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Analysis of the Collapse of the Pahlavi Regime in Light of Functionalist Theory

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this study is to analyze the relationship between efficiency/inefficiency and the fall of the Pahlavi regime. This is done within the framework of Almond and Powell's functionalist theory and with an emphasis on the category of functional efficiencies of the political system. These two theorists believe that the specific task of the efficiency of the functions of the political system includes five powers of extraction, regulation, distribution, symbolism, and accountability, and that political systems must manage their activities with society within the framework of these five powers in order to survive and develop. Based on this, the question of the present study is to what extent was the Pahlavi regime able to achieve the functional efficiencies of a political system in relation to its environment?

Method: This study is conducted using the causal method. The causal mechanism reveals the socio-political processes and shows how inputs and outputs are related to each other. Therefore, it can be examined what results the government policy led to in the five powers mentioned. Data collection in this study was also compiled in a library format.

Findings: This study shows that, given the increasingly authoritarian nature of the Pahlavi regime, this government failed to perform adequately in the five aforementioned capacities and as a result, it fell. The findings of the study indicate that from the perspective of extractive capacity, reliance on oil and lack of reliance on taxes intensified dictatorship. From a regulatory perspective, the second Pahlavi regime did not operate within the framework of the law due to its authoritarian approach. From a distribution perspective, during the second Pahlavi era, we witnessed a lack of proper distribution of facilities and equal opportunities between the general public and the ruling elite. The symbolic or symbolic function such as the ideology of archaism was also not effective in maintaining and surviving the political system. From the perspective of accountability, we witnessed a lack of accountability of the government due to the lack of attention to the existence of a corrupt bureaucracy.

Conclusion: The Pahlavi regime was almost inefficient in the years leading up to the revolution based on these five government indicators. The accumulation of ineffective policies caused the people's demands not to end in the desired outcomes and as a result, ineffective policies were accumulated. In such circumstances, the socialization of politics as a challenge facing the system practically caused the spread of public distrust and the political system faced a crisis of legitimacy.

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Introduction

The Islamic Revolution is among the social revolutions. Transformation in social revolutions is characterized by great depth and breadth. Accordingly, the Islamic Revolution brought to an end the several thousand year history of monarchy in Iran. The rapid outbreak of the revolution raised the question of why the political order established to lead Iran out of backwardness collapsed so quickly. The occurrence of the revolution, apart from the realm of political and social realities, also produced a revolution in the realm of theory. For many generations, theories of revolution were unable to analyze what had occurred. From this point, a newer generation of explanations of revolution attempted to analyze the revolutions of the late twentieth century (such as the Nicaraguan Revolution and the 1979 Iranian Revolution).

Apart from these composite approaches, most analyses of the background to the collapse of the Pahlavi government sought to examine the Islamic Revolution by highlighting cultural aspects, the role of religion, and the confrontation between modern and Western approaches on the one hand and tradition on the other. This was necessary, but not sufficient. In other words, given the complexity of the Islamic Revolution as a major social revolution, it is necessary to analyze its causes from multiple angles. In this regard, the angle of analysis can be either the performance of the state or the approach of the revolutionaries. The present article has adopted the first path.

The functionalist approach is among the angles that appear useful and effective for analyzing the fall of the monarchical system. The aim is to determine whether, alongside the challenges arising from the confrontation between tradition and modernity, it can be claimed that the Pahlavi government lacked the necessary efficiency and therefore collapsed. The important challenge and issue is that if the Qajar dynasty, due to its tribal nature and the absence of a permanent army and a powerful bureaucracy (Abrahamiyan, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 16), was unable to respond to the needs of an Iranian society undergoing modernization, the Pahlavi regime, by virtue of oil wealth, an extensive bureaucracy, and a permanent army, possessed far greater authority and capability to respond to the needs of Iranian society. Functionalists such as Almond and Powell analyze the efficiency of political systems by relying on five capacities that political systems must possess: extractive, regulatory, distributive, symbolic, and responsive. It appears that by employing these functional roles, one can examine the efficiency of the Pahlavi system in Iranian society.

Thus, clearly stated, the question this research seeks to examine is: ‘To what extent was the Pahlavi system able to achieve functional efficiency as a political system in relation to its

environment?’ In response to this question, the hypothesis is proposed that, given the increasingly authoritarian nature of the Pahlavi system, this government was unable to perform appropriately in the five aforementioned capacities and consequently collapsed. To explain the role of inefficiency in the fall of the Pahlavi government, after reviewing the research background and the theoretical framework, the grounds for the regime's fall will be examined from the perspective of the five efficiency indicators.

1. Research Background

From the perspective of the two indicators of the reasons for the fall of the Pahlavi regime and the efficiency of the Pahlavi system, several works have been written. Hamed Iranshahi and colleagues (2023 AD/1402 SH) examine the fall of the Pahlavi regime in their article, "The Crisis of Government Inefficiency and the Issue of the Fall of the Pahlavi Regime," using Parsons’ structural-functional theory. According to the authors, the Pahlavi regime lacked certain capacities, including the use of force, regulatory capacity, national identity, extractive capacity, internal cohesion, and redistributive capacity, which led to inefficiency in the Pahlavi system. However, in this research, the authors address only the internal dimension of these capacities and do not consider their international dimension. Moreover, some of Almond and Powell’s five indicators are absent from Parsons’ model.

Javad Moqimi and Soosan Safavari (2021 AD/1400 SH), in the article "The Causes of the Passivity of Political Elites During the Pahlavi Period and Its Impact on the Crisis of Efficiency," argue that the existence of shared interests between elites and the Shah and the ruling apparatus was a factor in the crisis of responsiveness, which ultimately led to the revolution. Masoud Ghaffari and Mohammad Radmard (2017 AD/1396 SH), in an article titled "Institutionalism in Development and the Reasons for the Fall of the Pahlavi Regime," argue that the process of institution-building in Iran had failed because development in Iran was not based on a national approach aligned with societal demands. Masoud Akhavan Kazemi and Omid Shokaraneh (2021 AD/1400 SH), in the article "Analysis of the Impact of the Distribution Crisis on the Fall of the Second Pahlavi Regime and the Occurrence of the Islamic Revolution," state that the distribution crisis politically led to a lack of responsiveness, economically to the unequal distribution of oil revenues, and socially to the suppression of religious beliefs.

Given the above, the innovation of the present study lies, first, in examining the fall of the Pahlavi regime in light of all functionalist capacities. Thus, it adopts a comprehensive approach and discusses capacities with both internal and international dimensions that are interconnected. Second, it recognizes that weakness in some functional roles is not merely single-causal but encompasses a set of factors that have not been addressed in previous work. In addition to the above, the most important innovation of this research is that it examines the impact of the efficiencies proposed in Almond and Powell's functionalist theory on the fall of the Pahlavi regime, an approach that has not thus far been considered in analyses of the reasons for the fall of the Pahlavi regime.

