



Contemporary Researches on Islamic Revolution



Examining the Transformation of the Public Sphere during the Transition from the Authoritarian Modern State of the Pahlavis to the Religious State of the Islamic Republic

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Scientific Research	Objective: This study aims to analyze the status of the public sphere in the Iranian Constitution by comparing two distinct historical periods in contemporary Iran: the Pahlavi era as an example of an authoritarian modern state and the Islamic Republic period as a model of a religious-republican state.
Article history: Received: 2025-11-27 Received in revised form: 2025-12-22 Accepted : 2026-01-27 Available online: 2026-10-24	Research Method: The present study is qualitative and, methodologically, is based on thematic analysis and thematic network analysis.
Keywords: Public Sphere, Pahlavi, Islamic Republic, Constitution, Habermas.	Findings: The findings indicate that although the Constitution of the Constitutional Revolution contained progressive principles such as freedom of the press, government accountability, parliamentary oversight, and the establishment of associations, in practice it failed to provide the conditions necessary for the emergence of an active public sphere. During the Pahlavi period, the concentration of power within the monarchy, electoral control, media monopolization, and the absence of intermediary institutions restricted the possibility of free communicative action and critical participation, reducing the public sphere to a formal, performative, and state-controlled level. By contrast, despite its adherence to religious frameworks and security considerations, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran has, in theoretical terms, created broader capacities for social participation and the production of public dialogue. The expansion of elective and participatory institutions, the development of public media, the emergence of diverse political currents, and the increasing role of universities and social networks have created opportunities for the relative expression of communicative action and civic demand.
	Conclusion: Accordingly, the transition from the authoritarian modern state of the Pahlavis to the religious state of the Islamic Republic did not eliminate all the limitations affecting the public sphere; nevertheless, it has, overall, resulted in a theoretical transformation and an increase in the dialogical and participatory capacities of Iranian society.

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Introduction

Modern political science, unlike that of the pre-modern period, was reduced, with its turn toward positivism, to the study of power relations and the ways in which power is acquired and maintained within society. Jürgen Habermas, a contemporary philosopher and sociologist, is among the few theorists who once again integrates political knowledge with ethics, revives normative-ethical political thought, and, through this approach, undertakes a reconstruction of the “Public Sphere.” The civic condition with which he is confronted is fraught with crises, and he does not consider institutional reform alone sufficient to overcome this critical situation. Drawing on critical theory, whose two principal characteristics are a critique of “Instrumental Rationality” in modern thought and a “Critique of the Structure of Power” based on late capitalism, Habermas seeks to reconstruct the public sphere (Manouchehri, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 36).

In Jürgen Habermas’s thought, the “Public Sphere” is an arena in which citizens can freely deliberate on public affairs, criticize power, and influence decision-making processes. In his view, the public sphere, which is the product of extensive transformations in various dimensions of European society, constitutes a sphere of communicative action and public participation that makes the legitimacy of political power dependent upon its capacity to respond to public opinion. Nevertheless, through his critique of liberal capitalist societies, he argues that the public sphere has undergone a process of decline and that its revitalization requires measures across various domains.

Iran, a country with a civilization spanning several millennia, has been deeply influenced by Western modernity throughout its contemporary history. The structure of the state and its relationship with society has undergone fundamental transformations over the past century, transformations that have directly affected the formation, weakening, and expansion of the public sphere. The Constitutional Revolution ultimately led to the rise of Reza Khan, who, in the course of his rule, was confronted with the Constitution produced by that revolution. After consolidating his position, however, he adopted a governing style different from that of the early years of his reign. At the beginning of the Second Pahlavi period, on the one hand, the particular circumstances of the international environment and World War II and, on the other hand, the personal characteristics of Mohammad Reza Shah created conditions in which a certain degree of pluralization of power could be observed (Abrahamian, 2024 AD/1403 SH). This environment contained semi-democratic conditions within itself, and had it continued, the country might have followed a different trajectory. However, the Second Pahlavi regime, for various reasons, also moved toward authoritarianism (Bashiriye, 2022 AD/1401 SH), and the conditions that had emerged

at the beginning of this period did not persist. This ultimately led to the 1979 Revolution and the beginning of the Islamic Republic's period of governance.

