Ethnic Claims in Iran in Terms of Justice and Development
(A Study of Five Iranian Ethnic Groups applying the GT Method)

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Abstract

The identity/ethnic diversity in modern Iran has occurred contemporaneously with globalisation processes and brought about interethnic conflict orientated toward identity- and justice-seeking to eradicate discrimination and inequality, in line with the achievement of social development. This is the issue that the present research has sought to investigate among Persians, Azeris, Kurds, Arabs and the Baloch in Iran.

Iranian social identities are dissatisfied with the dominance of elements of the Persian identity and do not find the reduced status of Iranian historical identity to be in alignment with justice and the development of collective identities.

There are ambiguities involved in the use of 'ethnic identity' and 'national identity' among some minorities in Iran, there is a great emphasis on using the word 'nation' instead of 'ethnic group'. The use of the term 'ethnic' in this study is not intended to diminish conceptual complexity.

This article is an extract from the author's recently published book[1], which adopted a hybrid, qualitative approach (grounded theory), using in-depth interview surveys and tools; library documentation; and an open questionnaire in 13 provinces to extract and classify data in the following areas: religious identity and national identity (interaction or opposition), interethnic cultural borders, ethnic and national movement dead-ends, elimination of cultures, and a peace-orientated approach to resolving the crises. Thus, a conceptual model was obtained, shaping basic factors (economic and ideological), intervening factors (media and lifestyle), grounded factors (legal and cultural parameters and resource mismanagement) and phenomenal orientation (claims for justice and the socio-political gap), and presenting strategic action (peaceful action, acceptance of the present conditions and state-nation interactions) and its outcomes (stability and decline of social capital).

Keywords: Iran, ethnic identity, Iranian national identity, Persian (Fars), Azeri, Kurd, Arab, Baloch, development, justice, minority.

Introduction and Problem Statement

Iran is a country with multiple identities. The contemporary Government's failure to provide social development and justly apply social policies has highlighted ethnic convergence or divergence in respect of the social integrity and social consensus of the country as a whole. New aspects of this situation appeared after the 1979 Revolution and several conflicts have come about.

Conflicts occurring among the collective identities in contemporary Iran revolve around respect for the distinctions and differences of each identity. Since the second half of the 20th century, in fact, many have sought for globalisation processes (the ever-increasing development of media and the enhancement of identity awareness and their abilities to manifest) to be acknowledged alongside traditional sources of social identity (ethnicity, religion and nationality), modern gender-based identity-seeking, sexual orientation, lifestyle, pseudo-religious groups, and other processers.

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[1] Ahmady, Kameel. Et al. From Border to Border (A comprehensive research on Identity and Ethnicity in Iran), 2021, Mehri Publishing, London, UK
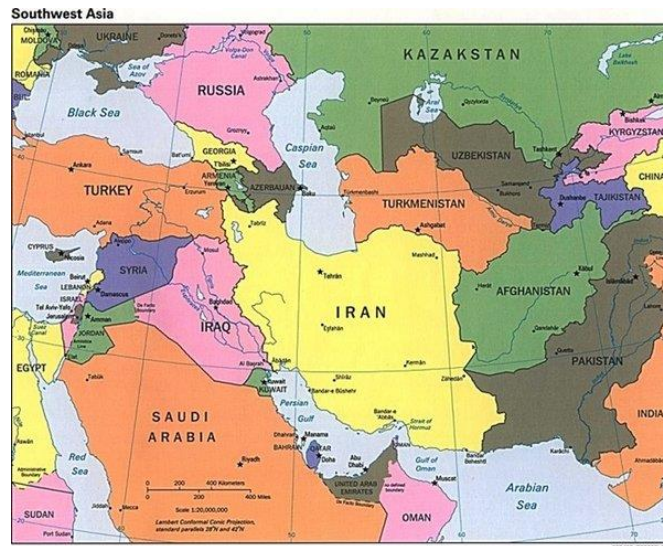
Figure 1: Map of Iran and its neighbours

Despite this multiplicity of identities, the current, dominant identity discourse is around the unification of identities, as the capability of approving of the present diversity has been lost. Justified as an attempt to maintain national unity and the security and political integrity of the country, this approach itself has led to wider gaps between ethnic groups, and between these groups and the Government, and to the emergence of identity-seeking political movements and groups.

This research, focused on five major Iranian identities, addresses different aspects of the issue by applying qualitative and hybrid methods to a study of the elite and the public from various ethnic groups. Moreover, the cultural mosaic in Iranian society, along with the constant, ever-increasing significance of ethnic communities in the development and enhancement of social integrity, has highlighted the concern for the basic notions in this research – i.e. justice and development. This is closely connected to the quality of the collective identities of Iranian ethnic groups and the underlying reasons for their existence.

The spirit dominating contemporary human societies demands democracy and development. This is more prominently observed in multicultural societies where emphasis has been made on interethnic issues and relations between participating social groups and governments.

Research Scope

A branch of the Aryan ethnic group that immigrated towards Iran, originally from Southern Russia, gradually entered the Iranian plateau in the late second and early first millennia BC [1]. Ever since then, the plateau has frequently been invaded by various ethnic groups. A number of nationalist thinkers[2] have blamed Arabs for destruction brought about in Iran upon their invasion [2]. According to some researchers and historians, however, components of Iranian identity were so culturally powerful that they have remained alive and dynamic despite the domestic diversity and multiplicity of new identities and cultures and invasions by foreign identities. Iranian identity still involves diversity and multiplicity from its variety of constituent discourses. The present identity conditions in modern Iran have been compared, appropriately, with pieces of cloth of various colours sewn together [3, 4].

The historical notion of Iranian identity took shape during the ethnic, political and religious movements in the Sassanid Era, persisted (with ups and downs) through the Islamic Era, was reborn in the Safavid Era, and was manifested as the national identity of Iran in the modern era [5]. It can be said to have been influenced, to date, by three areas of civilisation: Iranian, Islamic and Western [6].

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[2]   Such as Akhundzade, Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, Sadegh Hedayat and Malek al-Sho'ara Bahar.

Different ethnic groups, including the Lur, the Baloch, the Turkmen, Azeris, Arabs, Kurds and Persians, live in Iran today, most of whom arguably reside in regions near the borders, culturally linked to groups in the neighbouring countries. This has turned Iran into a heterogeneous country in terms of social structure, where different ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious identities live, and similar groups reside across country borders, sometimes turning those borders into wells of crisis. These groups, including Arabs and Kurds in Iraq, Azeris in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the Baloch in Pakistan, can be considered sources of conflict and crisis [7, 8].

Despite the status of Persian as the official language, each Iranian collective identity has its own language(s), dialect(s) and accent(s). There also exist various religions and religious branches among the ethnic groups, yet they have similarities from other aspects, as well as being Shia which is the official religion [9, 10].[3] On that basis, legislators have included articles in the Constitution to acknowledge cultural differences and to facilitate constant intercultural life. For instance, Article 15 of the Constitution[4] asserts that local and ethnic languages may be used besides Persian, and Articles 7 and 64–160 directly or indirectly address ethnic groups' and minorities' rights. Moreover, mentions have been made in Articles 24 and 26 of the freedom to establish 'parties' and 'societies', and the freedom of publications and the press.

The social groups in Iran have, throughout history, usually lived next to each other in peace and with little conflict. However, conflicts have appeared between them following the emergence of nation-states and the expansion of identity-seeking movements around the world, on the one hand, and the increase of ethnic marginalisation and discrimination by dominant groups, on the other.

This research investigates five collective identities: Persians, Azeris, Kurds, Arabs and the Baloch.

Baloch

The Baloch reside in south-eastern Iran and have Aryan roots. As the competition between England and Russia intensified, they adopted settlements in different countries including Iran, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan[5] [11].

Relations between the Baloch and central governments have always been accompanied by conflict. In fact, the adopted policies have marginalised this group. A source of conflict is their cultural similarity to the residents of the neighbouring country, which has caused them, for example, to prefer foreign television channels to domestic ones. This has also enhanced an ethnic identity (rather than a national identity) and a sense of belonging to a collective identity beyond borders, leading to the potential to seek autonomy [12].

Since Balochi is spoken in different countries, there has always been little consensus among linguists on its classification; hence there are multiple proposals in that regard. Some, for instance, have discussed 'Northern and Southern Balochi', while others have identified 'Eastern and Western Balochi'. Some recent views classify the language into three groups: Eastern, Western and Southern. Ignoring these somewhat complicated divisions, the most important – in fact, the best-known –version of Balochi is Rakhshani, which has one of the largest numbers of speakers, in Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan [13, 14].

All the Muslim Baloch belong either to the Hanafi Sunni majority or to the Twelver Shia minority, and there is no other sect or branch among them. Some of the characteristics that distinguish the Baloch from other ethnic groups are discussed below. Clothing made with a particular embroidery technique known as suzanduzi is a very popular cultural work and artistic product by Baloch women.

Azeri

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3   The following articles of the Constitution can be referred to in that regard: 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 37 and 38.

4   'The Official Language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as textbooks, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian.'

5   More than 1.3 million Iranian Baloch live in Sistan and Baluchistan and other Iranian provinces today.

Living in areas neighbouring the Republic of Azerbaijan, Azeris have the same linguistic origin as the Turks. The ambition to unite the Republic and Iranian Azerbaijan and to integrate the territories on the two sides of the Aras River has been a commonly-found dream of pan-Turkism since the Soviet era. Most Azeri speakers reside in south-western Iran (in East and West Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Zanjan and Qazvin Provinces) and there are, of course, speakers of Khorasani Turkic in Iran. Most of the Iranian Azeri are Shia Muslims, but there is also a group of them known as Ahle Haqq.

While adhering to national and religious rites, Azeris have preserved their own customs in many areas of culture, and the rituals common among them have gained national popularity in some cases. Thus, the mourning processions of the Great Hussainiya of Zanjan, Tabriz, Urmia and Ardabil are among the best-known of the groups found mourning the Islamic Prophet's family in the month of Muharram. They also commonly practise rituals such as tashtgozari, ta'zieh, Shah Hussain guyan, chest-beating and self-flagellation, where lamentation is carried out in Azeri. The mourning rituals held at Tabriz Historical Bazaar have also been registered nationally. Moreover, Azerbaijani music is considered to be an important part of this people's cultural identity, and Azerbaijani artists have presented unique, creative music, and those who sing their own poems in Azeri are known as the Ashiq. To describe Azerbaijan and its heroes, they sing beautiful poetry accompanied by Azerbaijani music in celebrations and mourning ceremonies, thereby appealing to many people. Traditional Azerbaijani clothing is a particular symbol of Azeris, which has come into existence following long cultural, religious and other processes.

Persian (Persian/Farsi speakers)

The Persians are Iran's largest ethnic group. They mainly reside in central cities. They are politically dominant; that is, they have gained control over the other ethnic groups as a result of elements of their identity, including their language (Persian) and religion (Shia). Most Persian speakers in Iran are Twelver Shia Muslims, but there are also Persian-speaking Sunni Muslims residing in certain regions near the borders.

Persians live mainly in large Iranian cities, and culturally dominate areas far beyond Iran. Persian is an Indo-European language spoken in Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In fact, it is the official language of Iran and Tajikistan and one of the two official languages of Afghanistan (alongside Pashto). It has also been the official language of India (before the English colonisation).

Kurd

Following Arabs, Persians, and the Turkic peoples, the Kurds are the fourth-largest ethnic block in the Middle East [15]. They mainly reside in regions close to the borders of four countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

Kurdish is a sub-branch of the Indo-European family of languages, related to Ossetian, Dari, Persian, Tajiki, Tati and Talysh; ancient languages such as Avestan, Sogdian, Khwarezmian, and Scythian; and many others [16]. It is an Iranian language belonging to the North-Western or South-Western family groups [17, 18]. The Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji); Central Kurdish, Southern Kurdish, Gorani and Zaza varieties can be seen within the geographic range.

According to Vali (2018), Kurdish identity is manifested in the differences between it and what defines other dominant identities. It is signified without signifiers, and is present by being absent [19]. Vali regards this identity to be a kind of subjectivity without the requirements for representation/signification in history and politics. There are both Shia and Sunni Muslims among the Kurdish people. If Iranian Kurdish settlements were partitioned into two religious sections, most of the Sunni Kurds could be said to reside in the northern half. There is, of course, another group of Kurds, known as the Yarsani (Kaka'i/Ahle Haqq), who mostly live in certain cities and villages in Kermanshah Province.