2. Research Methodology

A causal mechanism is a chain of factors and events that, based on a law-like order, begins with the explaining and ends with the explained. Here, what is meant by a law-like order is the laws governing behavior (Little, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 22–25). Accordingly, a causal mechanism reveals social processes and shows how inputs and outputs are connected (Falleti & Lynch, 2009: 1161). Thus, in this article, efficiency variables (extractive, regulatory, symbolic, distributive, and responsive capacities) are treated as independent variables, and the stability or instability of a political system is treated as the dependent variable.

3. Theoretical Framework

Prior to the attention to systemic and functionalist approaches, one of the major challenges in political science was the description and explanation of the internal structure of the political system. Attention to this issue can provide a suitable space for diagnosing the pathologies of political systems (Ishiyama & Breuning, 2010: 72). In general, in political science, states are examined from three very different perspectives: from an idealist viewpoint, from an organizational perspective, and finally from a functionalist perspective (Heywood, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 129). In the functional conception of the state, institutional role or purpose is of fundamental importance. For example, analysts define the "Political System" as a set of formal legal institutions that constitute a "State" or "Government" ... With a broader definition, the term encompasses actual as well as prescribed forms of political behavior,

including not only the legal organization of the state but also the reality of how the state functions (Heslop, 2025).

In this regard, Almond and Powell should be considered among those development theorists who have presented theories concerning the political system and its mode of operation, whose primary task is the maintenance of order. Accordingly, political systems must implement three functional roles:

- Conversion and transformation functions;
- Adaptation functions;
- Functional efficiency roles of the political system (Shirzadi, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 99).
However, given the breadth of these three functional roles, this article intends to focus only on the functional efficiency roles and, on that basis, evaluate the fall of the Pahlavi system. Almond and Powell consider the functional efficiency roles of the political system to consist of five functions that all political systems seek to implement for survival:
 - Extractive capacity;
 - Regulatory capacity;
 - Distributive capacity;
 - Symbolic capacity;
 - Responsive capacity (Shirzadi, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 100).

As we know, Weber considered the state to be the bearer of legitimate authority. From the perspective of the theoretical model that will be elaborated below, there is a narrow gap between authority and sliding into authoritarianism. That is, on the one hand, we may encounter a powerful and legitimate government, and, on the other, a powerful government indifferent to public satisfaction. The important challenge is that past royal despotisms and contemporary modern dictatorships are at risk of this distortion. Below, we introduce the state's functional roles.

3.1. Extractive Capacity

Extractive capacity refers to the performance of the political system in extracting material and human resources obtained from internal and external environments. Thus, the ability to acquire extractive resources forms the foundation for other capacities and limits or expands the system's and society's ability to achieve various goals (Almond & Powell, 1966: 195).

Typically, the ways of obtaining extractive resources differ, and political systems can acquire these resources from their environment and individuals; however, the most common methods of extracting resources in modern countries are taxation and borrowing (Almond et al., 2017 AD/1396 SH: 271). An important point is that countries with single-product economies lose their extractive capacity during economic crises. Extractive capacity operates in both internal and external dimensions. For example, in the internal dimension, one can refer to taxation, the absence of a single-product economy, trained and skilled human resources, and a productive economy; and in the external dimension, to items such as income from international trade or foreign tourists, profits from investments abroad, tributes and reparations obtained from foreign countries. Taxes on services provided to foreigners can also be counted as part of a political system's extractive capacity (Almond & Powell, 1966: 203).

3.2. Regulatory Capacity

By regulatory capacity, we mean the political system's ability to exercise control over the behavior of individuals and groups within society. Regulation of behavior has usually been equated with legal coercion and threats; however, political systems have generally been able to regulate the actions of individuals and groups through other means, including material incentives (Almond et al., 2017 AD/1396 SH: 238). The type of political system is important in the implementation of the regulatory function. For example, authoritarian systems supervise various aspects of society, both private and collective, take control of all societal resources, and direct society along their desired path. It should be noted that regulatory capacity does not merely seek to impose restrictions that hinder societal and individual growth; rather, it underpins civilization, comfort, and social welfare. Issues such as public health, job security, and environmental protection are considered part of governments' regulatory activities (Almond et al., 2017 AD/1396 SH: 241).

3.3. Distributive Capacity

Distributive capacity refers to the allocation of various goods, services, honors, positions, and different opportunities that political systems distribute among individuals and groups within society (Almond et al., 2017 AD/1396 SH: 231). Equitable development requires strengthening and guiding economic growth to optimize its benefits for residents of low-

income communities across all urban areas and to ensure their active participation in the development process (Blackwell, 2000: 1285). Naturally, in developing countries, this form of development must also be extended to non-urban communities. In general, it must be accepted that the resources available to the government, in whatever form they exist, must be distributed among individuals; therefore, depending on the nature of the political system, distribution may manifest itself in society in either an equal or unequal manner. There are sectors (such as defense) that governments sometimes emphasize, overshadowing their distributive capacity. These governments, even when sectors such as education and health are harmed, allocate their budgets to defense and military issues. Poor countries, despite needing to improve skill levels or pay greater attention to health and education, are unable to take steps in this direction due to insufficient budgets (Almond et al., 2017 AD/1396 SH: 236–237).

3.4. Symbolic Capacity

By symbolic capacity is meant the recourse of political leaders to history, bravery, or to values and ideologies such as equality, freedom, democracy, communism, or liberalism. However, the main purpose of strengthening and using symbolic aspects can be understood as compelling people to pay their taxes more quickly and honestly, to obey the law, and to accept the hardships present in society. This type of reliance on symbols becomes particularly important during times of crisis (Almond et al., 2017 AD/1396 SH: 242). It can also be stated that this capacity is related to a set of efforts that ensure the dissemination of symbolic values (parades, celebrations, travels) in society and help secure a minimum level of public support (Badi', 2000 AD/1379 SH: 58). One of the functions of using symbolic capacity is to create unity among different segments of society, and political systems, by creating a shared national identity and employing symbolic capacity, can use it both in times of crisis and in other decisions that require public support (Almond & Powell, 1966: 200).