During the Pahlavi period, although the Constitution of the Constitutional Revolution provided for such capacities as freedom of the press, the establishment of parliament, and the legal equality of citizens, the severe concentration of political power, security controls over political parties and associations, economic dependence on the state, and media monopolization obstructed these capacities. Consequently, contrary to the spirit of the constitutional order, the public sphere was transformed in practice into a controlled and state-dominated space in which the possibility of critical communicative action was undermined. Following the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the model of political legitimacy underwent a transformation, and the new Constitution institutionalized certain participatory mechanisms. Nevertheless, the religious-republican structure of the system has also generated new constraints on the public sphere. This dual condition has caused the public sphere in the Islamic Republic to function neither as a "Suppressed and Closed" sphere, as in the Pahlavi period, nor as a completely "Free and Unrestricted" sphere; rather, it operates as a multilayered and fluid space in which opportunities and constraints coexist. Numerous studies have examined the concept of the public sphere, including Jürgen Habermas (1989), *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*; Nozari (2014 AD/1393 SH), in the book *Rereading Habermas*; Sadeghitabar (2013 AD/1392 SH), in the dissertation entitled "Transformations of the Public Sphere in Iran from the Constitutional Revolution to the Present"; Tavassoli Naeini (2022 AD/1401 SH), "The Status of Political Participation in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran"; Sabze'i (2016 AD/1395 SH), "A Sociological Analysis of the Public Sphere in Post-Revolutionary Iran"; Najafzadeh (2014 AD/1393 SH), "The Simultaneity of the Emergence of the Public Sphere in Iran and the West"; and Gholami et al. (2023 AD/1402 SH), "The Relationship between Political Jurisprudence and Modern Public Law in the Constitutionalism and Republicanism of Contemporary Iran." These studies have addressed the concept of the public sphere and its position within Iranian society.

Despite the existence of valuable scholarship on the public sphere in Iran, a significant research gap persists regarding thematic analyses that concurrently investigate the transformation of the public sphere during both the Pahlavi and Islamic Republic periods. This study addresses this gap by integrating Habermas's critical theory with a thematic analytical approach.

Given the importance of this topic, the study first identifies the principal themes of the public sphere in Habermas's thought, followed by an examination

and comparison of relevant constitutional principles from the Pahlavi era and the Islamic Republic of Iran within this theoretical framework. The analysis clarifies how the Iranian Constitution, across these two periods, incorporates, restricts, or redefines elements of the public sphere. By revealing existing gaps and challenges, this analysis not only enhances understanding of the public sphere's status and transformation but also offers a framework for critiquing governance structures and developing mechanisms for rational citizen participation. Notably, the emphasis on citizen participation in governance is regarded by the leadership of the Islamic Republic as essential for system preservation and is frequently highlighted as a necessity across various domains.

1. Theoretical Framework

Aristotle distinguished between two fundamental realms: the household/private sphere and the city/public sphere. By defining human beings as "Political Animals," he maintained that human beings can realize their human virtues, freedom, and participation only within the space of the polis. For Aristotle, the public sphere is a domain in which citizens deliberate on laws, justice, and collective interests (Aristotle, 2023 AD/1402 SH). In the Roman Republic, the concept of *res publica* referred to public and shared affairs; however, with the dominance of the Church during the Middle Ages, this distinction was weakened. During this period, there was no clear distinction between "Religious Affairs," "Royal Power," and "The social life of the people." The Church itself controlled the public sphere, which was neither dialogical nor based on rational argumentation, but rather rested on religious authority. With the Renaissance and the process of religious reform, this trend changed, and the authority of the Church was challenged (Alam, 2017 AD/1396 SH).

In the modern era, Immanuel Kant was the first thinker to explicitly discuss the public sphere. By emphasizing human reason, he connected it with universality and regarded enlightenment as achievable only through the public sphere. From Kant's perspective, the assessment of truth requires public agreement, which is rooted in critical rational debates within the public sphere (Gripsurd, 2010: 4). However, the first thinker to analyze the concept of the public sphere, rather than merely describe it, was Jürgen Habermas. Bashiriyeh maintains that Habermas, as an heir to the Frankfurt School, introduced revisions to the school's fundamental ideas. By criticizing instrumental rationality, he developed the concept of communicative rationality, which is essentially an emancipatory process (Holub, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 5).

According to Habermas, the bourgeoisie in Europe, by making use of the emerging communicative space, established a public sphere in which citizens en-

gaged in dialogue with one another independently of the state. Argumentation and rationality prevailed over domination and authority, while the press, cafés, and literary circles constituted its principal pillars. Habermas regards this period as an example of “Dialogical Rationality.” (Habermas, 1989: 33-36) In Habermas’s view, however, late capitalism, through the commercialization of the media and the expansion of consumer culture, gradually transformed the public sphere from a space of criticism and argumentation into an advertising-oriented and passive sphere. He speaks of the decline of the public sphere, a condition in which people have been transformed from active participants in dialogue into passive consumers of information and advertising (Habermas, 2023 AD/1402 SH).