Kurds adhere to the practice of national and religious rituals. They celebrate Nowruz with utmost glory, and highly value religious customs and feasts such as Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr and, particularly, the Islamic Prophet's birthday. In some regions, food is made and distributed for free in celebration of religious feasts, including a particular type of soup-like dish known as âsh. There are also ceremonies involving daf-playing, prayers and particular utterances made by the dervish or in praise of the Islamic Prophet in celebration of his birthday. In Kurdish settlements, various types of Kurdish clothing can be observed, each in a unique and beautiful form,

slightly different from the others. Traditional Kurdish men's and women's clothing includes headwear and footwear as well as ordinary clothes. The designs and applications of each of these components varies by season, type of occupation, lifestyle and ceremony. Although different types of clothing are common in different parts of Kurdistan, such as Hawraman, Saqqez, Baneh, Gogulawa, Gerrus, Sanandaj, Mariwan and Mahabad, they are all the same in that they cover the entire body.

Arab

The Arabic-speaking community is scattered over a vast territory in Asia and Africa, including southern and south-western Iran and parts of Khuzestan Province [20, 21]. It should be noted that the Iranian Arabs Iranian Arabs, like Turks, share a common religion, and this undermines the transnational ethnic identity.

The Arabs residing in Iran mostly speak Khuzestani Arabic, a dialect of Mesopotamia Arabic. They are scattered over four provinces, including Khuzestan, Hormozgan, Bushehr and the southern parts of Ilam, but most of them live in Khuzestan and are mostly Twelver Shia Muslims. Of course, there is also a Sunni Arab minority in Iran, which makes up a very low percentage of the Arab population.

Like any other Iranian people, the Arabs in Khuzestan have their own culture. Following the Arabs in the neighbouring countries, they find Eid al-Fitr to be of much greater significance in their public culture. It is celebrated with a large number of norms, behaviours and customs. An tradition common among the Khuzestani Arabs is the Gargee'an ceremony, held in Ahvaz on the 15th of Ramadan every year. Another highly important ritual commonly practised by the Arabs is the coffee-drinking ceremony involving pots known as dallah, which is held with a great deal of formality.
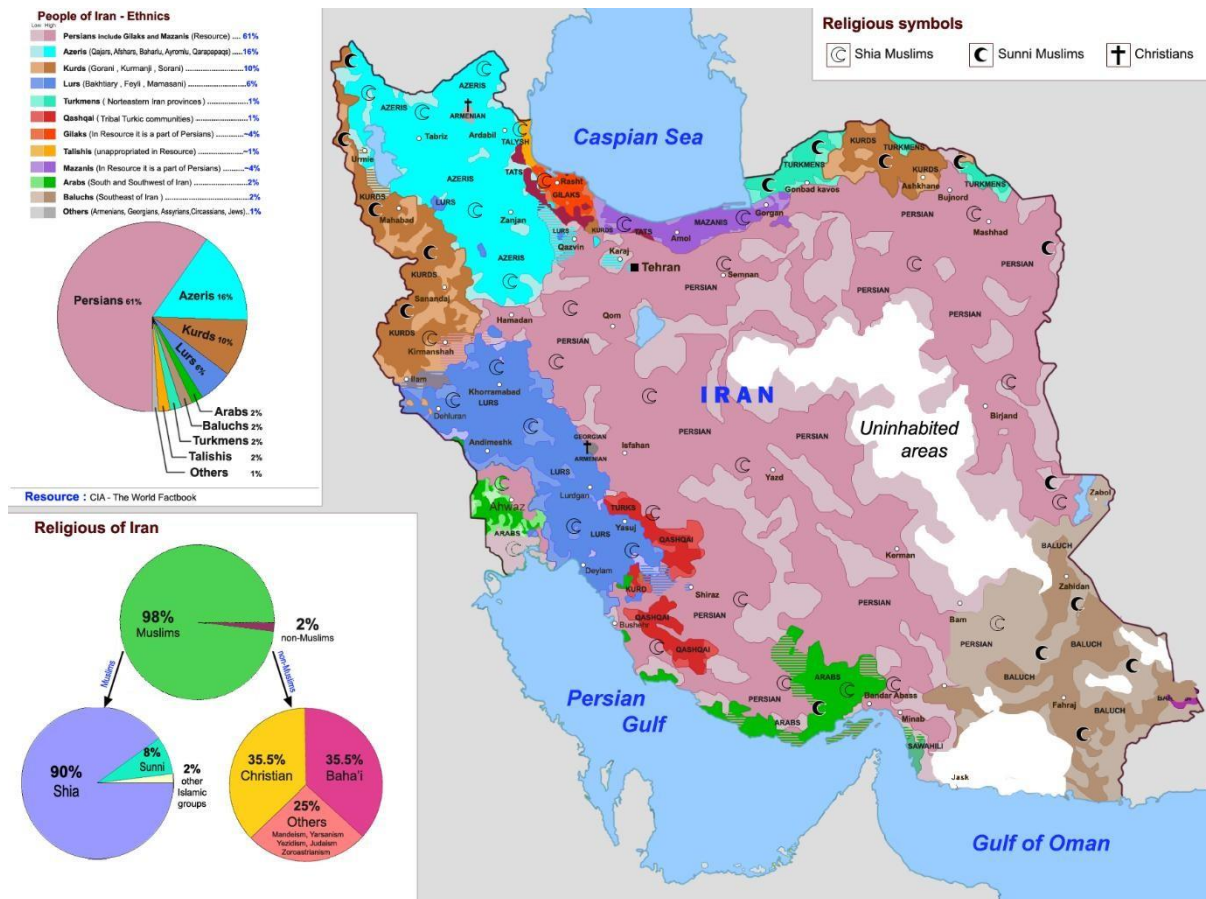

Figure 2: Distribution of ethnic groups and religions in Iran

Data available on the ethnic groups in Iran are insufficiently transparent. For instance, their true populations are inaccessible in censuses, and the Statistical Centre of Iran has simply publicised the provincial populations and features.

Table 1: Populations of some Iranian provinces based on the 2006, 2011, and 2016 consensuses

Province	Capital	2006 Population	2011 Population	2016 Population
Tehran	Tehran	11228625	12183391	13267637
Razavi Khorasan	Mashhad	5515980	5994402	6434501
Isfahan	Isfahan	2399327	4879312	5120850
Fars	Shiraz	4220721	4596658	4851274
Khuzestan	Ahvaz	4192598	4531720	4710509
East Azerbaijan	Tabriz	3527267	3724620	3909652
Mazandaran	Sari	2893087	3073943	3283682
West Azerbaijan	Urmia	2831779	3080576	3265219
Kerman	Kerman	2584834	2938988	3164718
Sistan and Baluchistan	Zahedan	2349049	2534327	2775014
Alborz	Karaj	2053233	2412513	2712400
Gilan	Rasht	2381063	2480874	2530696
Kermanshah	Kermanshah	1842457	1945227	1952434
Golestan	Gorgan	1593055	1777014	1868619
Kurdistan	Sanandaj	1416334	1493645	1603011

Iranian Ethnic Groups' Identity-Seeking

Because the Persian ethnic identity is considered to be the exclusive component of the Iranian national identity, the national identity has been reduced to the Persian identity, including, among other things, language, religion and culture. Thus, Iranian identity claims have emerged in different eras. Ethnic groups have exhibited different methods of seeking identity, given the sociopolitical conditions in each era.

The range of research conducted in this regard suggests that attenuations of the government and its confrontations with political, economic and social crises have provided ethnic groups with opportunities to pursue their identity-seeking purposes, followed by conflicts with the central government. In fact, that is how the direct relationship between a decrease in the government's control and power and crises involving the government and ethnic groups are observed [22, 23].

The Persians are seen to be the major ethnic group in Iran. The radical version of this perspective introduces the other Iranian ethnic groups as primitive, tribal and marginal, and presents Persian culture to the other groups as a dominant, sophisticated model.

The Azeris constitute the second-largest Iranian ethnic group after the Persians. Their ethnic claims date back less than a century – most prominently exemplified by those that occurred in the Republic of Azerbaijan under the leadership of Seyyed Jafar Pishehvari. The most radical Azeri orientations include pan-Turkist tendencies, which originate from the Turkic ethnic groups within the Russian Empire. The Iranian Azeris' major identity claims are social and justice-based, suggested through civil claims, while the opposition parties based abroad tend to pursue independence.

The Kurds have also exhibited a wide range of identity claims. The dominant Kurdish nationalist approach is a primordialist one. They argue that the Kurd nation is a primordial entity, a foundation rooted in the Kurds' nature [19]. Their identity claims in Iran also date back less than a century, to the 1945 establishment of the Autonomous Republic of Kurdistan (centred in Mahabad), under the leadership of Qazi Muhammad. As the protests leading to the 1979 Revolution began, the Democratic Party was reorganised and other parties, such as Komala and the Khabat Organisation, took shape. Today, the Kurds' identity-seeking is represented in civic institutions and organisations and cultural and artistic activities. Armed identity-seeking political parties are still active abroad, although they have undergone segregations.

The Iranian Arabs' organised identity-claims date back about seventy years. After the 1979 Revolution, they publicised their points of view and aims and even took military measures. There are two different levels of claim today, one demanding complete independence for Khuzestan from Iran and the other seeking a federal system formed within the national Iranian framework [24].

The Baloch speak Balochi and are Hanafi Sunni Muslims. The 1879 division of Baluchistan between Iran and India (present-day Pakistan) caused political borders to take shape within this integrated ethnic group. The ethnic discrimination on both Iranian and Pakistani parts triggered ethnocentric feelings and brought about ethnic claims among the Baloch. The presence of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan has intensified the identity-seeking movements of the Baloch on both religious and ethnic fronts. Today, however, ethnic claims are made mainly as civil, cultural and social activities and are raised because of the religious gap, economic discrimination and the presence of core-periphery relations.

Aims and Significance of the Research

Iranian society has long been based upon multi-ethnic, multi-identity life. Some experts argue that any generalising explanation of a multi-ethnic society will be inadequate if it disregards the ethnicity factor. Given the ever-increasing importance of ethnic communities in the formation and enhancement of social consensus, scientific investigation of ethnic groups has received greater attention than before. Along the same lines, many experts maintain that national integrity and identity are rooted in ethnic communities and very old ethnic emotions, as primitive nationalism. Ethnic integrity and identity consensus in a multi-ethnic, multicultural society can bring about peace and fill in ethnic gaps.

The main problem here, which makes this investigation significant, involves describing and explaining Iranian ethnic groups' collective identity.

The efficiency of present-day governments depends on their capabilities of providing development. In societies with multiple identities, the notion of interethnic justice, as well as development, is of great significance, and this is what the present research is focused on. Thus, the formation and extension of a comprehensive understanding of other ethnicities and identities contributes to social solidarity and national integrity. This contrasts the variety of distinctions made between identities and invites civil society, the open minded, identity and cultural activists, and all who care about peace onto a dynamic field and attempts to enhance the multiplicity of cultures rather than eliminate them.

The identity of an individual or a group requires another identity to be distinct from. In that case, identity results from distinction, while distinction and its denotation are artificial, just as identity itself is. Therefore, it is the other identity that that is there in the first place and is responsible for formation or development [25].

In this research, 'identity' has been employed to mean an awareness of who an individual is and of their social belongings, which assumes an external, collective aspect and may turn into a basis for sociopolitical relations and actions [26], but is realised mainly through comparison and differentiation between the in-group and the out-group [27]. The overall framework of attitudes of human science towards identity in the processes of tradition, modernity and postmodernity is reflected in the following table.