3.5. Responsiveness Capacity

Given that governments and political systems are responsible for meeting the needs of the people, they must be responsive to internal and external demands and pressures. However, the important point is to whom and in which areas the system must be responsive (Almond & Powell, 1966: 201). This capacity also reveals the degree of sensitivity of the system and its skill in satisfying demands (Badi', 2000 AD/1379 SH: 58). In general, political stability is

achieved when the ruling system, from the perspective of the governed population, is responsive to the political needs of society (Shik Lee, 2019: 730). If politicians influence bureaucratic performance through indirect means, such as restricting meritocratic rules, manipulating electoral processes, and other measures, the resulting power imbalance can have serious consequences for democratic legitimacy (Woodhouse, 2019: 145). The responsiveness of a government is, to a large extent, influenced by the nature of the regime; thus, in authoritarian and dictatorial governments, the dictator cannot be held accountable, and political parties and social movements have minimal impact in making rulers responsive in such systems. Therefore, political structures bear responsibility for meeting demands and needs and for the specific organization of roles and structures for accountability (Almond & Powell, 1966: 202). For this reason, governments, to provide for the basic needs of the people and respond to other demands, have focused on and placed the greatest emphasis on instruments for maintaining authority, both objectively and subjectively.

Accordingly, this article, based on the application of Almond and Powell's theory, seeks to link the element of inefficiency to the central signifier of the Second Pahlavi government: authoritarianism.

4. Application of Almond and Powell's Theory to the Pahlavi System

Based on the indicators examined in the theoretical framework of this research, the following sections apply the five capacities to the Second Pahlavi government.

4.1. Extractive Capacity of the Pahlavi System

The important issue is why extractive capacity did not develop in the Pahlavi government. The Pahlavi regime's reliance on oil revenues began in the early 1960s and reached its peak in the 1970s. Researchers refer to this period as the era of the emergence of the Shah's authoritarianism (Takeyh, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 188). During this period, Iran's oil revenues jumped from 885 million dollars in 1971 to 17.8 billion dollars in 1975 (Takeyh, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 280). Thus, from the mid-1960s onward, the state no longer needed to collect taxes from the people, and government revenue was effectively based on oil and gas exports (Eyvazi, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 221).

Due to its reliance on oil revenues, the Pahlavi state made a large segment of wage earners in society, including workers, industrial laborers, and employees, dependent on itself through the

salaries it paid them, while at the same time remaining independent of these classes. This was because it had no need for extractive resources from within society, which, in turn, led to the formation of a viewpoint within the state holding that the government had no duty of representation or accountability to society. For this reason, a large portion of oil wealth was spent on projects that brought grandeur and prestige but had little real economic value. The purchase of military equipment, nuclear power plants, uranium enrichment equipment, and 25 percent of the shares of the West German Krupp Steel Company are among such examples (Gasiorowski, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 338).

Extractive capacity from the international dimension in the Pahlavi system was also not very successful, and despite some efforts and groundwork, the regime was unable to generate significant income from this source. In general, foreign investment in the non-oil sector during the Pahlavi period was limited and negligible. According to the law, foreigners could own a small share of factory shares, but they were free to transfer the profits from their investments out of Iran. Under such conditions, foreign investors tended to invest more in consumer industries and household appliances; nevertheless, foreign investment was far less than imports of foreign goods into the country (Keddie, 1990 AD/1369 SH: 260-261). Foreign capital entering the country in 1962 amounted to 5.9 billion Rials (equivalent to 126.6 million dollars), while in 1972, 8.923 billion Rials (equivalent to 12.3 billion dollars) left the country (Foran, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 488).

Moreover, in the area of foreign investment during the Second Pahlavi government, Iran did not gain significant advantages, and in some cases, inappropriate approaches were observed. According to Katouziyan, government investment in Krupp's heavy industrial complex was one of the Shah's greatest mistakes in foreign investment. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi paid 800 million dollars of the country's capital to purchase slightly more than 25 percent of the shares of this company and its subsidiaries, which mainly produced declining products such as steel with high production costs (Katouziyan, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 373). In general, sole reliance on oil led to dependency, which, in turn, intensified the Shah's dictatorial tendencies and the separation between the state and the nation. In addition, disinvestment and vulnerability to international oil price fluctuations in the oil sector reduced extractive capacity during the Second Pahlavi period.

4.2. Regulatory Capacity of the Pahlavi System

Political systems must possess a certain level of legitimacy to exercise regulatory capacity in society, so that laws are accepted by the people with minimal reluctance and opposition. The political system during the Pahlavi period can be characterized as patrimonial, one defined by authoritarianism and the personal centralization of power in the Shah. As Ray Takeyh notes, throughout his life the Shah held a contemptuous view of democratic government and believed that major events occur only when a reformist dictator stands at the apex of all affairs (Takeyh, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 18). For this reason, during the Second Pahlavi period, programs of economic development and progress were subject to the desires and inclinations of a single individual. Sudden policy changes and impulsive decision-making confused officials and paved the way for abuse by those closest to the Shah, thereby intensifying chronic political, administrative, and social corruption (Qaragozlou, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 42-43). This Shah-centered personalism, combined with administrative corruption, severely undermined the regulatory function, because under the Pahlavi regime, the law was usually embodied in the person of the Shah. Consequently, to the extent that people observed a lack of respect for and implementation of the law in the Shah's own conduct, the legitimacy and public standing of the Shah declined correspondingly. The Shah effectively had no genuine belief in the rule of law, and the laws promulgated were largely formalistic. For example, according to the 'Where did you get It from?' law, all state officials who in any way received salaries and benefits from the public treasury were required to report annually all changes in their assets; temporary or permanent dismissal from office and confiscation and seizure of property were among the punishments stipulated by this law for violators (Radmard, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 66). It is evident that this law, like other anti-corruption laws, never acquired any practical implementation.

Another factor that, throughout the Pahlavi period, led to the regulatory function being used in an undesirable manner and in an inappropriate domain was undoubtedly the approach of SAVAK and the newly established Rastakhiz Party. Through the Ministry of Labor and labor unions, SAVAK monitored and inspected individuals entering universities and other state institutions. As a result of this performance, the number of strikes, which had reached 79 cases in 1953, declined to only 3 cases by 1957 (Abrahamiyan, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 517). During the Second Pahlavi period, the regime's apparatus of repression included SAVAK, the gendarmerie, the police, and the armed forces. This repressive apparatus enabled the state, by

weakening opposition organizations and creating an atmosphere of fear, to keep a large number of Iranians from political activity and to increase the state's autonomy (Gasiorowski, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 258).

In addition, the Rastakhiz Party, with SAVAK's assistance, controlled and supervised organizations, ministries, and other state institutions that provided livelihoods for thousands of people. This supervision in the publishing sector led to a decline in published titles from 4,200 in 1975 to fewer than 1,300 the following year. For example, a number of writers were arrested during these years and forced to confess that in their writings they had focused more on criticizing social conditions than on the achievements of the Revolution (Abrahamiyan, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 554). At times, the government was sensitive to authors' names, and their works were denied publication (Madani, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 179).