By dividing society into two domains, the system and the lifeworld, Habermas argues that, in this process, the system came to dominate the life world.

This development has subjected individuals in capitalist society and modern humanity to crisis (Edgar, 2023 AD/1402 SH). Accordingly, Habermas emphasizes the need to return to the life world, and argues that communicative action is necessary for this return and for the revitalization of the life world; this is something that takes place within the public sphere. In Habermas’s view, the public sphere is “A sphere in which citizens can freely and equally deliberate on public affairs and exercise oversight over political power.” (Habermas, 1989: 89)

On this basis, the public sphere possesses certain characteristics, although it is not possible for all of them to emerge comprehensively in every society. Indeed, in many societies and political systems, even the most basic components of the public sphere fail to emerge. Within the public sphere, participants may encounter opinions that differ from or oppose their own. Such discussions take place primarily through mass media, meetings, social media, academic publications, and political and governmental documents (Overland, 2018).

Habermas, by proposing a normative conception of the public sphere, regards it as a part of social life in which citizens can discuss and exchange views on matters that they consider important for securing the common good. He identifies four conditions as necessary for the formation of a public sphere:

1. The formation of public opinion;
2. Accessibility for all citizens;
3. The possibility of unrestricted speech based on freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of expression, and the dissemination of opinions on matters of public interest, which entails freedom from economic and political control;
4. Discussion concerning the general laws governing social relations (Habermas, 1989: 136).

Political participation in the public sphere is formed through dialogue. This sphere is completely distinct and separate from the state and constitutes a site for the production and circulation of discourse that can, in principle, be critical of the state and the governing authority. The public sphere is also distinct from the formal economy. It is not an arena of market relations; rather, it is a place for discussion and deliberation, not for buying and selling (Fraser, 1990: 57). According to this theory, democratic governance depends on the capacity and opportunity of citizens to participate in clear and effective deliberation (Hauser, 1999: 45).

2. Research Method

The present study is qualitative and, methodologically, is based on thematic analysis and thematic networks. This is a process-oriented method used to analyze textual data and to identify, analyze, and report patterns within qualitative data that are employed to present and substantiate an understanding of reality (Clarke & Braun, 2006: 80).

A theme represents something significant within the data in relation to the research questions. It is also a pattern identified in the data, characterized by a recurring and distinctive feature within the text that reflects a particular understanding or experience and is considered by the researcher to be relevant to the research questions (King, 1998: 150).

In thematic analysis, the extraction of prominent themes from a text is pursued at different levels. Thematic networks, in turn, seek to facilitate the structuring and mapping of these themes and, according to a specified procedure, organize them systematically into the following categories:

- A) Basic themes: Codes and key points identified within the text;
- B) Organizing themes: Categories derived through the combination and condensation of basic themes;
- C) Global themes: higher-order themes encompassing the overarching principles governing the text as a whole.

These themes are then represented graphically as network maps, in which the prominent themes at each of the three levels, together with the relationships among them, are displayed (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

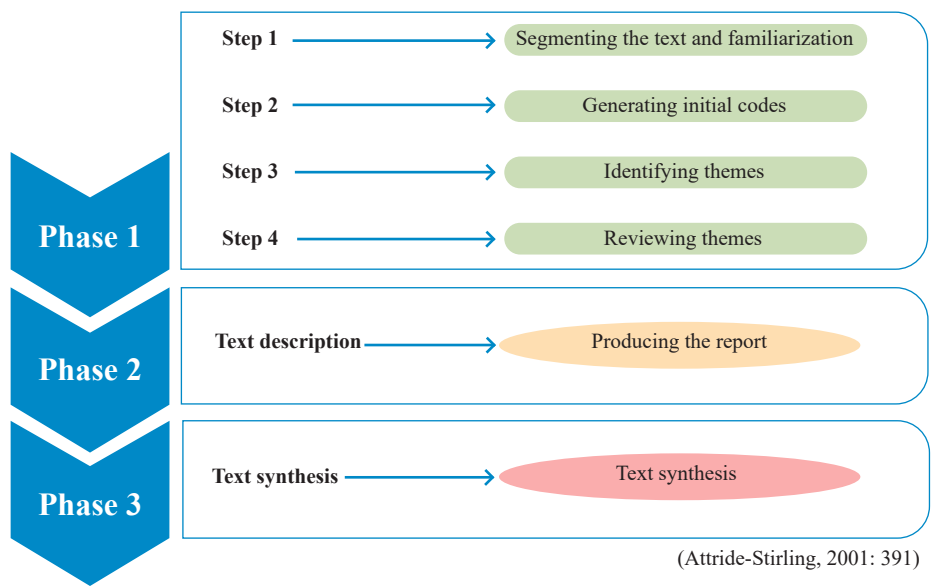
In the present study, avoiding quantitative and statistical analysis, we examine themes related to the public sphere in the constitutions of two distinct periods and employ an integrated model based on the following two approaches.