Table 2: Overall framework of the approaches (traditional, modern, and postmodern) to identity [28-34]

Approach	Time	Place and Space	Sources of Identity	Types of Identity	Subject	Schools of Thought
Traditional	Past	• Place identity • Land identity • Integration of space and place	• Customs, religion and structures • Need to be identified	• Fixed, stable, power-based essence • Predetermined • Personal primordialist	• Trans-historical • Eternal • Fixed essence	• Popular belief • Non-scientific • Religious, supernatural
Modern	Present	• Emergence of nation-states • Lands with official borders	• Subject • Far-sighted intellect • Religious reform • Scientific revolutions	• Structured and variable by social, economic, and cultural conditions • Collective (such as national) and individual identity	• Interaction between the subject and social structures and its meaning investigation	• Interaction • Symbolic • Marxist structuralist
Postmodern	Future	• Segregation of place and space	• Micro-/local actions and cultures • Achievement of discourse	• Open identity • Contrastive and particularist • Fragmented and fluid • Diverse and multiple • Discourse-based	• Different representations • Multiple, sequential interpretations	• Post-structuralist • Critical • Psychoanalytic • Post-Freudist

Given the trend in societies toward systems of participative management and the considerations required for observing citizenship principles and establishing civic institutions [35], it can be asserted that the significance of the transformation of societies into participative systems, observing the above principles, is highlighted for two reasons. Firstly, it indicates the individual's self-perception and others' perceptions thereof in society. Secondly, it results from the dynamic identity relationship between the state and the nation [36].

Ethnicity Versus Nationality

Ethnicity is a dynamic combination of a real or hypothetical common descent (common historical memory), a common ethnic awareness, symbolic elements and political-territorial belongings within a social group on which ethnic experience is based [37]. Anthony Smith enumerates the following components for ethnic identity:

- human population;

- common ancestors;

- historical memory;

- common culture;

- specific territory; and

- correlation and integration of interests.

The words national and nationality entered the lexicon of social science following the Industrial Revolution and the spread of nationalist feelings. National identity results from an identified unit of land and a state (military–political), characterised as follows by Ernest Renan.

Nation → **Cultural heritage**
→ **Everyday plebiscite**

Some scholars name two groups of elements as the components of a nation
– i.e. objective elements (territorial) and subjective elements (mythical, memories, beliefs and cultures) [38]. Ahmad Ashraf also lists a number of factors in the formation of national identity [5].

Giddens (2006, p. 41) expresses the conditions of present-day global and local identities as follows [28].

Table 3: Types of identity according to Giddens

Type of identity	Level of Belonging	Time	Place	Effective factors	Place-space relationships
Local	Local	Pre-modernity	Place particularism	Local customs and traditions	Place-space coincidence
Global	Global	Post-modernity	Super-local	Thoughts resulting from modernity	Place-space separation

The relationships between levels of collective identity are controversial today against the attitude of ethnic particularism, and media manifestations have turned them into routine facts [39].

Numerous studies have verified the claim that negative images from ethnic groups promote discriminative attitudes, stereotypes and myths of distinction and superiority (see, for instance, Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Graves, 1999) [40, 41]. The major alternative for meaning (identity) construction in society involves cultural communities, with religious, national or regional bases, perhaps leading ethnicity to be influenced by religion, nationality and locality [34].

Investigation of ethnicity and ethnic relations has not appealed to classic theoreticians, and no explicit concern for these relations can be found in the thoughts of sociologists such as Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber and Georg Simmel.

Three competitive theoretical perspectives on the formation of ethnic and national identity are discussed below.

Firmly associated with Anthony Smith, the first approach, known as primordialism, sees national identity as a natural phenomenon and regards nations as having ethnic cores [42]. According to primordialists, evolutionary psychology demonstrates man's successful accordance with the conditions that have taken shape during the prehistoric period [43]. A fixed cultural formation is assumed there, which has been established by ethnic activists, enabling constant sense-making for generations.

Instrumentalism is the second approach, based on which ethnicity is a resource that is used by the elite to define group identities, regulate group membership and boundaries for making claims to it, and extracting resources [44].

The last approach is constructivism. Unlike primordialism, constructivism is focused on processes that help ethnic groups to emerge. It contains elements of both the primordialist and the instrumentalist approaches [44]. Constructivism argues that national identity is a social construction, like other group identities, including those listed by primordialists as indicators of national identity.

Issues that have been addressed in regard to ethnic groups include political ethnocentrism [45], ethnic identity-seeking, ethnicity politicisation with respect to internal colonialism, the cultural division of labour [46], and the role of communication in the development of ethnic awareness [47]. Theoreticians such as Hans Kuhn and, more regularly, Anthony Smith have analysed the role of the elite in nationalist movements, considering the extension of the government's control domain and greater tendency toward centralization to be sources of the appropriate conditions for ideological mobility provided by 'scientific intellectuals'. John Viruili also regards nationalism as a particular, successful form of modern policy adopted by the elite to divest the dominant class of the power of government [24].

Development

The diversity of theories about contemporary human, social and economic change allowed notions such as the quality of life, participative development and alternative development to enter the literature in the humanities, in which 'social development' can be used as a cover term on which social development is a qualitative and substantive inclusion.

Sen (1983, 2003) defines 'development' as the process of developing real freedom, and regards it as the aim and means of freedom [48, 49].

Michael Todaro (1987) considers development to be a multidimensional trend that requires fundamental changes in the social structure and public perception, and the structures of national institutions [50], acceleration of economic growth, reduction of inequality, and eradication of absolute poverty [51].

According to Peter Donaldson, development involves fundamental political changes made in the social structure, orientations and institutions for the complete realisation of society's objectives [52].

Misera also emphasises the cultural aspects in his definition of development [53].

Bernestein argues that the objectives of development include the keenness to overcome malnutrition, poverty and disease.

According to Eisenstadt, development involves activities to transform from nondemocratic to democratic governance.

Huntington maintains that the political development of a system increases as it switches from simplicity to complexity, from dependence to independence, from inflexibility to flexibility, and from multiplicity to unity [54].

And this is how the neglected dimensions of development are considered and the quality of the concept that exists in it is highlighted, based on which progress, improvement, and its synonymous concepts are considered and emphasis is placed on indigenous cultures [55-57]. Furthermore, development denotes decreases in inequality, poverty and unemployment and increases in participation and democracy, which require appropriate conditions and improvement in the quality of life.

Social Justice

It can be asserted that man's most important ideal throughout history is social justice. Injustice has brought about numerous inequalities and intensified wealth gaps and social problems. On that basis, different aspects of social justice have been investigated in the humanities, and several theories have been developed. These include liberalist, neoliberalist, socialist, communitarianist, and religious (Islamic, Christian, etc.) discourses, as summarised in the following discourse analysis by Akhtari and Zolfaghari (2017, p. 116–119) [58].

Table 4: Discourse analysis from the perspectives of sociological schools

Notion/ Discourse	Liberalist	Neo-liberalist	Socialist	Rawlsian	Commun-itarianist	Islamic
Wealth gap	Required for progress	The poor's fault	Disapproved	Approved to the extent required for progress	Disapproved	Absolutely disapproved
Government intervention in economy	None	Reduced	Approved as with all other affairs	Restricted to attempts for reduction	Extensive	Moderately decided as required by present conditions
Deprived classes	Ignored	Ignored	Addressed	Addressed	Addressed	Addressed
Ontology	Individu-alism	Individu-alism	Collectivism	Individu-alism and collectivism	Collectivism	Individu-alism and collecti-vism
Ethical philosophy	Utilitari-anism	Utilitari-anism	Deonto-logical ethics	Deonto-logical ethics	Virtue ethics	Deonto-logical and virtue ethics
Possession	Private	Private	Public	Achieve-ment of distributive justice without induction of private possession	Public (social charity)	Private and public
Facilities	Unequal enjoyment	Unequal enjoyment	Equal enjoyment	Equal distribution	Equal distribution	Equal enjoyment
Income inequality	Required	Required	Redistri-bution for the low-income	Approved to the extent required for progress	Redistri-bution for the low-income	Approved to the extent that wealth gap is prevented

Notion/ Discourse	Liberalist	Neo-liberalist	Socialist	Rawlsian	Commun-itarianist	Islamic
Economic competition	Equal opportunities	Free entrepreneur-ship and individual skills	Not required to be free	Equal conditions with a few restrictions	Free	Free
Legal equality	Prioritis-ation of constitutional rights and socio-political freedom	Excessive concern for economic activity and reduction of rights	Equality in all socio-political rights	Equality in socio-political freedom given the first principle	Just distribution of other blessings not inferred from that of political power	Equal natural rights and variable acquired rights by work and fulfilled duties

When a just action is discussed, an action is meant that is not unjust. When justice is modified by the social attribute in social justice, methods should naturally be sought of establishing social laws and regulations that provide justice rather than lead to injustice. In other words, social justice denotes the observance of equality in legislation and law enforcement. That is, the law should provide all with equal means of progress and welfare. It is the government's responsibility to enforce and practise social justice. Therefore, the government should practise no discrimination against individuals and make it possible for them to make progress and acquire social welfare [59]. Variables effective on social justice include reduction of poverty and deprivation, supply of employment, supply of basic needs (such as accommodation, health and education), stabilisation of prices in accordance with payments, just distribution of income and wealth, establishment of security and discipline, observance of all people's rights, and provision of social security and welfare services [60].

The following aspects can be considered for social justice: equality, political partipation, and economic, cultural, legal, and distributive justice [61]. Thus, the principles of social justice include: (1) the supply of the primary needs of all members of society; (2) the observance of everyone's rights for equal freedom; (3) the provision to everyone of equal access to economic opportunities; and (4) the establishment of economic inequality where the poorest classes can maximise their wealth [62].

John Rawls' Theory of Justice involves two key principles. The first concerns every individual's equal rights with respect to the broadest freedom available in a social institution or participation, and the second principle pertains to the exclusion of inequality, unless it eventually benefits all.

Results and Findings

The results of this research demonstrate that the notion of justice-orientated, development-based identity/ethnicity suggests the condition of a performance gap on the government's part. The results often find national consensus to be dependent on achievement of interethnic justice, aspects of which are examined below.

Ethnic Groups' Local Economies

Iranians long made their livings through pastoralism and agriculture, until trade and commerce began to thrive in Iranian cities along the passage of the Silk Road through the country.

The central parts of Iran, where the Persians reside, contribute the most to the industrial sector.[6]

The agricultural sector involves high-return crops such as the pistachio and saffron commonly grown in Central Iran; that sector also, therefore, is a large share of the gross domestic product.

The economy of the Kurdish settlements of Iran is based on agriculture, pastoralism and horticulture. Due to their location close to the borders, however, border trade (in its legal form) and occupation as kolbars (the illegal form) have gained popularity there.

The economy of the Azeri settlements is based on agriculture, pastoralism and factories and industries such as tractor manufacturing, the petrochemical industry, machinery manufacturing and the steel industry.

The settlements of the Arabs are characterised by communication opportunities and maritime boundaries, on which international commerce and trade and maritime transit have thrived in those parts, which include the port cities. Moreover, there are abundant oil resources in those areas.

In the Baluchistan region, equatorial and tropical fruits are grown, such as dates, bananas, citrus fruits, mangos, papayas, sapodillas, pistachios and grapes. They each have their own particular markets. The nomads raise camels as an occupation, and alternate industries have also taken shape in some parts.

According to the data obtained in this research, the majority of the political claims made by the Iranian ethnic groups concern the centralised economic policies that have led to the formation of core-periphery relations. A kind of objection has been made in the interviews to the economic and livelihood gaps arising from the core economic policies, as the periphery (Iranian ethnic groups) is believed to have an unjust share of the economy.

Identity (National–Religious) Justice

Although there are two aspects of Iranian identity, i.e. national and religious, the justice-orientated approach is focused on different ethnic groups' senses of belonging to the notion of 'nation' and the framework of Iranian national identity.

We   Iranians,   our   language   has   a   root   other   than   Arabic. It all has Pahlavi roots. Avestan side, one Parthian side, the other one in Ashkani; Ancient or Avestan.

~ Aziz Nemati, poet and linguist from Urmia

Religious orientations are not opposed to national issues. In the case of a conflict, however, religious issues are more   vulnerable   than   those   pertaining   to   ethnicity   and   identity (Javadi Hesar, journalist and political activist)

As shown in the following charts, the researcher has investigated the amount of interethnic communication in Iran. According to the interview results, 53.9% of the elite state that they frequently communicate with other ethnic groups, and 28.9% experience less communication. Among the general public, there has been a smaller amount of ethnic communication: 55.4% experience a lack of communication and 37.3% experience little.