Censorship during this period was primarily political rather than moral; books, films, newspapers, radio, and television were all subject to it. A list of banned books had been prepared, the re-publication of which was not permitted, and even possessing them was effectively punishable; in fact, a number of citizens were convicted on this basis (Madani, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 178). In some cases, SAVAK's censorship went so far as to prevent the publication of books that had previously been printed. For instance, the publication of plays such as *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* was prevented solely because a king or prince is killed in them (Hoveyda, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 93).

Regarding other functional roles through which governments can, by enforcing regulations and laws, bring order to social life and use their regulatory capacity to improve people's conditions, the educational and health sectors can be mentioned, areas in which the Second Pahlavi regime also failed to perform successfully. For example, in the health sector, there were 11,000 physicians in Iran in 1977, whereas 40,000 to 50,000 were needed to extend public health coverage nationwide. Of the total 11,000 physicians, at least half were located in Tehran, because working facilities and income-generating opportunities through private practices were more readily available there (Parsons, 1984 AD/1363 SH: 74).

Ultimately, in the Second Pahlavi regime, in addition to the clear violation of the law, the people were dissatisfied with the government's regulatory practices.

4.3. Distributive Capacity of the Pahlavi System

The Pahlavi government must be regarded as one of those regimes that lacked adequate distributive capacity, and one reason for this is its authoritarian nature. In such governments, material resources and employment opportunities are distributed not on the basis of competence and merit, but rather according to proximity and loyalty to the Pahlavi regime and to the person of the Shah. Consequently, decision-making was more exclusive and non-modern in nature than it was grounded in the Constitutional Law and parliamentary principles (Radmard et al., 2021 AD/1400 SH: 24).

In line with Ray Takeyh's perspective, the Shah found himself trapped in a system in which his power was constrained by rival institutions, a situation he found dissatisfying. On the contrary, he accorded little status to the parliament, the cabinet and independent Iranian politicians (Takeyh, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 396). Perhaps his youthful experience with elite pluralism, including his bitter and pessimistic view of Iran's aristocratic classes, whom he believed had conspired with the Allies to exile his father, shaped this attitude. Yet he overlooked the fact that this was precisely the most important path to the survival of the regime and the dynasty.

In other economic, social, and cultural spheres as well, during the Second Pahlavi period, we observe an inequitable distribution of facilities and equal opportunities between the general population and the upper echelons of the ruling elite. In society, class divisions were tangibly felt. For example, during this period, despite the development and modernization that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, we witnessed the expansion of shantytowns and the low quality of life of some segments of the population. Between 1966 and 1976, the proportion of families living in only one room increased from 36 percent to 43 percent. Forty-two percent of Tehran's population lacked adequate housing, and 96 percent of rural residents had no access to electricity (Abrahamiyan, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 550).

This was while the Pahlavi family and the Shah's close associates were immersed in oil dollars. For example, in just one instance, according to Asadollah Alam, for Farah's birthday celebration held in Birjand, the world's best chef was invited from Paris, and over two days, the cost of food for the event reached 40,000 dollars. The birthday cake alone cost 200 dollars (Faghih Haqqani, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 144).

It should be noted that one characteristic of rentier states is that, because they make little effort to raise revenues, spending those revenues becomes easier, and squandering them

becomes routine. For this reason, as John Foran recounts, the National Iranian Oil Company regularly and secretly transferred a portion of oil revenues on a monthly basis into the Shah's personal account. It is said that this amount was at least \$1 billion. Moreover, the assets of the royal family have been estimated at approximately between 5 and 20 billion dollars. In addition, between 1973 and 1976, government officials received at least one billion dollars in commissions (Foran, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 464).

The improper distribution of resources was so severe that not only did a gap emerge between Tehran and other parts of the country, but even within Tehran itself, there was evident class division and unequal distribution of income and wealth. The unequal distribution of facilities in Tehran effectively led to the division of the city into two distinct cities: the north as a wealthy urban area whose residents lived in luxurious European-style villas and which was full of restaurants and discotheques, and the southern part of the city, characterized by poor neighborhoods, narrow alleys, polluted air, and impoverished residents (Hoveyda, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 97).

Land reform, carried out to create an independent peasant class, can be considered part of the distributive policies of the Second Pahlavi period. However, since not all farmers benefited from these lands and did not enjoy sufficient income, this program ultimately failed. An examination of land distribution statistics after the completion of land reform during the Pahlavi period "Shows that 1,600,000 households owned land amounting to 2.43 million hectares, whereas 9,500 large landowning households controlled 2.45 million hectares of land; that is, each large landowning household possessed 171 times as much land as land-poor households [after land reform]." (Fouzi, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 222)

Land reform was not the only problem faced by rural populations. Alinaghi Alikhani, who served as Minister of Economy in the 1960s, recounts that, according to Amir Abbas Hoveyda, the prime minister prioritized cities, rather than all the people of Iran (Alikhani, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 191). This reality was evident in the pricing of agricultural products. Grain prices were set in favor of urban residents rather than farmers, which discouraged agricultural producers. As a result, agricultural production declined. Overall, the Shah's distributive policies were never directed toward the entire population of the country.

4.4. Symbolic Capacity of the Pahlavi System

Modernization and development under the Second Pahlavi, although not directed toward the political structure, encompassed other spheres, including social, religious, and broadly cultural domains. The Shah's efforts to rapidly marginalize indigenous culture and promote superficial and selective aspects of Western culture led to alienation, anomie, and the emergence of frustration and rebellion among traditional groups and the urban poor (Eyvazi, 2001 AD/11380 SH: 195). With the initiation of the modernization process by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, religion was sidelined and replaced by an emphasis on ancient nationalism, which was favored because it was more compatible with the construction of a monarchical system. In this definition, the religious element was deliberately neglected, while ancient traditions were placed at the core of identity. As one researcher puts it, the Shah's mindset, in fact, cast a shadow over the entire structure of society. Thus it was that Amouzegar, the prime minister during the crisis period, in response to his associates who expressed concern about murmurs emerging from mosques, stated: "The era of reactionary clerics has come to an end, and modern Iran is moving beyond them." (Najafzadeh, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 365)

The celebrations of the 2,500th anniversary of the monarchy, contrary to their intended purpose of portraying the Shah as powerful and magnificent, depicted him instead as a ruler distant from traditions and from the people, especially given that at the time of these celebrations the financial situation of many people was unstable and the majority were suffering from poverty (Keddie, 1990 AD/1369 SH: 273). The Pahlavi government was so influenced by authoritarian development that it sought by any means to transform the face of society, and naturally, a large segment of the population, who held Shi'i inclinations, did not align with Westernizing and anti-Islamic approaches (Sullivan, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 107). The Shah's aloof and arrogant behavior constituted the flip side of the people's turn toward religious leaders (Najafzadeh, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 366). From this perspective, the overall effort, in the form of modernization and social transformation, was aimed at restricting religious thought and privatizing it (Azghandi, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 104).

