity to administer their own affairs. For this reason, within Sadr’s intellectual framework, consultation is a process through which “Collective Intelligence” is formally recognized as an interpreter of social interests and an advisory arm of the ruler. This collective intelligence is not a rival to the Shari’ah; rather, it is a mechanism for identifying concrete circumstances and applying legal rulings to complex social cases. On this basis, Martyr Sadr maintains that if democracy or any other participatory system constitutes an embodiment of the realization of this obligatory consultation and the institutionalization of the *Ummah*’s participation, establishing and implementing such a system would be obligatory for both the ruler and society.

Accordingly, the necessity of consultation between the ruler and the people entails certain implications, one of the most important being the recognition of the *Ummah*’s supervisory and participatory role at all levels of power.

From this perspective, religious authority and leadership are defined not as assuming responsibility for all executive affairs, but rather as exercising oversight and safeguarding the proper course of society through commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong.

Meanwhile, the primary responsibility for administering the government and managing public affairs rests upon the people and the elites emerging from within the *Ummah*. This participation assumes even greater importance during the Occultation, because in the absence of the impeccable Imam, the need to draw upon collective intelligence and public opinion in order to prevent despotism and ensure the effectiveness of the political system becomes more pronounced than ever. Martyr al-Sadr emphasizes that consultation provides a means of mobilizing the intellectual capacities of the *Ummah*, through which the relationship between divine sovereignty and popular will is manifested at its highest level. He maintains that if a political system is not founded upon consultation and the general will, the spirit of caliphate within it remains lifeless, and society cannot fulfill its divine responsibilities with regard to establishing justice.

Furthermore, the insistence that consultation is obligatory even for an impeccable authority contains the subtle implication that the Islamic system is fundamentally a “Collective” and “*Ummah*-centered” system rather than an individual-centered one, even when that individual stands at the pinnacle of perfection and knowledge. This perspective precludes authoritarian interpretations of religious government and demonstrates that, in Islam, political legitimacy and social effectiveness depend upon continuous interaction between leadership and the general population. Under this interpretation, institutions such as councils, parliament, and elections should not be regarded as borrowed phenomena from the West, but rather as instruments for fulfilling a religious obligation, namely “Consultation in the Matter.”

If contemporary democratic systems are understood as institutional forms for securing popular participation, then, on the basis of Martyr Sadr’s third premise, employing such forms to realize divine objectives would be not merely permissible but obligatory by virtue of the principle that the means to an obligatory end acquire the status of obligation. In other words, if establishing just government depends upon participation and consultation with the people and such consultation can be realized only through elections and parliamentary institutions, then elections would become a political and religious obligation.

Ultimately, Martyr al-Sadr’s political thought, by placing the principle of consultation and collective intelligence at its center, seeks to establish a balance between “Divine Guidance” and “Human Will.” He demonstrates that God’s sovereignty over human beings is not a source of deprivation of freedom but rather

a safeguard for freedom against human tyrannies, while consultation serves as an instrument for protecting this freedom and its accompanying responsibility. On this basis, the Islamic system is portrayed as a dynamic and living entity in which the ruler and the *Ummah* move along a progressive path toward the realization of a society founded upon monotheism, justice, and public participation. While preserving the authenticity of its jurisprudential and theological foundations, this approach provides a precise response to the needs of the contemporary era and the requirements of political administration in today's complex societies.

It demonstrates how a progressive model of democracy committed to divine values can be derived from religious texts, in which the collective reason of believers plays a key role in shaping the horizons of the future. This theoretical coherence in Sadr's works attests to the depth of his understanding of the inseparable relationship among religion, politics, and society, within which the human being, as God's vicegerent, is entrusted with the mission of laying the foundations of Islamic civilization through reliance on revealed guidance and the utilization of collective reason.

4. Critique of Martyr Sadr's View

In light of the foregoing discussion, it appears that Martyr Sadr's view concerning the relationship among the people, government, and leadership has now been articulated. Nevertheless, in the author's view, several objections can be raised against this position, which will be examined below.

4.1. The Lack of Universality of the Right of Caliphate for All People

This critique of Martyr Sadr's position concerns the proposition that the right of caliphate and, consequently, the right to govern cannot be regarded as a general and universal right belonging to all human beings. Critics argue that, in numerous verses of the Qur'an, obedience and submission are not demanded universally from all human beings; rather, they are specifically required with respect to three groups: "First, Almighty God; second, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); and third, a particular group identified as the *Ulū al-Amr* or persons appointed by God. For example, in Surah *Āli 'Imrān*, obedience to God and the Messenger is explicitly commanded (*Āli 'Imrān*: 132, 32); in Surah *al-Nisā'*, obedience to God, the Messenger, and the *Ulū al-Amr* is made obligatory (*al-Nisā'*: 59); and the same theme is repeated in other surahs, including *al-Mā'idah* (verse 92), *al-Anfāl* (verses 1, 20, and 46), *Tāhā* (verse 92), *al-Nūr* (verses 54 and 56), *Muḥammad* (verse 33), *al-Mujādilah* (verse 13), and *al-Taghābun* (verse 12).

On the basis of this group of verses, critics conclude that the right to govern and to be obeyed has not been delegated absolutely to all human beings; rather, it

is confined to these three groups: God, as the possessor of intrinsic sovereignty; the Prophet, as God's messenger and representative; and the *Ulū al-Amr*, or particular individuals appointed by God.

Accordingly, contrary to Martyr Sadr's interpretation, according to which caliphate is a general status belonging to humankind, this critique emphasizes that the Qur'anic texts indicate that the right to govern belongs specifically to designated individuals and cannot be extended to all human beings.