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[6]   The industrial shares of the central parts belong to the provinces of Alborz (44%), Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari (39.6%), Isfahan (41.4%), Markazi (40.3%), Qom (43.4%), Tehran (37.3%) and Yazd (47.8%).
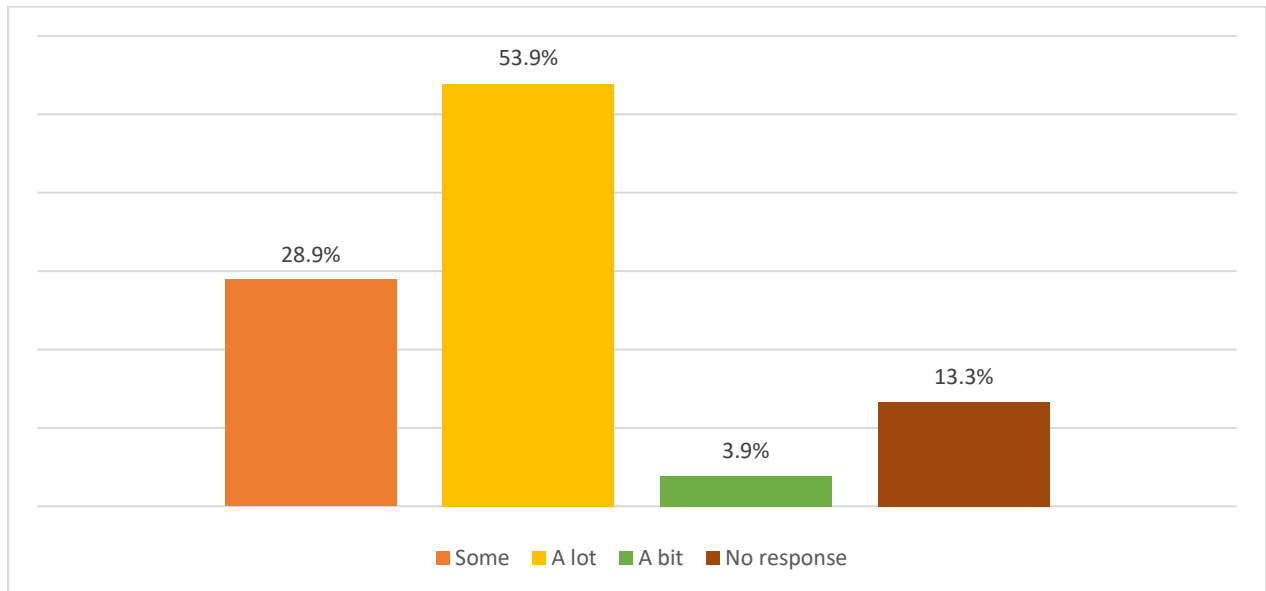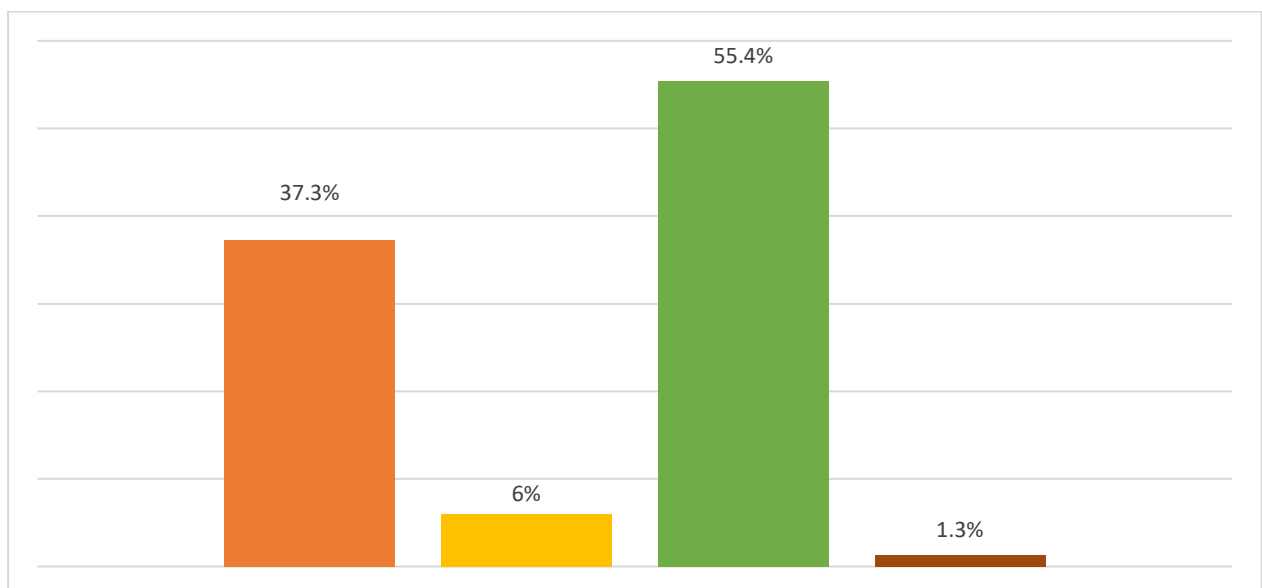
Chart 1: Interethnic communications – elite

Chart 2: Interethnic communication – public

As noted by many of the participants, national identity has two basic aspects in Iran: the Iranian aspect and the spiritual (religious) aspect. According to an interviewee, 'Both must be preserved, and if we have a kind of cultural self-destruction or cultural alienation after the revolution, it is because we have badly taught Islam to the child after the revolution and we have not taught Iranianness at all.'

Part of the research results concerns identity symbols. There are three groups of interethnic Iranian symbols that contribute to national integrity. Symbols such as Nowruz, Chaharshanbe Suri, Mehregan and Yalda are ancient. The second group is religious symbols, including Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Ghadir, the Islamic Prophet's birthday, and the anniversaries of the Shia Imams' martyrdom. The third group includes government symbols related to the Islamic Republic Era, as exemplified by the ten-day Fajr celebration, the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, the 13th of Aban (3rd of November), Quds Day, and the flag and anthem of the Islamic Republic.

The data suggest that the ancient Iranian ceremonies, festivals and rituals (Cyrus' birthday, the Mehregan and Sadeh feasts, etc.) and those of the non-Shia religions and Islamic branches need to be celebrated (this was emphasised by the interviewees). Thus, conducting these celebrations along the same lines as the Shia religious

ceremonies (Muharram, Safar, Sha'ban feasts, etc.) could eliminate the conception that politics is ideological or that the religious (Shia) view is dominant and can remove the religious minorities from society.

Unfortunately, because the Government is in the hands of one religion that tries to apply this religion in all customs, ceremonies, assemblies, institutions and organs of government, the Kurds feel discriminated against in this regard, and this religious gap has caused many Sunni talents to be lost economically, socially and culturally in Iran, and I think this religious divide is the biggest obstacle to Iran's development, especially in the growth and development of Sunni Kurds.

~ Jalal Jalalizadeh, religious-political activist from Sanandaj (Kurdistan)

Charts 3 and 4 show the religious gap from the perspectives of the participants (i.e. how many participants feel that there is religious discrimination in Iran). Respondents are categorised as the 'elite' and as the 'general public'.

Charts 3 and 4: Religious Gap and Discrimination – elite (top) and public (bottom)

Cultural Aspects of Interethnic Justice

According to the research findings, Persian-speakers typically adopt global and super-local attitudes to define their identities and have reconstructed and even changed most of their conventional characteristics, while the other ethnic groups under investigation, i.e. the Kurds, Azeris, Baloch, and Arabs, exhibit lesser acceptance in that regard.

The principle of any nation is to preserve all the customs of its people and, in this way, to continue living and to introduce itself to other nations . . . Why should I not preserve the clothes, customs and culture of my people?

~ Mullah Ahmad Bahrami, religious-social activist from Javanrood (Kermanshah)

The interviewees from the ethnic groups other than Persian have argued that the Iranian central governments following the Constitutional Revolution have not adopted a just approach to the issue of ethnic mother tongues, causing the deprivation of education in the mother tongue by recognising Persian as the official language.

We do not have the right to education in our mother tongue . . . although this is reflected in the constitution of the country, but education in the mother language has not happened.

~ Saadoun Mazuchi, civil and political activist from Mahabad (West Azerbaijan)

On that basis, in Charts 5 (elite) and 6 (public), 85.9% of the elite and 63.9% of the general public who participated in the study argue that education in the mother tongue is a legitimate, legal right. On the other hand, 14.1% of the elite and 15.7% of the general public disagree on its legitimation.
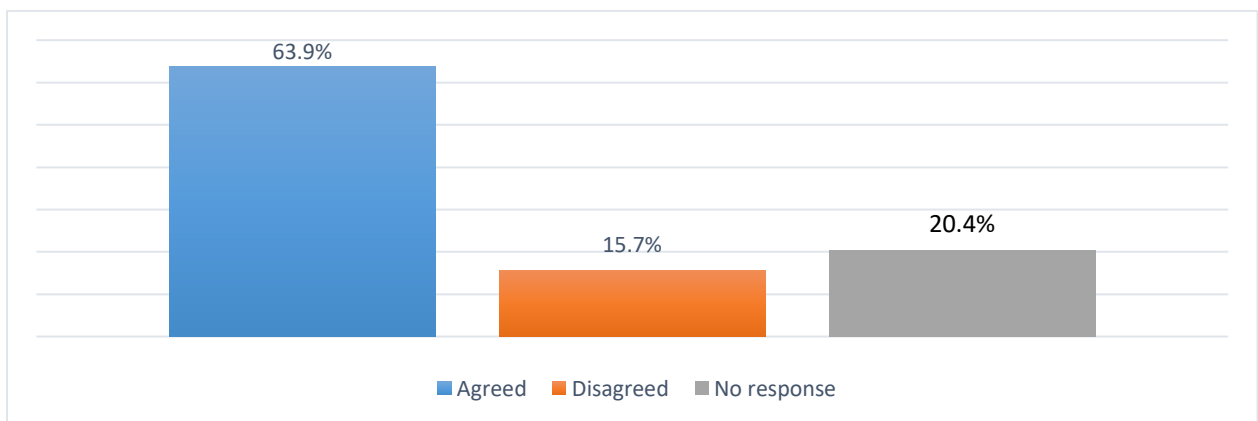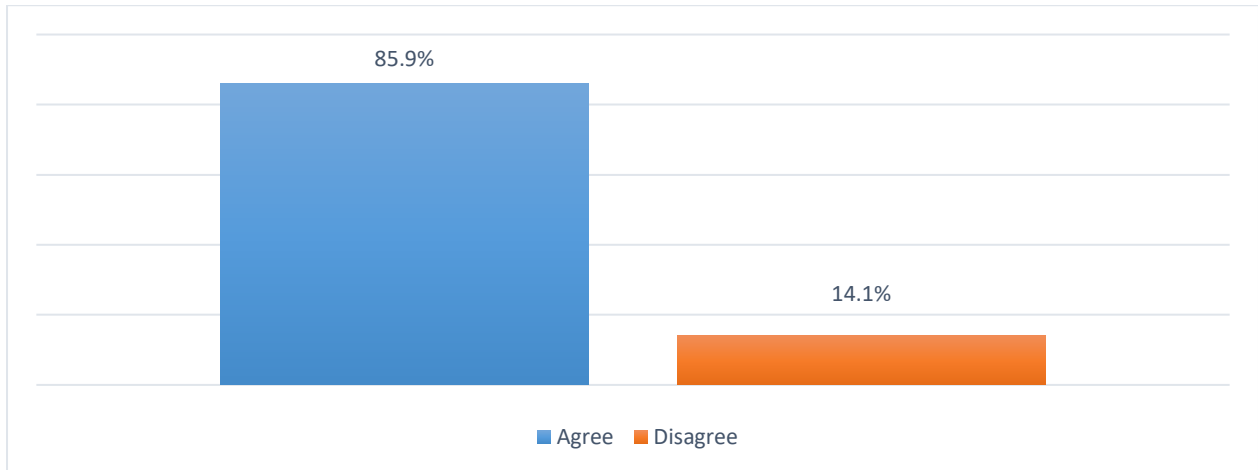
Charts 5 and 6: Legitimacy of learning in the mother tongue – elite (top) and public (bottom)

However, if a variety of ethnic groups and religious minorities reside in the most important, strategic parts of a country and those close to the borders, and if people with the same social and cultural backgrounds are located across the borders, without national governance and influence any external issue or crisis will easily spread into the country due to communication and connection between those groups, dramatically reducing the Government's capability of monitoring the region. The results obtained from this research also demonstrate that ethnic groups have a constant view of the borders and the same ethnic groups across them.