One of the actions that provoked strong opposition from the people and the clergy and led to the failure of another symbolic project of the Second Pahlavi was the issue of changing the calendar. Mohammad Reza Shah intended, under the claim that the country was on the path of development and civilization and that he was acting like the ancient Iranian kings, to replace the Islamic calendar with the 2,500-year imperial calendar. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi sought

to shape Iranian identity on the basis of ancient Iran's teachings and identity. Thus, although during his reign he attempted to present himself as a religious person and even made several pilgrimages to holy sites, in the end, he pursued the dilution of Islamic concepts in the identity of the Iranian people. The Shah's policies, implemented in pursuit of his quest for grandeur, assaulted many of the deepest-rooted principles of Iranian culture (Zonis, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 114). Naturally, no nation remains silent in the face of humiliation and waits for an opportunity to retaliate against the humiliations imposed upon it. As a result, the people of Iran not only did not cooperate with these policies but actively opposed them.

Another event that can be regarded as a factor weakening national identity and the unity between the people and the political system during the Pahlavi period is undoubtedly the Capitulation Bill. Under this bill, which was approved by the National Consultative Assembly, American advisers were granted judicial immunity. This was itself considered a clear violation of sovereignty. However, the impact of capitulation went beyond the violation of the constitution; it wounded national pride and represented an imperial presence, an event that damaged the beliefs and emotions of the people (Katouziyan, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 284). Therefore, in light of the factors discussed, the symbolic or representational function in the Pahlavi political system not only failed to be effective but also became an important factor in activating opposition forces among religious groups and the deprived classes of society, who were largely influenced by the discourse of religious leaders.

4.5. Responsiveness Capacity of the Pahlavi System

The Pahlavi system was not responsive to the demands and claims it received from society and the people. This was rooted in the authoritarian nature of the regime, in which the people, social groups, and opponents were ignored. It is for this reason that Hossein Bashiriye argues that in the "Discourse of Pahlavi absolutist modernism, there was little room for political participation and competition." (Bashiriye, 2024 ADS/1403 SH: 69) After the coup of August 19, 1953, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi sought to employ military figures in government. Accordingly, Major General Zahedi was appointed prime minister, and Major General Bakhtiyar became the military governor of Tehran. Naturally, when military elements were placed within the political structure due to their absolute obedience to the Shah, they were effectively accountable only to him, which, in turn, contributed to repression and a lack of responsiveness toward the people.

Another factor contributing to the Pahlavi government's lack of responsiveness was undoubtedly its rentier nature, which led to authoritarianism and the state's independence from social classes and the populace. Consequently, the distance created between the government and the people prevented the Pahlavi system from being responsive to society. Moreover, the prioritization of economic development over political development led the Shah to form a misguided perception of political freedom and governmental accountability. Accordingly, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was not concerned about the absence of political freedom because he believed that what mattered to the general public was material comfort. It was in this context that, during this period, the new term "Economic Democracy" became commonplace (Alikhani, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 76).

The nature of the Pahlavi system was such that political parties independent of the government did not emerge, and the existing parties, including the Melliyun Party and the People's Party, were "Yes-sir Parties" rather than genuine and effective actors; in this respect, there was no real difference between them. Thus, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's dictatorship made real competition among parties impossible (Bayat, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 84). The formation of the Rastakhiz Party delivered the final blow to the Pahlavi system and extinguished even the faint hope of accountability within the regime. Overall, as noted, the two-party system was effectively under the Shah's control, and in the few instances when leaders of the People's Party stepped outside the regime-defined framework and voiced criticism of the government, they were removed. Among such figures were Alinaghi Kani and Nasser Ameri, who were sidelined in 1972 and 1974, respectively (Halliday, 1979 AD/1358 SH: 45).

External factors also contributed to the Shah's lack of accountability. The United States supported a strong government in Iran because, during the Mosaddegh period, the interests of oil cartels had been endangered. By contrast, the existence of a powerful central government aligned with them secured the interests of these oil cartels (Keddie, 1990 AD/1369 SH: 218). The Pahlavi regime's unresponsiveness to public opinion, both domestically and internationally, led security organizations and the state apparatus to exert heavy pressure on their opponents, with little fear of repression or torture. As the London *Sunday Times* stated, "The human rights situation in Iran is worse than anywhere else in the world." (Cambridge, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 143) Ultimately, it should be noted that, due to the absence of the rule of law and the presence of a corrupt bureaucracy, the principle of accountability during the Pahlavi period was effectively marginalized. Although Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was, under

the Constitutional Law, considered a non-responsible (irresponsible) figure, in practice, he used the granting of special privileges to secure loyalty and obtain political support (Radmard et al., 2021 AD/1400 SH: 25).

Conclusion

The authors of this article believe that the Pahlavi government, owing to its standing army and extensive bureaucracy, possessed the capacity to effect change in Iranian society. Accordingly, this study sought to answer the question of the extent to which the Pahlavi system fulfilled the functional capacities of a political system within its environment. To address this issue, the theoretical approach of Almond and Powell was employed. Based on the Almond–Powell framework, system performance can be assessed through five indicators: extractive, regulatory, distributive, symbolic, and responsive capacities.

The study's findings regarding the Second Pahlavi period indicate that, from the perspective of extractive capacity, reliance on oil led to a single-commodity, dependent national economy, which in turn eliminated the need for taxation, intensified dictatorship, and widened the gap between the state and society. From a regulatory perspective, the Second Pahlavi system was in clear violation of the law; disregard for the Constitution itself attests to this. From a distributive perspective, during the Second Pahlavi era, resources and opportunities were not equitably distributed between the populace and the ruling class. The symbolic or representational function was also ineffective in preserving and sustaining the Pahlavi political system; beyond this, excessive emphasis on components such as ancient nationalism (archaism) provoked active confrontation by religious forces with the government. From the standpoint of responsiveness, due to the absence of the rule of law and the presence of a corrupt bureaucracy, the Pahlavi government was effectively unresponsive to the people. The regime used the granting of special privileges to secure loyalty and obtain political support. Therefore, based on these five indicators, the Pahlavi government was an inefficient and ineffective system.