First, the six-phase model developed by Braun and Clarke, consisting of familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Clarke & Braun, 2006).

Second, Attride-Stirling’s thematic network framework classifies themes at three levels:

- A) Basic themes;
- B) Organizing themes;
- C) Global themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

A summary of the six stages of thematic analysis is presented in Figure 1.



3. Thematic Analysis of Habermas’s Thought and Extraction of Basic Themes

Based on the methodological process of thematic analysis, the first step is to extract the initial conceptual codes from Habermas’s theories. These codes are then organized into conceptual categories and transformed into basic themes. The categorized themes are subsequently integrated with one another and transformed into organizing themes, ultimately leading to a global theme. The sources underlying the analysis of Habermas’s thought in this section include Habermas’s major works, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, as well as related studies by Calhoun (2001) and Fraser (1990).

Table 1. Text Analysis and Extraction of Basic Themes of the Public Sphere in

Habermas's Thought

Extracted Text / Conceptual Statement	Basic Theme
A sphere in which citizens can freely and equally deliberate on public affairs and exercise oversight over political power.	Free and equal access to the public space or public sphere
Influenced by Hannah Arendt, Habermas defines the public sphere as a realm of social life in which something approximating public opinion can emerge and access to which is guaranteed to all citizens. Habermas explicitly refers to the "political" public and identifies certain requirements for it: the concept of the public sphere entails that people come together in the arena of shared interests. The public does not refer merely to what belongs to society as a whole; rather, it is a structure that brings together individuals and groups who have a place in private discourse within a discourse based on common interests.	Distinction between the public and private spheres
A sphere in which argumentation and rationality prevail over domination and authority. Human beings, by employing reason, are capable of transcending self-interest, prejudice, and dogmatism.	Communicative rationality and persuasive argumentation
The public sphere is also distinct from the formal economy. It is not an arena of market relations; rather, it is a place for discussion and deliberation, not for buying and selling. These distinctions among state institutions, economic markets, and democratic associations are essential to a democratic perspective.	Independence of the public sphere from state and economic power
In his view, the public sphere provides a setting for the exchange of ideas and dialogue aimed at shaping individual opinions, views, and ideas characterized by reason and critical perspectives. Through reason, individuals can move beyond the realm of coercion and the control exercised by non-rational forces. Individuals in this sphere can enjoy freedom of expression, freedom of publication, freedom of assembly, and freedom of communication. It is only under these conditions that individuals collectively constitute a public sphere. Communicative action constitutes the basis of communicative rationality, while communicative rationality constitutes the basis of critical theory, and critical theory provides knowledge oriented toward emancipation. Contrary to subject-centered and subjectivist conceptions, in which the autonomous subject is regarded as the agent of every action and process, emancipatory thought identifies dialogue itself as the means of emancipation.	Public criticism
A sphere in which citizens can freely and equally deliberate on public affairs and exercise oversight over political power.	Transparency and accountability of institutions of power and governance
The source of legitimacy lies in formal and informal processes associated with dialogue, deliberation, and political exchange of views. Political legitimacy therefore depends on broad public participation in political decision-making. Participation does not necessarily or exclusively mean voting in elections; rather, it specifically entails having an effective voice in decision-making. It is a sphere of social life in which individuals can come together to discuss social issues freely and, through such discussions, influence political and governmental actions.	Formation of the general will through dialogue
Citizens must be assured that their views will be reflected in legislation and policymaking. In fact, the rule of law and popular sovereignty must be internally interconnected. Law therefore serves as the intermediary through which the communicative power of the people is transformed into administrative power. Political participation in the public sphere is formed through dialogue.	Communicative action instead of strategic, ideological, or instrumental action

From the perspective of legal theory, the modern legal order can derive its legitimacy only from the idea of autonomy and free will. Citizens must always be able to regard themselves as the authors of the law. The outcome of this process is the basic system of rights and the foundation of institutional rights that make the ideas of autonomy and free will possible. Politically, its source lies in the right to equal individual freedoms to the greatest extent possible. It also entails the enforceability of rights and legal protection of the individual, together with equal opportunities to participate in processes of opinion- and will-formation through which citizens exercise their political autonomy and establish legitimate law.	Participatory equality and the absence of hierarchy
Within the public sphere, participants may encounter opposing or divergent opinions. Such discussions take place primarily through mass media, meetings, social media, academic publications, and political and governmental documents. Members of society meet one another through various mediating institutions and engage in dialogue concerning common issues and matters of shared public interest.	Dialogical intermediary spaces and free media
In Europe, the bourgeoisie used the emerging communicative space to establish a public sphere in which the press, cafés, and literary circles constituted its principal pillars. Habermas regards this period as an example of dialogical rationality.	Informal public spaces (cafés, media, associations)

These themes will constitute the conceptual framework for analyzing the constitutions of Iran during the two historical periods under examination.