Iranian rulers' coercive, suppressive approach to confrontation of the ethnic groups' identity-seeking movements has always caused social rebellion. On the basis of the above, it would make sense for rulers to consider the identity groups' claims, which natural rise up from the heart of society, at the end of a protestant process and to resolve many of the claims through negotiation and interaction. This could be the key to national consensus and integrity, if practised.

Social Changes and Development

The contemporary Government's extreme centralisation has enabled no function but the accordance of institutions, organisations and entities associated with government interests, leading to the overall inefficiency of the institutional structures of the country and the ethnic groups.

In fact, local, governmental and quasi-governmental institutions in Iran have so far failed to be institutionalised in accordance with a set of defined functions. Centralisation and praise for the superordinate at the levels of capital, province and county within the law and in the election and recruitment of managers and similar tasks have caused the roles of people and their cultural and intellectual diversity to fade away. As a consequence of these disabling structures, ignorance and failure to resolve problems or plan efficiently can be observed – exemplified by the most important political development project of the Reformist Government (the local Islamic Councils, 1998), which has reached a dead end. Rather than being places for people's claims, counselling resources and planning, the above councils have turned into places for the economic rent, corruption, share-claiming, etc., already institutionalised in the current social/political/economic/etc. culture.

Non-governmental organisations, which can increase people's participation, are also participating in the new paradigm of development (i.e. the New World Order) in today's world [63]. participation of non-governmental organisations in local development as voluntary, non-profit organisations indicates the existence of decentralisation and partial delegation of authority in local decision-making and management, leaving them in disappointing, static conditions.

This economy has a double management; one side holds 65 to 70 percent of the power, and most of these long arms (to reach out and take from national treasure) are his and he is not accountable to anyone. The other 30 to 35 percent, which also has long arms, is chosen by the people and it is not completely controllable. It is deplorable when that 35 percent is accompanied by 65 percent; for example, they become the source corruption in a municipality.

~ Amoli, journalist from Mashhad (Khorasan Razavi)

According to interviewees, like government departments and organisations (the Executive Branch), institutions such as the city council and municipality do not function positively; they have even hindered development and caused more severe economic and administrative corruption, in some cases. Thus, public trust in them has dramatically decreased, and they have strayed away from their original roles and duties.

In Iran, the population is concentrated in a few cities, particularly in Tehran, which indicates regional imbalance and overconcentration at a few points. Tehran alone is home to more than twenty percent of the country's total population, a phenomenon known as macrocephalisation, leading to inequality and improper distribution of facilities. Moreover, capitals are depleted in other parts due to the concentration of human resources and economic capital in these, gradually widening the gaps between cities. In Iran, this is true of province capitals and large cities following Tehran.

The distribution of employment, production, and wealth in Iran is not fair at all, but it is very cruel. Someone is running the economy who is ignorant. They do it intentionally and wisely. You notice, you see the economy of this region, which on all sides has managed the Shiites and the non-Kurds and put the Kurds in the lower ranks.

~ Mohammad Hosseini, religious and cultural activist from Sanandaj (Kurdistan)

Four broad categories of the causes of underdevelopment in different ethnic regions, and even Iranian society in its entirety, can be inferred from the data provided by the participants in the present research: breach of law and underdevelopment, underdevelopment and Iranian spirit, Asian method of production and Iran's underdevelopment, and rationality and underdevelopment.

It should be noted that most renovation projects in the past century have failed, and it has already been found that sustainable development can be realised only on local and native bases. Accordingly, the requirements seem to include the existence of local institutions without government centralisation, formation of local and regional cooperatives, and maintenance of the spirit of cooperation available in traditional culture.

Media Justice

The reality of the national media is activity in line with cultural monopoly, which is why they can be referred to as 'the media of governance'. The results obtained in this section indicate inappropriate relationships between the Government and the ethnic groups. One objection made by these groups, particularly by the Sunni community,

the largest religious minority in the country, is the lack of religious centres in province capitals, especially in Tehran; however, media programmes have approved of the Government's performance in that regard.

An analysis of the contents of media programmes from the interviewees' perspectives indicates ethnic groups' overt and covert dissatisfaction with the performance of the media active in the country. According to the participants, the domestic audiovisual media are directed towards the assimilation of Iranian ethnic groups, while the Persian respondents exhibit somewhat greater satisfaction with the performance of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. Of course, the interviewees also argue that the provincial audiovisual channels do not perform better than the national broadcasting.

Charts 7 (elite) and 8 (public) show levels of satisfaction with the provincial and national channel programmes of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting.
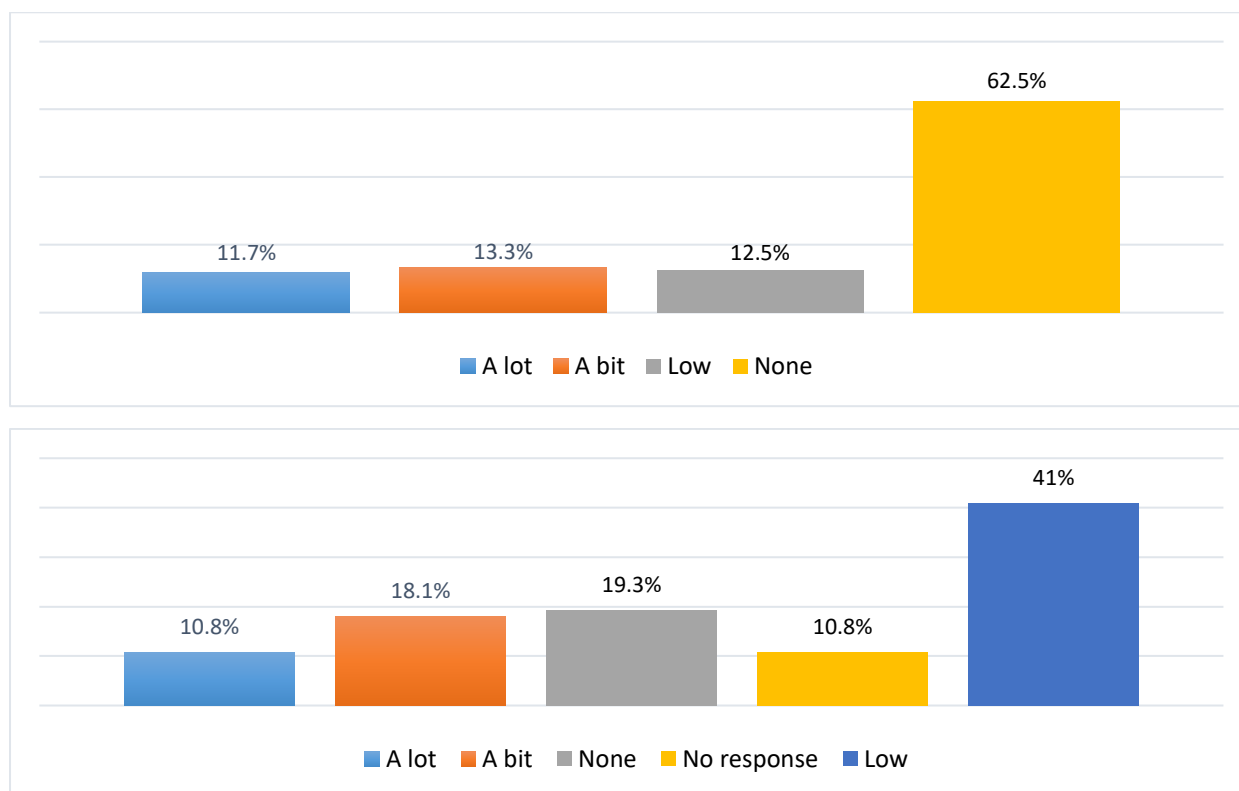
Charts 7 and 8: Satisfaction with radio and television – elite (top) and public (bottom)

In the conditions of censorship and control of the media, the audience definitely functions as a group of activists, seeking an alternative by searching for media with similar orientations. This has been confirmed by the results obtained from the interviews with the different ethnic groups.

We use and watch cyber cultural products and media in the Arab world and it has affected our lives, from choosing a name from our children to fashion and the clothes and the music and the words and speech.

~ Qasem Al-Kathir, researcher and ethnic activist from Khuzestan

Economic Justice

Certain ethnic groups have unbalanced, unjust shares of the economy of Iran. A major part of the heavy industry, involving steel, car, petrochemical and similar, is located mainly in the centre, in Persian-speaking provinces. The largest shares of the industrial sector belong to the provinces of Alborz (44%), Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari (39.6%), Isfahan (41.4%), Markazi (40.3%), Qom (43.4%), Tehran (37.3%), and Yazd (47.8%).[7] In the

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[7]   Khabaronline, news ID: 375259

agricultural sector, as in industry, crops gaining high income, such as the pistachio and saffron, are grown in Central Iran, which has led to a large share of the gross domestic product coming from the Persian settlements.

We have two governments in our province: the rule of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the rule of the Sistani Republic. I have signed and promised to the authorities not to use 'Sistani Republic' in my interviews, but I will say it. A very small group that has a maximum of 2% in the province have become the republic of totalitarians who, because their religion is the same as the Government (as apposed to us, being Sunni), received a special conditions after the Revolution, and have taken political, economic, administrative power and everything in their hands in this province. We Baluchis hate them. Why do I say Sistani Republic? Because all of them have gathered to strike at the other 98%, to create discord, to dismiss and paint the unfortunate Baluchi as a counter-revolution and take away equal opportunities from us.

~ Abdul Salam Bozorgzadeh, Radio and Television Programmer from Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan)

Ethnic groups are in unbalanced, less just economic conditions in multi-ethnic provinces such as Sistan and Baluchistan and West Azerbaijan. The Sistani and the Azeris, for example, hold larger shares of the national economy than the Baloch and the Kurds, respectively, which supplements the unequal opportunities in politics and economy.

Due to their geographic location close to the borders and security issues, the Iranian Kurd settlements are not highly developed in terms of advanced industries. The region is in improper economic condition and suffers a high unemployment rate among the active population as a result of the lack of economic infrastructures, factories and investments in the industrial sector. Therefore, most men have to engage in 'fake' occupations as smugglers, kolbars and the like to earn livings.

According to the data obtained from the research participants, 89.8% of the elite and 81.9% of the general public argue that job opportunities are not evenly distributed among the ethnic groups, and only 10.2% of the elite and 8.4% of the general public argue that there are equal employment opportunities among the ethnic groups.

Statistics suggest that the Azeri ethic group is in a relatively proper condition in terms of economy, occupation and welfare. The region has a considerable share of dairy and protein production. Of course, a more important role is played there by the factories and large industries, such as tractor manufacturing, the petrochemical industry, machinery manufacturing and the steel industry.

International commerce has thrived on the communications established and the maritime boundaries delineated at the Arab settlements in the Khuzestan and Hormozgan provinces. Moreover, the oil-richness of these settlements and the presence of large industries has attracted a workforce from all around the country. The resulting conditions have somewhat disrupted the ethnodemographics of the region, as well, as various Iranian ethnic groups have settled there to obtain job opportunities, but the native Arabs in the region are, overall, at low economic levels.[8]

I am in a province where there is water, oil and gas. The issue of unemployment does not make sense here. Poverty should be very low, but we see that deprivation and poverty in the villages and on the outskirts of cities are terrible. This may be the case in other provinces, but our view is that we are sleeping on wealth and oil, but we are living in poverty.

~ Bassem Hamadi, socio-political activist, labour-rights activist and writer from Ahvaz (Khuzestan)

There are very poor economic conditions in Baluchistan, and no factories have been founded or investments made in the province in recent years. The borders have also been closed, and there is no economic or cultural interaction with the other side. Consequently, goods smuggling and poverty have spread widely around the province. Although it used to be regarded as Iran's granary, Sistan and Baluchistan is confronted today with infertile agricultural lands.

The economy is built on livestock, agriculture, and industry, but we do not have something called industry in this province. Zabul was to become an agricultural centre, Baluchistan an industrial centre, and Zahedan a university

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[8]   www.citypedia.ir

centre. Zabul has nothing now. Anyone can prove that during these forty years a factory has been built for Zabul, I will be silent. Our people earn little something from smuggling diesel and petrol. The border wall has been drawn and they cannot do that either. Now we are behind the wall and we cannot cross the other side.