As functionalist theory explains, the collapse of the Pahlavi system was due to dysfunction in fulfilling the fivefold efficiency functions during the pre-revolutionary period. The authoritarian nature of the regime meant that public demands did not translate into desired outputs, and ineffective policies accumulated. Under such conditions, political socialization was severely challenged, public distrust increased, and the political system faced a legitimacy crisis. In essence, due to its authoritarian nature, the Pahlavi government was unable to

perform its core functions effectively. Part of this problem stemmed from the identity of the Pahlavi system itself. This regime emerged through Reza Khan's coup of 3 Esfand 1299 (February 21, 1921), which was supported by the British embassy, and later ensured its survival through the coup of August 19, 1953, carried out by the United States and Britain. Consequently, it did not perceive a need to seek support from society. The patron–client nature of this government led it to secure support not from society but primarily from the international system, and despite its modernizing claims, it adopted a top-down, authoritarian approach to development and did not define its problem as achieving effectiveness in meeting societal needs.

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The Role of Ethical and Spiritual Values in the Emergence, Continuity, and Advancement of the Islamic Revolution of Iran within the Intellectual Framework of the Two Leaders of the Revolution

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this study is to explain the function of *ethical and spiritual values* across three critical stages of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, emergence, continuity, and advancement, based on the intellectual framework of the two leaders of the Revolution (Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei). Accordingly, the research seeks to answer the key question: ‘What role do these values play in guiding the Revolution’s transition from its formative phase toward civilizational development?’

Method: Adopting a qualitative approach and employing a descriptive–analytical method, this study analyzes the content of official documents, writings, and speeches of Imam Khomeini and the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, aiming to provide a deep, internal, and religion-based understanding of the phenomenon.

Findings: The findings demonstrate that ethics and spirituality have functioned not merely as initial catalysts for revolutionary mobilization, but as foundational pillars for sustaining the political legitimacy of the Islamic system and as a robust barrier against secularization. Maintaining social equilibrium and enabling the Revolution to move beyond mere survival toward the realm of civilizational and cultural growth in the future is entirely contingent upon the continuity and institutionalization of this epistemic foundation.

Conclusion: The final analysis indicates that the identity of the Islamic Revolution is defined through a triadic interconnection of ethics, spirituality, and politics. Consequently, the realization of any future-oriented strategy, the reproduction of soft power, and the achievement of the New Islamic Civilization are existentially dependent on the institutionalization of the same moral–spiritual foundation that constituted the Revolution’s point of departure. Without it, civilizational development would be unattainable.

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Introduction

The Islamic Revolution of Iran represents an exceptional phenomenon in the contemporary world due to its transformation from a political movement into a civilizational project. Emerging from profound intellectual, cultural, and spiritual developments within a society striving to revive its religious and ethical identity, the Revolution was rooted in a broader wave of Islamic awakening that had begun earlier in the twentieth century. Under the leadership of Imam Khomeini, this movement succeeded in dismantling a dependent and authoritarian political structure and establishing a new system grounded in faith, justice, and human dignity.

Examining the role of ethical values in the emergence, continuity, and advancement of the Islamic Revolution not only contributes to a deeper understanding of this historical event but also offers an analytical model for interpreting major social transformations that are formed and sustained on the basis of cultural–religious values. This necessity becomes even more evident when contrasted with classical revolutions, such as the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions, which have predominantly been explained through economic and structural factors. In contrast, the Islamic Revolution of Iran was fundamentally shaped around ethical–religious values such as justice-seeking, resistance to oppression, independence, and martyrdom, values that have remained central to its identity for over four decades and are deeply rooted in the Shi‘i value system.

Accordingly, a systematic and documented study of these ethical values and their modes of influence across the three stages of emergence (pre-revolutionary period), continuity (the Sacred Defense and early crises), and advancement (consolidation and sustainability) can assist policymakers, social scientists, and younger generations in gaining a more accurate understanding of the true nature of the Islamic Revolution and the factors underlying its durability, while also strengthening resistance against historical and theoretical distortions.

What fundamentally distinguishes the Islamic Revolution from other political movements is its deep and enduring integration with ethics and spirituality, an integration that has persisted from the initial revolutionary struggle through the phases of stabilization and growth of the Islamic system. These values did not merely function as motivational forces; rather, they evolved into criteria for guidance, legitimacy, and resilience of the political order. In this regard, the thought of Imam Khomeini, and its continuation within the intellectual framework of the Supreme Leader, constitutes a foundational source for understanding the role of ethics

and spirituality in the revolutionary process. Both leaders, drawing inspiration from the Qur'an and the teachings of the impeccable Imams (AS), viewed the Revolution not as a temporary event, but as a continuous process aimed at reconstructing Islamic civilization in the modern era.

Despite existing theoretical and empirical efforts in the field of revolutionary ethics, most studies have focused on a single phase, primarily the stage of emergence, while insufficient attention has been paid to the interconnectedness of the three stages of emergence, continuity, and advancement from the perspective of ethical and spiritual values. Understanding this continuity is essential for grasping the Revolution's sustainability and its civilizational orientation. On this basis, the present study seeks to analyze the intellectual framework of the two leaders of the Revolution in order to elucidate the authentic position of ethics and spirituality at the levels of genesis, persistence, and elevation of the Islamic Revolution, and to reconstruct a theoretical model linking ethics, spirituality, and civilization.

From a methodological standpoint, this research is descriptive–analytical in nature and is designed according to an inductive and exploratory approach. Its sources consist of the official speeches, writings, and interpretations of Imam Khomeini and the Supreme Leader. The data have been examined through thematic analysis and conceptual inference in order to extract an indigenous theoretical model for sustaining the path of spirituality in the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution.