In other words, these basic themes will serve as the basis for determining which constitutional principles of the Pahlavi period and the Islamic Republic correspond to or conflict with these themes. The next step involves constructing the organizing themes based on the themes identified above. These are themes that categorize and integrate similar basic themes into semantic groups. At this stage, dispersed elements are organized into coherent conceptual sets that, in the subsequent step, lead toward the global theme. The outcome of this integration consists of the following five organizing themes: “Equal and free public participation, communicative rationality as the foundation of legitimacy, social oversight and transparency of power, independence of the public sphere from formal power, intermediary institutions and dialogical infrastructures, the manner in which these themes are categorized is presented in Figure 2.

In the next step, these organizing themes are directed toward the formation of a global theme, which constitutes the final stage of the thematic analysis of Habermas’s theoretical conception of the public sphere. Formulating the global theme as the overarching message and central motif of his thought brings all the organizing themes together within a comprehensive framework.

The outcome of the preceding two stages of analyzing Habermas’s thought is the following overarching message: “The public sphere as an arena for the formation of citizens’ rational-critical will in relation to power.”

Habermas’s ideas concerning the public sphere have had a profound influence on theories of democracy. In his view, the public sphere constitutes a prerequisite for the realization of participatory democracy and political legitimacy

in the modern world. According to Habermas, any political system that is unable to create such a space for its citizens is devoid of rational legitimacy. Accordingly, the global theme of Habermas's thought can be summarized as follows: "The public sphere, as a dialogical and rational space, should provide the conditions for the formation of an independent, equal, transparent, and critical public will, a space that is not subordinate to power, but rather exercises oversight over it.

Figure 2. Themes of Habermas's Thought Concerning the Public Sphere



Designed by the author

With the global theme established, the Habermasian model of the public sphere can now be understood as comprising five organizing themes and ten basic themes.

This model will serve as the analytical framework for the subsequent thematic analysis of the two constitutions, enabling an assessment of their correspondence with or divergence from the Habermasian model.

4. Analysis of the Iranian Constitution from the Perspective of the Public Sphere

The Constitution, corresponding to the Latin term *Constitution*, is defined by Heywood as a set of laws that establishes the duties, powers, and functions of governmental institutions, regulates relations among them, and defines the relationship between the state and the individual (Heywood, 2024 AD/1403 SH: 417). Garner defines it as the highest law governing a country, which determines the scope of authority of the governing branches and encompasses the rights and freedoms of a nation (Garner, 2009: 4).

The Pahlavi Constitution comprises 107 articles, while the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran consists of a preamble, 14 chapters, and 177 articles. Below, a brief explanation of the five main themes is provided, followed by an examination of the two constitutions. They are then studied and analyzed through the lens of the themes extracted from Habermas’s conception of the public sphere. At this stage, all terms, words, concepts, and other elements that are directly or indirectly related to the public sphere are extracted from the texts of both constitutions and recorded in the table corresponding to each period.

Table 2. Themes of the Public Sphere in the Constitution of the Constitutional Period

No.	Relevant Basic Themes	Organizing Theme	Relevant Articles/Statements in the Pahlavi Constitution	Correspondence / Contradiction—Conceptual Shift	Thematic Analysis
1	Equal access, participatory equality, distinction between the public and private spheres	Equal and Free Public Participation	8–26	Limited correspondence / presence of limitations	Participation by the entire nation and equality of the nation before the law are explicitly recognized; however, accountability to the Shah, as well as specific conditions governing ministerial appointments, constitutes a form of controllability of participation.