~ Mohammad Bahari, University Professor from Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchestan)

Charts 9 (elite) and 10 (public) show the sense of economic inequality among the ethnic groups. 90.6% of the elite and 88% of the general public argue that the ethnic groups in Iran suffer from economic inequality.
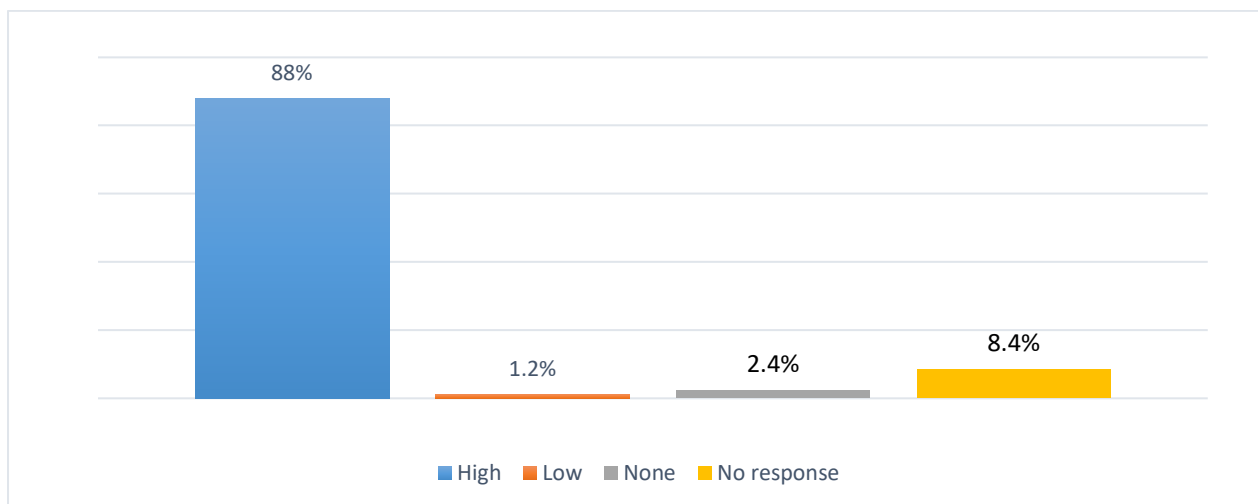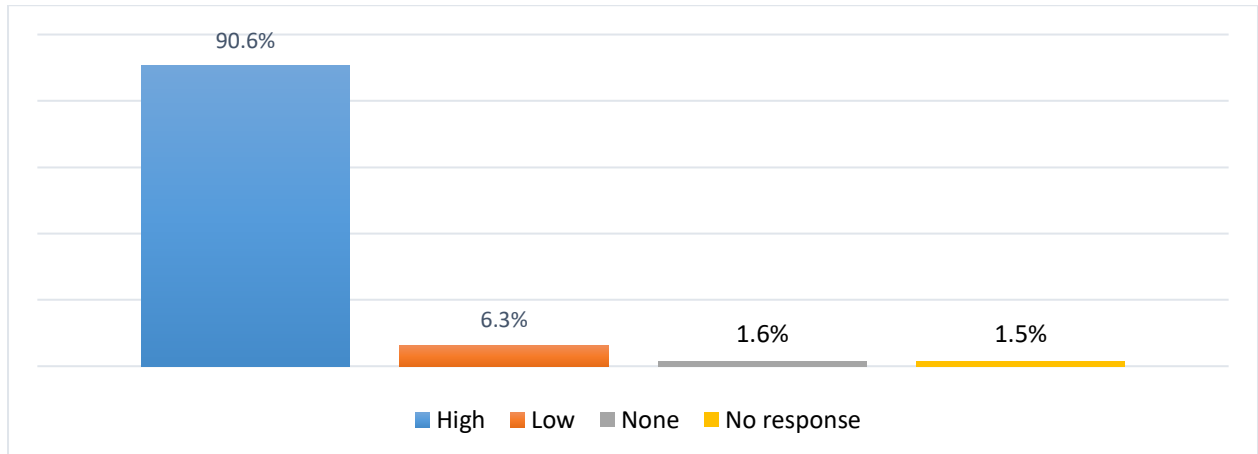
Charts 9 and 10: The extent of feelings of economic divide and discrimination elite (top) and public (bottom)

It has been found through the interviews with the research participants that the Government has played an insignificant role in the initiation and continuation of developmental activities, despite the natural and human potentials of each of the regions under investigation and their globally scarce resources and mines.

Political militarism spread over the country throughout the Pahlavi Era and continued into the Islamic Republic Era.

I have a PhD student who admits that he does not know anything, but because he comes from an governmental organisation I have to give him a grade.

~ Mehri Pakzad, faculty member of Azad University of Mahabad (West Azerbaijan)

The evidence that military authorities can utilise different sorts of economic rent suggests that militarism has infiltrated a variety of social structures, and administrative and economic corruption of different types has been extended through justifications such as social control, order and security.

Exclusion of Cultures

Under conditions of ethnic and cultural diversity, it is the quality of management that specifies whether it should be considered a threat, or it can be regarded as an opportunity. However, the interests of a particular group within governments and their inabilities to manage ethnic-cultural diversity usually direct matters towards exclusion.

Part of the data obtained from the research participants reveals a cultural monopoly of the Persian ethnic group, which has led to the deterioration of the rich Iranian culture and cultural diversity. This is severely imposed by the Azeris on the Kurds and other social groups in West Azerbaijan Province, to the extent that some participants in this study used the term 'colonisation in colonisation' to refer to it.

According to Dr As'ad Ardalan (a researcher, university instructor and social activist from Sanandaj), Reza Shahi's policy in 1925 and 1937 caused the installation of sign in the schools of Kurdistan which said: you have to speak in Persian language. The cultural dominance of the Persians, along with the attenuation of other cultures, has officially continued since then. Thus, the policy was officially promoted in magazines, including Iranshahr, Farhangestan, and Ayande,[9] as Iranshahr reads in an article on religion and nationality, 'The issue of ethnicity is so serious that whenever an Iranian who has travelled abroad is asked about his nationality, he mentions his birthplace instead of the proud name of his country. We must eliminate local sects, local dialects, local dress, local customs and local sensitivities.'

In 1928, parliament declared the Iranian ethnic groups' old costumes illegal and forced all men except registered clergy to wear Western clothes, including 'Pahlavi hats'. Eight years later, these hats were replaced by European chapeaus. Reza Shah prescribed the latter hats not only to exclude ethnic identities, but also to interfere with the ritual of saying prayers in Islam, which requires the forehead to be rested on the ground. He also changed the names of many cities.

Since the 1979 Revolution, the article in the Constitution that grants ethnic groups the right to read and write in their mother tongues at all levels of education has never been practised as expected and desired by these groups, due to the relevant authorities' subjective behaviour.

Our child speaks Arabic at home, but [when] he goes to school, they speak Persian to him, and this is cruelty. If his talent is said to be 100%, 50% used, it becomes a factor of scientific backwardness for the student. We see our children shining and succeeding even though they do not have a tongue; I mean, if he learns in his own language, I do not think we are in the current situation and we should be more advanced.

~ Hamid Hamadi, University Professor from Khuzestan

A result of the present research in this area is that there have been three dominant issues over most of Iranian history: confrontation, exclusion and ridicule of ethnic groups' cultural manifestations. A type of this exclusion is applied by the national media. For instance, radio and television programmes fail to reflect the above diversity and clearly represent one culture as more prominent and honourable. Another type of exclusion is revealed in the failure to allow ethnic and religious rituals. In fact, ethnic groups have been encouraged to imagine that there is an attempt to ridicule them culturally and prevent their cultural intergenerational continuity, and to value a specific culture instead and apply cultural assimilation for reasons such as easier management and incapability of intercultural acceptance.

In the province's radio and television, which has 70–80% Baloch population, there is very few programmes in the Baluchi language and no investment is made in the folklore and popular culture of Baluchistan, and equal opportunities are not given to the activists.

~ Abdul Rashid Triz, Mawlawi Mazhabi, history researcher and socio-political activist from Sistan and Baluchestan

Charts 11 and 12 show perspectives on the restrictions on ethnic and religious ceremonies.

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[9]   www.fa.wikipedia.org
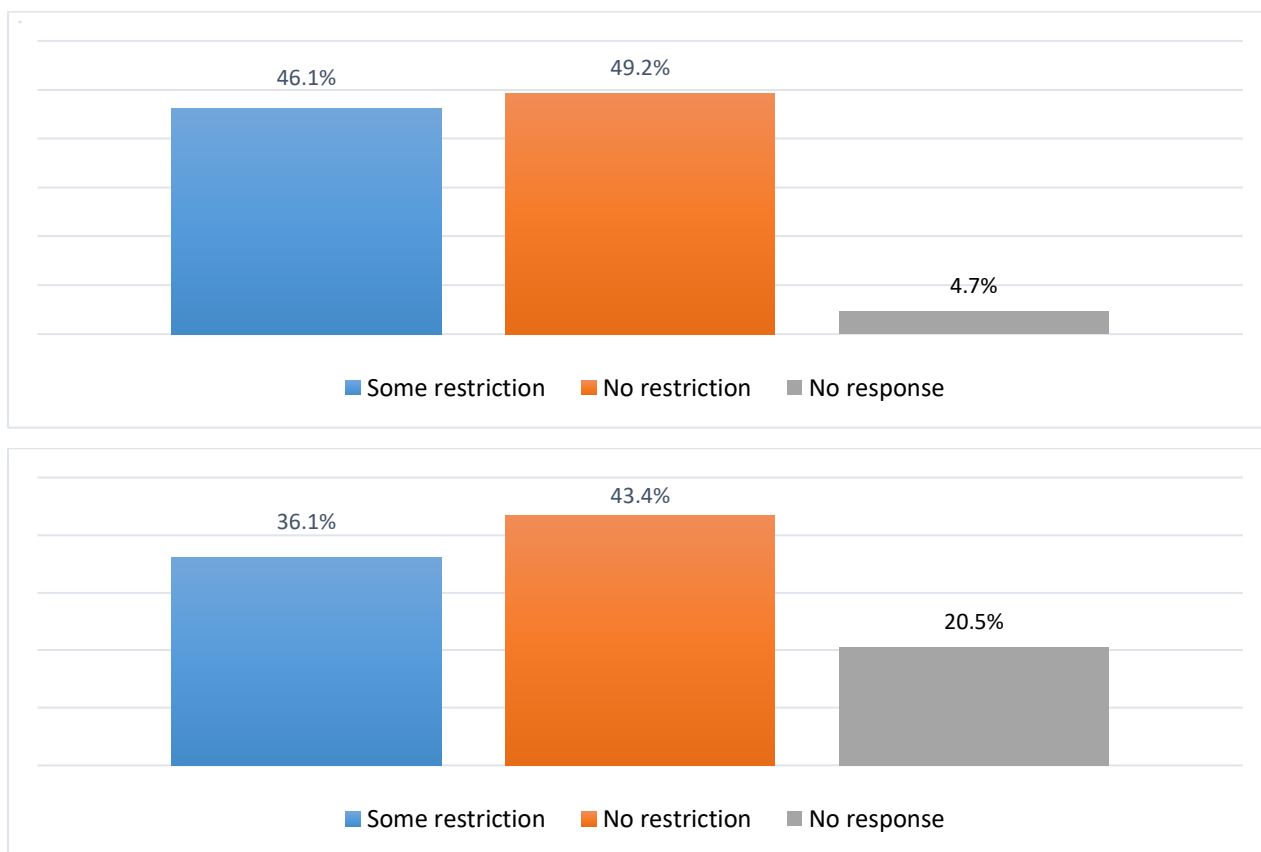
Charts 11 and 12: Restrictions on ceremonies – elite (top) and public (bottom)

Many scholars and experts in social science maintain that the current conditions in the country are anomic. They discuss attenuations of social order and integrity [64].

Reformist Abbas Abdi was first to seriously raise the problem of social collapse in Iranian society. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad[10] and his associates are among others who have recently addressed the issue. They argue that collapse has already occurred in economic, social, political, cultural, environmental and various other fields. Activists in various fields find the current conditions improper, which could pose a risk to the future of the country. The results obtained from the present study also confirm the existence of these crises.