Authors' Names	Research Title	Research Method	Year of Publication	Main Research Question	Research Findings
Akbari & Rezaei	An Analysis of the Indicators of the New Islamic Civilization in the Thought of the Supreme Leader (may his shadow be	Descriptive–Analytical	2015 AD/1394 SH	What is Islamic civilization and what are its main indicators?	From the perspective of the Supreme Leader, the expansion and advancement of the New Islamic Civilization require collective effort and wisdom, which

	prolonged)				emerge through ethics, hard work and diligence, faith in God, rationality, scientific capability, a flourishing economy, strong media, and effective international relations.
Karim Mehri	A Model of Spiritual Transformation Based on the Intellectual System of the Supreme Leader	Interpretive method and Grounded Theory methodology	2017 AD/1396 SH	What is the theoretical model of spiritual transformation from the viewpoint of the Supreme Leader?	Spirituality within the divine system of the Islamic Revolution has a multi-level function, encompassing the individual level and self-purification as well as the societal level and the formation of an Islamic state. Moreover, the victory of the Revolution, the endurance of the Islamic system, and the spiritual integrity of officials are impossible without reliance on this fundamental principle.
Abbas	A Model of	Descript	2019	What is the model	Spiritual leadership

Shafiei	Intelligent Spiritual Leadership Based on the Leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei	ive– Analytic al	AD/13 98 SH	of intelligent spiritual leadership based on the leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei?	guarantees human growth and excellence and constitutes a key element in the civilizational management of the Revolution.
Mohammad Ehsani	The Islamic Revolution and Social Ethics in the Thought of Imam Khomeini (RA): From Theory to Practice	Descript ive– Analytic al	2018 AD/13 97 SH	What is the Islamic Revolution and social ethics in Imam Khomeini's thought?	From Imam Khomeini's perspective, ethics is the Islamic moral system articulated in the Qur'an, Hadith, and the conduct of the Infallibles (peace be upon them). Ethics, in his view, is comprehensive and attends to all dimensions of human life, worldly and otherworldly, individual and social, by offering practical prescriptions and prohibitions. The ultimate goal of ethics, according to Imam Khomeini, is spiritual and

					existential closeness to God Almighty; the greater this proximity, the greater the human being's value and perfection.
Rasouli Saad Abad & Moradi	Islamic Conduct and Spirituality in Life from the Perspective of the Supreme Leader	Descriptive–Analytical	2020 AD/1399 SH	What is Islamic conduct and spirituality in life from the perspective of the Supreme Leader?	Strengthening ethical and spiritual values is a prerequisite for the sustainability of the cultural identity of the Revolution in the path of the Second Phase of development.

A review of the conducted studies shows that although these works have identified components and indicators of spirituality within the intellectual framework of the two leaders of the Revolution, these components have been examined in a fragmented and one-dimensional manner. No comprehensive and integrated model demonstrating the logical and structural relationship among these levels has been presented. Furthermore, most of these studies focus primarily on identifying and describing general components of spirituality and do not deeply explain the role of ethical values in the survival and advancement of the Revolution. By contrast, the present study, using a qualitative research approach and the Grounded Theory method¹, seeks, rather than beginning with a priori hypotheses, to extract data and concepts from the core texts and authentic discourses of the two leaders of the Revolution and then present them within an integrated intellectual system.

The data sources consist of the collected speeches of Imam Khomeini and the Supreme Leader concerning spirituality, ethics, the Islamic Revolution, and the New Islamic

¹. A qualitative and inductive approach in humanities research that, instead of starting from a pre-existing hypothesis or theory, focuses on the systematic collection and analysis of empirical data in order to derive and construct a theory grounded in the data.

Civilization. The Statement of the Second Phase of the Revolution has been employed as the central analytical framework. Accordingly, the main research question is: ‘What is the role of ethical and spiritual values in the emergence, survival, and advancement of the Islamic Revolution of Iran within the intellectual system of the two leaders of the Revolution?’

1. Research Concepts

Before addressing the cultural theory of the Revolution, it is necessary to become familiar with spirituality and spiritual values. Spirituality is a term derived from *A ‘nawī* and originally stems from the Arabic root *‘Anā*, which conveys meanings such as intention, attention, and conscious orientation toward a reality beyond the material world. In lexicographical and etymological sources, the term implies a movement from the "Outer World" to the “inner world” and refers to uncovering the existential truth of things in relation to the Exalted Creator (Ibn Fāris, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 4, 146–149; Moein, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 2, entry 1776).

In the Islamic epistemological and theological tradition, spirituality is not merely a mental state or an emotional experience; rather, it is an existential and practical reality, one that originates from sincere faith, devoted servitude, and self-purification, elevating the human being from the level of instincts and material desires to the station of servitude, proximity, and divine worship (Khosropanah, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 170–171; Vali Abraghouei, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 70).

Within this horizon, Imam Khomeini regarded spirituality as "The fruit of faith and sincere servitude," and attributed the endurance of the Iranian nation to its "Spiritual purity and reliance on divine assistance." (Khomeini, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 21, 51; *ibid*: 18, 326) He considered the victory of the Revolution to be the result of the awakening of this latent spiritual capital within the soul of the nation and summarized all these elements under the concept of spirituality, stating:

"Our nation changed the course of history; they calculated everything, except one thing, and that was spirituality!" (Khomeini, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 6, 310)

From the perspective of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, spirituality means the revival of divine values within the fabric of individual and collective human life, values that, especially in the Second Phase of the Revolution, must consciously permeate all dimensions

of social existence. He emphasizes that spirituality is the inner struggle of the human being to overcome egoism and continuously move toward divine satisfaction. A spiritual society is one in which faith, trust in God, self-sacrifice, and confidence in divine promises are institutionalized as a way of life (Statements on 11 February 2019).²

From this viewpoint, spirituality is not synonymous with isolation or purely individual asceticism; rather, it represents a divine deepening of social, cultural, and political equations. Thus, spirituality is a dynamic and evolutionary process that begins with awareness and self-knowledge, leads to self-purification and moral refinement, and at the social level manifests itself as justice-seeking, sacrifice, service, beneficial knowledge, and societal development.

In summary, spirituality can be understood as a network of divine beliefs, inclinations, and actions encompassing faith in God, piety, trust, justice-seeking, sincerity, self-sacrifice, and readiness to give oneself in the path of truth. In the intellectual system of the two leaders of the Revolution, spirituality is not merely an individual or emotional experience; rather, it is a social and civilization-building reality that begins with the inner spiritual order of the human being, expands within society, and ultimately leads to the formation of a cultural and political system rooted in monotheism. In other words, spirituality in this framework constitutes the foundational force shaping the identity, resistance, and progress of the Islamic Revolution, a force that explains its past, gives meaning to its present, and directs its future.

2. Theoretical Framework: The Cultural Theory of the Islamic Revolution

Explaining revolutionary phenomena has always been one of the most challenging issues in the fields of social and political sciences. Various theorists, drawing on different approaches, from economic structuralism to sociological and cultural analyses, have sought to explain the causes of the occurrence, victory, and continuity of revolutions.