Thus, this critique maintains that the theory of the general caliphate of humankind conflicts with the apparent meaning of the Qur'anic verses, because the Qur'an makes obedience obligatory exclusively with respect to God, the Prophet, and the *Ulū al-Amr*, rather than with respect to all members of humankind.

Verse 39 of Surah al-Fāṭir¹ can also be interpreted in the sense that caliphate in this verse does not mean God's vicegerent. Rather, caliphate refers to a successor to previous generations, in the sense that each human generation succeeds the preceding generation in utilizing natural resources and capacities (Mughniyah, 2003 AD/1424 AH: 6, 294; Jazaeri, 2009 AD/1383 SH: 4, 163; Khosravani, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 7, 121; Ashkevari, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 3, 727; Tayyib, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 11, 35).

Consequently, from the author's perspective, Martyr Sadr's interpretation of this verse is open to question.

4.2. The Lack of Qur'anic Evidence for the Obligation of the Imam to Consult the People

The central point of the present critique concerns Martyr Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr's reliance on verse 159 of Surah *Āli 'Imrān* to establish the permanent obligation of consultation. This verse was revealed under circumstances in which the Muslims were experiencing an extremely difficult psychological and social situation following the Battle of *Uḥud*. Before the battle, although the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) personally favored remaining in Medina, he accepted the majority view because of the insistence of a group of Muslims and their desire for confrontation, and the Muslim army consequently went out to battle. During the fighting, a group of Muslims abandoned the battlefield, and this conduct contributed to the Muslims' severe defeat and the Prophet's serious injury. Historical sources such as *al-Wāqidi*, *Ibn Hishām*, and *ʿĀmilī* provide detailed accounts of this event (al-Wāqidi, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 1, 2, 210-220; Ibn Hishām, n.d.: 2, 63; ʿĀmilī, 1965 AD/1385 AH: 7, 63).

1. It is He who has made you successors [vicegerents] upon the earth.

In such circumstances, it would naturally have been expected that, following the bitter experience of *Uḥud*, the Prophet would no longer place his trust in the people's opinions and would abandon the practice of broad consultation. Yet verse 159 of Surah *Āli 'Imrān* was revealed precisely in this context and emphatically instructed the Prophet to continue consulting the people: "And consult them in the matter." Exegetes such as *ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm Qummī* and Allamah *Ṭabāṭabāʾī* have likewise emphasized this historical context of revelation (Qummī, 1985 AD/1404 AH: 115; Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1972 AD/1352 SH: 4, 57).

This gives rise to a philosophical and exegetical question: "If the outcome of the Prophet's consultation with the people ultimately led to defeat in practice, how can the permanent obligation of consultation be inferred from this verse?"

Some exegetes maintain that the revelation of the verse in such a context not only fails to establish an obligation but may even constitute evidence that the practice was limited to particular circumstances or that the repetition of such a costly experience was discouraged. This objection has been formulated as the "Prohibition Objection"; that is, the possibility that the verse addresses the specific circumstances following *Uḥud* and does not intend to legislate a permanent and universal ruling, but rather seeks to prevent the Prophet from developing an excessive distrust of the people, rather than establishing a binding political rule. On this basis, critics emphasize that Martyr Sadr's argument for deriving a ruling requiring consultation in all periods from the aforementioned verse faces certain difficulties. The historical and literary appearance of the verse indicates that its occasion of revelation occurred in a context in which consultation did not produce a desirable outcome. Therefore, a general and permanent ruling cannot be directly derived from it unless a more precise distinction is made between the occasion of revelation, the context of the verse, and the general principles of legislation. Accordingly, the central challenge raised by this critique is that Martyr Sadr's Qur'anic foundation for establishing the absolute obligation of consultation requires greater exegetical substantiation.

Conclusion

Based on an examination of Martyr Sadr's works, it can be concluded that he advances four principal foundations concerning government. First, human beings are free from every form of sovereignty other than that of Almighty God, and no being has the right to exercise intrinsic authority over them. Second, God has appointed all human beings as His successors on earth, and divine caliphate is a general status belonging to humankind. Third, the primary responsibility for administering society and realizing divine government has been entrusted to the people, while the role of the ruler or Imam is primarily supervisory; such that

if human society reaches a sufficient level of maturity and development, there would no longer be a need for an Imam or ruler, and God would directly govern the people. Fourth, the ruler is obligated to consult the people at all times and under all circumstances, with the qualification that the rationale for such consultation is not to remedy a lack of knowledge concerning the various dimensions of issues, but rather to involve the people in the process of government.

Nevertheless, the first and fourth foundations advanced by Martyr Sadr have been challenged. The objection to the first foundation is that numerous Qur'anic verses, contrary to his view, restrict caliphate and the right to obedience to a particular group rather than extending them to all human beings. Although verse 39 of Surah *al-Fāṭir* may, at first glance, appear to support Martyr Sadr's position, consideration of its context and the preceding verses indicates that the intended meaning of caliphate in this verse is the succession of later generations to earlier generations in benefiting from divine blessings, rather than the general caliphate of humankind. The objection to the fourth foundation is that the command to consult in verse 159 of Surah *Āli 'Imrān* was revealed under circumstances in which, following the Muslims' defeat at the Battle of *Uḥud*, there was a possibility that consultation might be prohibited. God therefore commanded the Prophet to consult the people in order to dispel this possibility. Accordingly, the command in this verse does not indicate a permanent and absolute obligation of consultation and cannot be regarded as a general and perpetual ruling.

Thus, although Martyr Sadr sought, by advancing these four foundations, to provide a new foundation for Islamic political thought, at least two of his premises face significant exegetical and Qur'anic challenges that require further reconsideration and more precise elucidation.

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