2	Dialogical rationality, rejection of instrumental action, persuasive argumentation	C o m m u n i c a t i v e R a t i o n a l i t y a s t h e F o u n d a t i o n o f L e g i t i m a c y	7–18–19	Weak correspondence / weak institutionalization	Education can contribute to reason and rationality. At the same time, however, the foundations of rationality are defined in religious terms.
3	Criticism of power, governmental accountability, formation of the public will	S o c i a l O v e r s i g h t a n d T r a n s p a r e n c y o f P o w e r	33–61	Limited correspondence / limited implementation	Recognition of oversight by the legislative branch and the people, as well as the necessity of public awareness of the legislative process.
4	Independence of the public sphere from the state and economy, distinction from structures of political authority, informal public spaces (cafés, media, associations)	I n d e p e n d e n c e o f t h e P u b l i c S p h e r e	9–10–12–13–14–73–94–97	Potential correspondence / structural limitations and limited implementation	Non-interference with individual citizens, taxation in accordance with the law, and the public nature of court proceedings.
5	Media, intermediary spaces (associations, press, cafés), dialogical channels between the state and the people	I n t e r m e d i a r y I n s t i t u t i o n s a n d D i a l o g i c a l I n f r a s t r u c t u r e s	20–21–18	Limited correspondence	Freedom of the press and associations is recognized, but is itself made conditional upon the principles of Islam and the interests of the system.

Table 3. Themes of the Public Sphere in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran

No.	Relevant Basic Themes	Organizing Theme	Relevant Articles/Statements in the Constitution	Correspondence / Contradiction—Conceptual Shift	Thematic Analysis
1	Equal access, participatory equality, distinction between the public and private spheres	E q u a l a n d F r e e P u b l i c P a r t i c i p a t i o n	Preamble; 3–7–20–56–59–62–100–117–122–177	Conditional correspondence / conceptual shift	Participation is explicitly recognized in specific forms; however, its exercise is conditioned by the “Islamic criteria” and the existence of certain institutions, thereby making participation subject to institutional controls.
2	Dialogical rationality, rejection of instrumental action, persuasive argumentation	C o m m u n i c a t i v e R a t i o n a l i t y a s t h e F o u n d a t i o n o f L e g i t i m a c y	3–12–14–19–20–23–24–26–30–43–79	Potential correspondence / weak institutionalization	Increasing public awareness, free education, creating conditions for creativity, and other measures are oriented toward reason and rationality. There are also provisions concerning freedom of expression and thought and the prohibition of investigating beliefs; however, these are subject to specific qualifications, while the foundation of rationality is defined in religious terms.

3	Criticism of power, governmental accountability, formation of the public will	Social Oversight and Transparency of Power	8–55–69–76–84–90–174	Potential correspondence / limited implementation	Oversight by the legislative branch and the people is recognized, although certain institutions are not subject to the same degree of accountability. Oversight by the General Inspection Organization and the Court of Audit, public awareness of the legislative process, and related mechanisms are provided for.
4	Independence of the public sphere from the state and economy, distinction from structures of political authority, informal public spaces (cafés, media, associations)	Independence of the Public Sphere	44–9–12–13–22–25–28–175	Potential correspondence alongside certain limitations	Emphasis is placed on independence in various domains, while certain limitations also exist.
5	Media, intermediary spaces (associations, press, cafés), dialogical channels between the state and the people	Intermediary Institutions and Dialogical Infrastructures	24–26–8–30–50–104–175	Formal correspondence / structural limitations	The press, associations, and similar institutions are recognized, but their operation is conditioned by the principles of Islam and the interests of the system, which are open to interpretation and may function as limiting conditions.

5. Analysis of the Findings

The Constitution, as a “Social Contract” in any society, represents a legal and institutional embodiment of that society’s understanding of power, the people, and the reciprocal relationship between them. It is often referred to as the “Mother of Laws,” as it determines the overall framework governing relations between the people and the government. The existence of a clear and effective Constitution guarantees political stability, legal predictability, and increased social trust. Even in systems with nondemocratic structures, the Constitution continues to play an important role in legitimizing power and establishing minimum standards of citizenship rights.

In Iran, the two major constitutional experiences, the Constitution of the Constitutional Period and the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, reflect two distinct historical and discursive moments in the formation of the public sphere. Whereas the principal concern of the Constitutional Constitution was to limit monarchical power and establish a popular legislative institution, the central issue in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic has been the integration of divine sovereignty with the will of the people. Both experiences sought to transform the people from politically passive subjects into actors in the public

sphere; however, in each case, structural and ideological barriers prevented the full realization of this objective. A comparative examination of the components considered in this study reveals the following:

A) Equal and Free Public Participation

Under the Constitution of the Constitutional Period, two constitutional provisions made popular participation possible through the National Consultative Assembly and elected representatives. At its core, this embodied the idea of the “Nation as the source of law,” which constitutes one of the fundamental elements of the public sphere in Habermasian thought. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic likewise pursues this objective through various provisions, albeit with greater emphasis on it; the difference is that the will of the people is defined within the framework of divine legitimacy. From this epistemological perspective, political participation in the Islamic Republic is defined not on the basis of the complete secularization of power, but within the framework of “Religious Democracy.”