According to Dr Mehdi Feizi (a faculty member from Mashhad), 'We have a series of crises and challenges and, in fact, super-challenges in the country that are ready to explode like time bombs. From banks to pension funds, the water crisis, unemployment, divorce, and more. Each of these is dangerous and becomes more dangerous when put together. It can be scary to blow up one and the other.'

Since the Pahlavi Era, the central governments have hardly been concerned with measures to earn public trust in such areas, adopting the simplest solution; i.e. confrontation and coercion. Committees have been dispatched in certain cases to regions such as Kurdistan, and there were negotiations soon after the Revolution with the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan and popular Sunni figures such as the Central Sunni Council (Shams). However, such attempts failed due to the dominant centre-based, power-orientated, non-pluralist spirit, and the negotiators from the ethnic and religious groups were imprisoned or exiled in most cases.

Charts 13 and 14 show the political conditions of the country from the elites' and the general public's perspectives.

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10   Resalat Newspaper, Issue 9187, 8 April 2018.
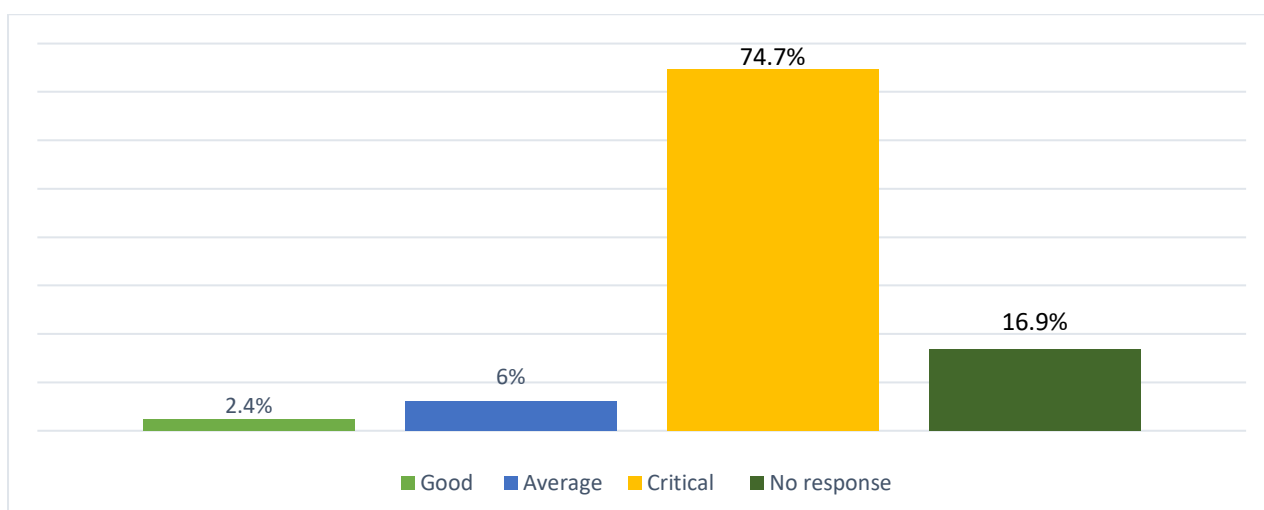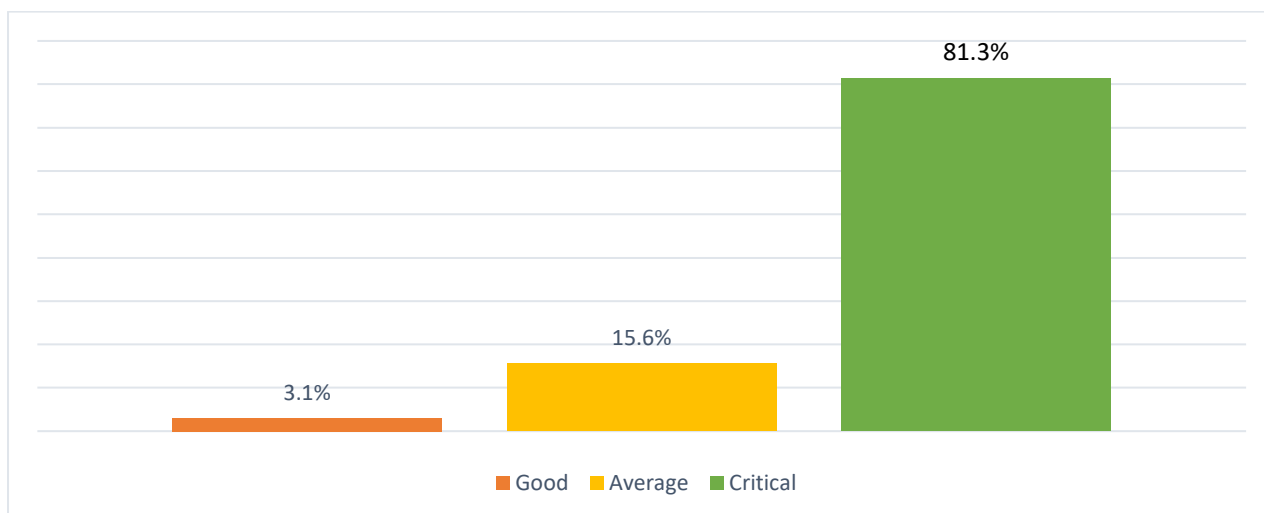
Charts 13 and 14: Iran's political conditions – elite (top) and public (bottom)

It was found, based on the research data, that ethnic issues are the most complicated, and at the same time the most influential, sociopolitical issues in Iran. Enhancement of ethnic identities and movements seems to be one of the most prominent manifestations of sociopolitical dynamism in Iran in the near future. The involved factors include wider gaps between national and ethnic identities; more serious social, dignity, economic, political and cultural claims; progressively more developed ethnic organisations, institutions, associations and centres; more severe extremist ethnocentric feelings among some of the elite, intellectuals and some political parties; more intense political alienation and separation of ethnic groups from the political system; and more explicit identity claims on opportunities for political expansion, such as national and local elections [65].

Conclusion

The major social issue related to the topic under investigation here is the sociopolitical gap that has caused justice-based claims to take shape among the ethnic and social groups in Iranian society. The changes in Iran's living and economic conditions, arising from the dominant ideology's management, can be regarded as a pivotal issue, on which ethnic groups' other claims have been based. Furthermore, these conditions result from the type of management applied to the country's social capital, which has been confronted with decline for decades and from which other challenges have originated.

The following paradigm presents the (basic, intervening and grounded) factors, phenomenal basis, strategic action and consequences within a GT framework.
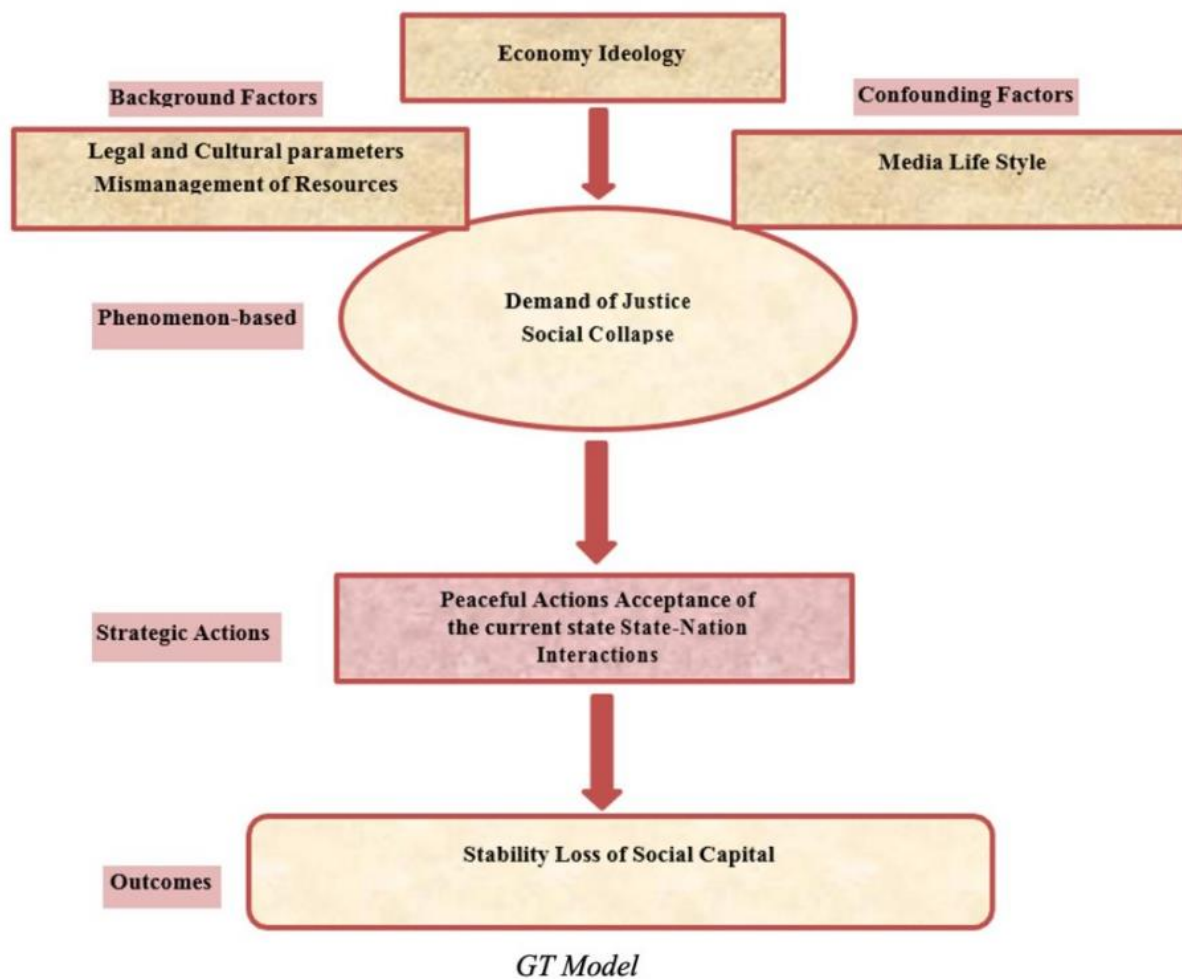
Figure 3: Conceptual model of the research (GT)

Given the above model, an unequal economy has taken shape based on the ethnic, centre-periphery and religious variables in Iranian society. This accounts for the conditions of development, which have realised most of the claims made by the ethnic groups under investigation in regard to the phenomenal orientation of the study. A major part of heavy industry, including steel and car companies, is located in Persian-speaking provinces such as Alborz, Isfahan, Markazi and Semnan, to which the largest amounts of economic revenue belong.

The Azeri (particularly those residing in East Azerbaijan Province) are the second-most affluent ethnic group, following the Persians, in terms of gained economic revenue. Despite these conditions, Azeris are no more satisfied with the Government than the other groups. Their feelings of inequality have been expressed in two terms. Firstly, they compare their economic conditions to that of Persian-speakers, arguing that the Azeri-speaking provinces hold a very insignificant share compared to the central provinces, such as Isfahan, Semnan, Markazi, Qom, Alborz and Tehran. The second point of this ethnic group's dissatisfaction with the Government is the belief in the concealed fact that most of the industries available in the region were established in the previous system of government.

In Iran's Kurdish settlements, from the cities in southern West Azerbaijan Province to Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Ilam, factories, workshops and industrial towns have developed very little in the industrial sector. There is a high unemployment rate in the region in spite of the young, educated human resources, who have to immigrate to Persian-speaking provinces, Tehran in particular, to earn a living or to work at bricklaying workshops in East Azerbaijan Province and other regions. Moreover, occupation as a kolbar has spread dramatically in the absence of official employment in the region, involving even unemployed youngsters with high-level academic degrees.

The Iranian Arabs are scattered in the Khuzestan, Bushehr and Hormozgan provinces. International commerce and business has thrived in the region on the oil-richness of their settlements and the presence of important port cities in the south-west and south. Therefore, labour forces from other regions are admitted beside the local workforce. The occupation of the non-Arabs there has caused a feeling of inequality and dissatisfaction with the Government among the residents.