Accordingly, although in both systems the people have theoretically been positioned as the source of legitimacy, in practice their participation has been subject to certain modifications through supervisory mechanisms, institutional limitations, and the objectives defined for governance. As also indicated in the table, however, the number of provisions addressing this issue in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic has increased markedly compared with the Pahlavi period, indicating a change in the way the position of the nation is conceived within the Constitution.

B) Communicative Rationality as the Foundation of Legitimacy

Under the Constitution of the Constitutional Period, Article 2 of the Supplementary Constitutional Law, through the establishment of a “Committee of First-Rank Religious Scholars,” represented an attempt to integrate modern political rationality with religious legitimacy. This provision marked the beginning of a dialogue between Sharia and secular law in Iran’s political history. In the Islamic Republic, this dialogue was transformed from an external supervisory relationship into an internal structural relationship: “Religion and jurisprudence no longer merely exercised oversight over the law but became part of the legislative process itself.” It may be argued that this transformation represents a transition from the “Duality of religious and secular rationality” under the Constitutional system to the “Intertwining of the two” in the Islamic Republic. Consequently, although the Constitution of the Islamic Republic has placed greater restrictions on the emergence of critical dialogue within formal institutional frameworks, informal

arenas, namely, those emphasized in Habermasian thought in discussions of the public sphere, such as universities, the media, cyberspace, and so forth, have expanded. It is also necessary to note that in both systems, communicative rationality has remained dependent on political conditions rather than becoming fully institutionalized.

C) Social Oversight and Transparency of Power

Both Constitutions have provided mechanisms for oversight and transparency. During the Constitutional period, institutions such as the National Consultative Assembly and the Court of Audit, together with the public nature of parliamentary deliberations, served as instruments of political and financial accountability on the part of the government. In the Islamic Republic, several constitutional provisions likewise concern similar institutions and oversight of public affairs in the interest of transparency, including through demands directed to the parliament, questioning and admonition of officeholders, and other mechanisms. In both periods, emphasis has been placed on transparency in the legislative process.

Furthermore, members of parliament, acting as representatives of the people, are authorized to exercise oversight and conduct investigations and inquiries into all matters and institutions. Nevertheless, this important mechanism for oversight and transparency has encountered numerous challenges. As a result, in both systems, transparency has tended to remain more theoretical than functional, because in the absence of a strong civil society, effective mechanisms of accountability have been weakened.

D) Institutional Independence of the Public Sphere

Under the Constitution of the Constitutional Period, efforts were made through several constitutional provisions to guarantee the rights of the nation while preserving the independence of the judiciary. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic has likewise addressed this concern in different ways and across a broader range of areas, with lawmakers seeking to ensure freedom and independence in various spheres for all segments of society. In both Constitutions, institutional independence has been legally recognized.

In practice, however, structures of power concentration, the economic dependence of institutions on the state,¹ and security considerations have con-

1. Despite the emphasis in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic on various state, cooperative, and private foundations across different sectors of the economy.

strained the actual independence of the public sphere. The difference is that the Constitution of the Islamic Republic has provided more legal mechanisms for potential institutional independence. Still, stronger ideological oversight and greater institutional concentration have impeded its practical realization.

E) Intermediary Institutions and Dialogical Infrastructures

Under the Constitutional Law, freedom of the press, assemblies, and provincial and municipal associations was guaranteed in three constitutional provisions. These provisions defined, for the first time at the legal level, a “Sphere of public dialogue.” The Constitution of the Islamic Republic has likewise fulfilled this function, but on a broader scale and across a greater variety of domains, with the difference that these freedoms are subject to Islamic principles and public security. Historically, the press and associations emerged during the Constitutional period as the first experiences of civil society; however, the weakness of supporting institutions led to their decline. In the Islamic Republic, cultural and media institutions have expanded quantitatively, but their independence and critical functions have remained largely dependent on official policies. In summary, with regard to the fifth theme, it can be stated that the public sphere in both systems of governance has emerged at the boundary between the state and society, but has never been completely free from the influence of power.

Conclusion

It should be noted that no Constitution emerges in a vacuum; rather, it is the product of the specific historical and social conditions of a given society. In Iran, the Constitution of the Pahlavi period was the outcome of the Constitutional Revolution. At the same time, the 1979 Revolution, with slogans such as “Independence, Freedom,” provided the context for the adoption of a new Constitution. An examination of these two Constitutions demonstrates that each reflected the political logic, power structure, historical circumstances, and political, social, cultural, and other developments of its own era.