It can be concluded that feelings of inequality and dissatisfaction have taken shape among ethnic groups in the past, along with an assumption of the Government's role in its development and persistence, and it has risen every day. The relevant research data suggest that the Baloch suffer the worst economic conditions and the severest dissatisfaction, and regard this mainly as a consequence of their dual ethnic-religious difference from the Government. Other reasons for the inequality and dissatisfaction include the underdevelopment of the industrial sector, drought and water scarcity, illiteracy and lack of education, little possession of managerial occupations and provincial and national administrative positions, and remote, marginal geographic location. The consequences include an increase in occupation as smugglers, social harm, religious and ethnic extremism, etc.

Two major scenarios have been presented for Iran in this study: social stability and social capital decline. If the current conditions persist, social capital will decline in various aspects, leading to social, economic, political and cultural collapse. In the second scenario, however, social stability will be achieved, and it can therefore be referred to as the favourable scenario, which depends on fundamental reforms in the economic, political, social, cultural, educational, medical and other infrastructures and superstructures, in association with the country's governmental institutions and ethnic groups.

Upon acceptance of the current conditions, the inequality and dissatisfaction will persist, and the interethnic gaps will continue to expand. The wider social, ethnic and religious gaps in this scenario will cause the social system to collapse and enmity and conflict to occur among the social groups. As a consequence, the young generation will leave the country, particularly the elite, and the human-resource crisis will persist.

In the second scenario – i.e. the favourable, futurist scenario – Iran will be in stable, sustainable cultural, social, economic and political condition. According to the obtained results, the three years to come will make known the country's eventual future trend and will specify which of the above scenarios will be realised. Iran's overall prospects in the favourable conditions can be shown as follows: Iran will be a country characterised by ethnic and religious diversity, from which national unity and solidarity originate. Political and cultural decisions will be made so as to develop interethnic relationships based on national reconciliation. The political system will abandon the hierarchical social system and citizen-ranking in domestic policy-making by accepting ethnic identity as parallel to national identity. Moreover, national determination will take shape to fill the gaps and resolve the dominant discrimination.

To realise the above prospect, operating strategies have been formulated and proposed in various social, cultural, political and legal fields, based on the results of the interviews with the research participants.

Suggestions and Practical Solutions

Under the present conditions, which foster feelings of interethnic discrimination and inequality, the enhancement of social trust and social capital in accordance with political loyalty to pluralist national integrity, favouring multiplicity, has taken precedence over any sort of planning. Moreover, where most human resources have been organised based on unspecialised criteria, and are unable to manage different crises, national integrity and ethnic solidarity have been reduced to theoretical mottos, void of social reality; continuous peaceful coexistence no longer makes sense, which implies that a more military-like atmosphere is dominating society, particularly the ethnic regions. Evidence suggests that this is being replaced by a spirit of applying rights, such as citizenship rights and the rights to social and economic security. In this research, the following suggestions are made in that regard.

Realisation of Economic Justice

In the industrial sector, the industrial centralisation established in the central provinces can be reduced by founding relevant centres, such as firms and factories. In the next stage, comprehensive laws should be formulated, related

to the prohibition of trafficking, smuggling (mountain porters) and social issues that are rooted in economic problems resulting from long-standing centralism, and the necessary enforcement guarantees should be enshrined in these laws.

In such conditions, there would be less efficient human resource and foreign currency leaving the country's economic market. Moreover, all Iranians could be employed and their scientific and practical powers could be utilised.

There are ambiguities involved in the use of 'ethnic identity' and 'national identity' among some minorities in Iran, there is a great emphasis on using the word 'nation' instead of 'ethnic group'. The use of the term 'ethnic' in this study is not intended to diminish conceptual complexity. Instead, the study strove to respect the spirit of science and did not intend to interfere with personal values in the research process.

Realisation of Sociocultural Justice

Today's research in various fields of science indicates the inefficiency of the dominant top-down, centralised policies and perspectives. The Government should contribute less to the management of many local affairs and leave it to the people themselves. This could be realised through independent parties and freedom of thought and action; otherwise, any activity is destined to be inefficient, like the local Islamic Councils, which have turned weaker, more corrupt and less efficient every day over five terms.

It is suggested that concern for meritocracy be enhanced; different social, cultural and political activities not be monitored as in a military setting; and local leaders and people be provided freedom to manage their own cultural, social and religious affairs. Measures that can be taken for the realisation of social justice include founding centres and places of worship particular to the Sunni and each of the present religious branches in Tehran, and acknowledging and encouraging education in the mother tongue. These both meet the people's innate needs and provide them with mental-social health and peace. They also allow the energy of the ethnic elite, local languages, artists and other ethnic activists to contribute to national production and effort.

Another important issue involves gender discrimination at the governmental level, as well as at the heart of the society, which pertains largely to social norms and rules, apart from legal restrictions. Undoubtedly, movement toward balanced, sustainable development requires that the entire potential capacity available in society be utilised, and it would denote a reduction of the power of national human and non-human resources to neglect part of the population (women). Many of the participants in the interviews have pointed out the issue. According to them, girls and women in Iranian society are affected by orientations arising from the abovementioned sexist attitudes upon equal competition against men in nationwide examinations, recruitment procedures and appointments for administrative positions (at the levels of ministry, province and county).

The notion of a second-order citizen (or lower) has been there among the topics discussed by the interviewees, used by people from ethnic group societies to express their feelings, and should be regarded as a warning to cultural policy-makers. The following solutions are emphasised in that regard:

1. comprehensive development of deprived regions, with priority given to ethnic groups and religious minorities;

2. development of participatory planning through utilisation of ethnic groups' diverse cultural capacities;

3. The right to self-determine and create a federal system
4. Creating safe educational spaces for studying in mother tongue at all educational levels
5. reduction of centralisation and redistribution of economic and social opportunities;

6. bottom-up planning and reverse development, so that the distribution of resources starts at the border and leads to the centre; and

7. reformation of the country's administrative system and managerial hierarchy through delegation of greater power to local managers.

Realisation of Political Justice

According to the research participants, Iranian political parties mainly emerge in masses for no longer than two weeks upon elections, and fade away once the procedure is completed. Since they are rooted in particular groups' or individuals' plans for possession of presidential or parliament seats and the like, there is no party in the ethnic regions expressing the people's ethnic claims. Perhaps the most significant reason for the isolation and withdrawal of Iranian parties is the dominant atmosphere, focused on security, monitoring and control, imposed by various institutions largely out of the control of the Government and the numerous filtering networks active in the country. The most important possible function of a party can be to express the claims of those with affiliated thoughts through democratic principles and the process of dialogue. When there is no such procedure in society, these strategies are replaced by strife and violence, and formation of such an atmosphere can jeopardise the legitimacy of the system.

The suggestions made in this research have been made by the participants. On that basis, the Government needs to spread the atmosphere involving parties to ethnic groups, as well as activate licensed parties, besides abandoning the militaristic atmosphere. Thus, the ethnic groups' claims could be expressed and met in a fully democratic manner simply through the process of dialogue.

All four ethnic groups under investigation, other than the Persians, have exhibited dissatisfaction in that regard. The Kurds, Arabs, and Baloch have stated that there had been no case of election of those speaking their languages for top political ranks, such as the heads of the executive, legislative and judicial branches, government ministers, governors and ambassadors, throughout more than forty years of the Islamic Republic Era.

Realisation of Social Welfare

Definitions provided of 'social welfare' cover both the material and spiritual aspects of meeting human needs. According to the data collected in this research, access to hospitals, medical centres and other necessary services in the field of healthcare in the ethnic regions under investigation has been distributed highly disproportionately and unfairly. In parts of Kurdistan, hospitals are incapable of performing the simplest surgeries and healthcare services, and the patient has to visit the province capitals (Urmia, Tabriz, Hamadan, etc.) for treatment. Of course, monitoring patients visiting Tehran hospitals well indicates the conditions of patients who have taken refuge there despite their poverty, due to deprivation in their own regions.

No access to natural gas has yet been provided in regions near the borders, particularly in the villages. Significant disasters have occurred in recent years in schools in Kurdistan and Baluchistan due to the use of oil heaters in the absence of natural gas, which have killed several students and teachers, and the burns will remain forever on many of the students' bodies.

Movie theatres, parks, and leisure time do not make sense near the Iranian borders. Development, industry and road infrastructures among the minorities and near the borders are horrendous, and the roads in those regions have turned into places of murder of youngsters. It is suggested that the indicators of social welfare be seriously revised with proper management and without ethno-religious discrimination, particularly in the fields of health and education, given at least the regional scopes and road infrastructures. Then, the troubles need to be shot and appropriate measures taken to prevent irreparable damage.

Role of Mass Media in National Solidarity and Interethnic Media Justice

The Iranian national, official media are clearly monopolised by the Government, engaged in a particular form of religious and political promotion and manifestation. There is a huge amount of censorship in these media, which disables the free flow of information. This is an issue criticised by the ethnic groups under investigation, who consider it as a source of discrimination in contrast to ethnic convergence and national integrity and solidarity. According to the research interviewees, this type of ideological manifestation censors Iranians' cultural richness and common historical and social backgrounds, pursues assimilation policies that lead to the politicisation of cultural issues and undervalues ethnic groups' cultural behaviours. This discriminative perspective has caused an increasing tendency to use Western and online media, playing a fundamental role in that regard. It is suggested that the issue be addressed openly to help admit the private sector into the field and allow each political party to possess different media. Provision of such access will lead to healthy competition and a return of the public trust to the national media.

Provision Made for Proximity of Religions in Iran

Part of the research findings suggest that religious thought could be left out of the official political system, replaced by an adoption of the conditions of secular government. Thus, any identity preference or privilege could be eliminated, causing the feeling of oppression against different religious identities to fade away and making provision for utilisation of human talents with a multiplicity of knowledge and expertise.

Utilising the Legal Democratic Capacity and Enforcing the Pending Articles of the Constitution

The pending articles of the Constitution, as is also emphasised by the research participants, address the issue of religious and human freedoms in accordance with different ethnic and racial groups' equality, as in education in the mother tongue (Articles 12, 13, 14, 15, and 19). They provide for the democratic capacity of the country's laws, making it possible to realise the ethnic and religious minorities' rights, and also resolving part of the dissatisfaction observed among the groups under investigation here.

In this regard, one could say that social realities and objectives do provide strong warnings of possible crises in each of these areas. According to the participants of this study, the way out of deadlocks and crises is for the Government to gain enough power to enact the pending articles of the Constitution.

About the Author

A social anthropologist and scholar, **Kameel Ahmady** received the IKWR 2017 Truth Honour Award from London Law University and placed first in the literary category at the 2017 Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation ceremony hosted by George Washington University.

A dual British-Kurdish Iranian national, Kameel Ahmady studied economic environment and publishing at the University of Communications in London, earned an M.A. in Social Anthropology from the University of Kent, and pursued additional courses on research methods and Middle East Studies at the London School of Economics and Birkbeck, University of London.

Kameel has worked mainly on international and social development, focusing on gender and minority issues. Published in English, Farsi, Turkish and Kurdish, his previous pioneering research has garnered international attention. In 2011, Etkin in Istanbul brought out **Another Look at East and South-East Turkey**, and his ground-breaking research, **In the Name of Tradition: Female Genital Mutilation in Iran**, appeared in 2015 with UnCUT/VOICES Press. Nova Science Publisher added **An Echo of Silence** – a study of early child marriage (ECM) in Iran – to its programme in 2017, a work that Shiraze publishing made available in Farsi. In 2019, **Childhood Plunder** (about scavenging – i.e. waste picking – in Tehran) was printed by IRSPRC. In 2020, **A House on Water**, investigating temporary marriage in Iran, was brought out by Shiraze in Tehran and Mehri in London.

In the last few years, Kameel has focused on LGBT+ and ethnicity in such works as **Forbidden Tale**, a comprehensive study of LGBT+ individuals in Iran, printed in English and Farsi by Mehri. In 2020, **The House with an Open Door**, a comprehensive look at temporary marriage in Iran, was printed, and in 2021, **From Border to Border: An analysis of Iranian identity and ethnicity**, based on research with five major ethnic groups – Turkish (Azari), Kurdish, Baloch, Arab and Fars (Persian-speaking) – was also published by Mehri in Farsi and English. His new book on child labour, **Traces of Exploitation in Childhood: A Comprehensive Research on Forms, Causes and Consequences of Child Labour in Iran** was published in June 2021 by Avaye Buf publishing. His latest research on male circumcision, **Blade of Tradition in the Name of Religion A Phenomenological Investigation into Male Circumcision in Iran** published by the same publisher as well as scholar press in 2023.

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