A comparison of the two Constitutions, however, shows that the concept of the public sphere in Iran has undergone a gradual process of development. During the Constitutional period, when the people were recognized for the first time as “Political Actors,” the public sphere emerged as the outcome of the struggle to constrain monarchical power and establish the rule of law. This Constitution recognized certain civil and media institutions as bridges connecting the people with political power. Theoretically, this represented a fundamental step toward the formation of a modern public sphere in Iran. Local associations, the press, and free assemblies provided, for the first time, opportunities for dialogue and criticism.

Nevertheless, the constraints arising from the monarchy, political pressure, the weakness of civil society, the securitization of society, and an elite-centered political culture prevented these mechanisms from becoming sustained and institutionalized. From a Habermasian perspective, this stage can be regarded as a kind of “Incomplete birth of the public sphere” in Iran: “The law recognized intermediary institutions, but the authoritarian political culture and the institution of monarchy prevented them from reaching maturity and achieving independence.”

Although the press and associations were declared free in the constitutional text, in practice they did not enjoy genuine independence because of political and security pressures. This situation can therefore be regarded as an intermediate stage: “A transition from a society lacking independent institutions toward a society in which dialogical institutions were beginning to emerge.”

The Constitutional Law opened the way toward the institutional independence of the public sphere; however, because of the absence of adequate civil and economic infrastructures, this independence remained largely a “Law on Paper.” From this perspective, the Constitutional Law initiated the formation of the public sphere, but the process remained incomplete.

Under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the public sphere was redefined in terms of popular participation and within the framework of divine legitimacy, with the people regarded as “Partners in Legitimacy.” This Constitution sought to establish a new balance among religious values, popular participation, and democratic principles.

It should be emphasized that the full realization of Habermasian communicative rationality requires an open political culture, institutional independence of civil institutions, and transparency of power. Following the 1979 Revolution, which resulted from the convergence of various social groups and strata with differing preferences, transformations took place in the country that generated expectations for the expansion of communicative action within society.

Theoretically, compared with the Constitution of the Pahlavi period, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic has provided broader frameworks for the formation of an active and pluralistic public sphere. Political and social freedoms, guarantees of legal equality and individual inviolability, and recognition of cultural diversity all constitute potential capacities that, if implemented, can contribute to strengthening the public sphere.

Nevertheless, several factors have prevented these capacities from being fully realized. Among them is the fact that certain constitutional provisions contain qualifications and interpretive conditions that may restrict the scope of civil liberties. The institutional structure of the country is such that many civil insti-

tutions and media organizations are subject to the supervision or direct control of official power, thereby limiting their institutional independence. The structural linkage between religion and the state has also resulted in the application of religious criteria to parts of the decision-making process and the formation of public opinion, which differs from Habermas's model of the public sphere. Thus, on the one hand, constitutional provisions have created genuine opportunities for civic participation and agency. At certain points in the history of the Islamic Republic, these capacities have enabled the development of media organizations, student associations, political parties, and other associations. On the other hand, the structural linkage between religion and the state, the concentration of power in certain domains, security restrictions during certain periods, the economic dependence of many civil institutions on state or quasi-state resources, as well as implementation-related limitations and challenges, have posed obstacles to the complete independence of the public sphere.

The result is a "Dual-aspect" public sphere in which both signs of free participation and communicative rationality, as well as structural and institutional barriers that restrict the scope of such participation, can be observed.

This is because, on the one hand, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, compared with the Constitutional Law, has provided broader legal and institutional capacities for public participation, dialogue, criticism of power, and the formation of public opinion. Moreover, the expansion of intermediary institutions, such as Islamic councils, media organizations, nongovernmental organizations, student associations, and professional guilds, has, during certain periods, practically strengthened the possibility of social dialogue and increased civic demands. Nevertheless, these capacities have not always been fully realized.

Some constitutional provisions are subject to conditions such as compliance with Islamic principles and the public interest, making the scope of freedom within the public sphere dependent on the interpretation of official institutions. Structural, interpretive, and implementation-related obstacles have meant that these capacities have become effective only conditionally and during particular periods. Therefore, Iran has neither remained in the condition of a "Suppressed Public Sphere" associated with the Pahlavi era nor achieved the pure and ideal Habermasian model of the public sphere; rather, it is situated in a transitional stage. This is a stage in which the possibility of expanding the public sphere exists, but its full realization requires strengthening intermediary institutions, increasing the transparency of power, reducing structural concentration, redefining certain interpretive restrictions, and pursuing implementation-oriented reforms to guarantee the free and rational participation of citizens.

Ethical Considerations

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Conflict of Interest

According to the authors' declaration, there is no conflict of interest in this article.

Compliance with Research Ethics

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Data Availability Statement

The data underlying this study are available upon request from the authors.

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