In the structural–functional approach, scholars such as Theda Skocpol (1979), in "States and Social Revolutions," emphasize the formation of revolutions as the result of structural factors such as state financial crises, international competition, military weakness, and the collapse of state institutions. Skocpol argues that revolutions arise from structural contradictions within society and the breakdown of state power, rather than from the will or ideology of revolutionaries (Skocpol, 1979: 86). However, this approach fails to explain why some

². <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?id=41673&nt=4&year=1397&tid=1246#100942>

societies experience revolutions under similar structural conditions while others do not. It also overlooks the role of cultural, ideological, and spiritual motivations of actors, and cannot adequately explain why individuals are willing to sacrifice their lives or participate in revolutions without calculating material benefit. Emotions, values, and collective identity are largely ignored in this framework.

In many sociological theories, revolutions are often understood as social and political fevers, rebellions, and disruptions of the natural order of society. Pitirim Sorokin considers the repression of instincts as a condition leading to revolution. Chalmers Johnson views revolution primarily as the result of a mismatch between environment and values, interpreting it as a consequence of the breakdown of equilibrium within the social system (Johnson, 1984: 23). Samuel Huntington defines revolution as a rapid, fundamental, and violent transformation of a society's dominant values and myths, political institutions, social structure, leadership, activities, and governmental policies (Nourbakhsh, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 37–43).

In contrast to these theories, which emphasize structural and material factors, some scholars have examined the formation of revolutions through a cultural approach. Cultural theories can be divided into two main categories: utilitarian and non-utilitarian. Utilitarian cultural theory is historically prior to other modern cultural theories and assumes that a good society is one organized in such a way as to minimize obstacles to individuals' pursuit of pleasure. Utilitarianism facilitates forms of social organization characteristic of modern capitalism and liberalism. In other words, individuals attempt to invest their skills, talents, and property where they can gain the greatest profit, treating cultural preferences as marketable commodities and assuming that individuals deserve to choose pleasurable cultural goods they desire (Milner, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 25–27).

However, with the expansion of cultural studies, rival theories emerged, often adopting a critical stance toward dominant Western culture, such as Critical Theory, Semiotics, Difference Theory, and Postmodernism.

The Islamic Revolution of Iran does not conform to Western cultural theories and has instead presented an independent theory in this domain known as the "Cultural Theory of the Islamic Revolution," which still requires extensive explanation. This theory is not based on a materialistic conception of culture; as such an approach reduces culture to a product dependent on the economic base. In certain respects, this theory may be close to the ideas of

Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), the Italian thinker, who believed that culture is neither a superstructure nor merely ideological, but rather one of the fundamental processes of social formation (Milner, *ibid*: 57).

Gramsci argued that a social group ensures its dominance over others in two ways: "Through coercion and through moral and intellectual leadership."

The latter constitutes hegemony, whereby a class exercises authority over others by controlling their beliefs and worldview, that is, culture (Gramsci, 1971: 57).

In light of what has been stated, the cultural approach, with its emphasis on culture and the role of values, beliefs, discourse, and collective identity, provides an appropriate framework for analyzing revolutions in which spiritual and cultural factors play a central role. The Islamic Revolution of Iran, due to its religious–cultural nature, its emphasis on ethical values, and its use of religious symbols and networks, represents a clear example of such revolutions. It cannot be explained solely through economic factors or political structures without paying attention to its cultural and value-based dimensions.

Therefore, in analyzing the Islamic Revolution of Iran, cultural elements, especially ethical values rooted in religious teachings, have played a key role. These values not only explain the widespread popular participation in the Revolution, but also make the continuity and survival of the post-revolutionary system intelligible. Imam Khomeini, while emphasizing spirituality as one of the major objectives of the Islamic Revolution, explicitly states in this regard:

"The Islamic Revolution of Iran achieved victory by relying on values and new components such as God-centeredness, spiritual orientation, justice-seeking, uprising for the sake of God, support for the oppressed, duty-oriented action, and opposition to arrogance, features that are unique and possessed by none of the contemporary schools of thought." (cf. Imam Khomeini, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 21, 402)

The cultural theory of the Islamic Revolution emphasizes the role of culture as the driving engine and the groundwork for structural change. From this perspective, culture itself is revolutionizable, and Cultural Revolution precedes social and economic revolution. As Martyr Beheshti also emphasized:

"We first carried out a cultural revolution, and then we changed our social system." (Hosseini Beheshti, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 2, 18–19)

This statement indicates that deep cultural transformations, especially in spirituality and people's beliefs, paved the way for political and economic change. In this view, Islamic

culture, particularly Shi'i culture, along with national elements, is introduced as the primary infrastructure of this Revolution, and spirituality plays a central role within it. Indeed, spirituality represents the precise point of distinction between the Islamic Revolution and other revolutions.

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution believes that one of the honors of the Islamic Revolution is that it introduces Islamic values, monotheism, divine laws, and the spiritual values of Islam to the world. He emphasizes this dimension and states:

"The foundation of the Islamic Revolution is human cultivation, and human cultivation at its first level is the repair of the heart; the revivel of the soul. A world filled with gold, adornment, and material blessings, yet lacking humanity, ethics, and religiosity, will bring no pleasure even to the worldly people and will not provide comfort to humankind. Human comfort arises from the moral and spiritual disposition that must be drawn from religion and take root in it. A world without ethics, without spirituality, and without religion becomes exactly what you see today under the disgraceful and heavy shadow of superpowers and global aggressors, and you see what they have done, and continue to do, to nations; all of this is the result of religiosity." (Statements of the Supreme Leader on 10 January 1992)³

From the viewpoint of the leaders of the Revolution and its theorists, the revolution that occurred in Iran was a synthesis of justice-seeking, freedom-seeking, and spirituality. These three slogans emerged as the most central cultural concepts of the Revolution, giving meaning to human life and generating a desire for change among large segments of Iranian society. Emphasis on returning to the Qur'an and the Sunnah and on reviving Islamic civilization, as the ethical and political foundations of the Revolution, constitutes another distinctive feature that laid the groundwork for Islamic unity and awakening beyond Iran's borders.

This Cultural Revolution led to rapid changes in attitudes, such as diminishing fear of death and embracing sacrifice, and brought about fundamental cultural transformations before any change in the political system occurred.

³. <https://khl.ink/f/2555>

3. Research Findings

3.1. The Role of the Intellectual System of the Two Leaders of the Revolution in the Emergence of the Islamic Revolution

Throughout history, the dual concepts of spirituality and ethics have consistently been regarded as fundamental and intrinsic needs of human life. Spirituality, as the quest for meaning, connection with a transcendent truth, and understanding of humanity's place in existence, and ethics, as the normative system regulating individual and social relations, are considered the two wings that enable humanity to ascend toward perfection. One of the primary teachings of divine prophets and spiritual leaders has been concern for the moral guidance and spiritual elevation of societies.

3.1.1. Spirituality: The Backbone of the Emergence of the Islamic Revolution

According to the statements of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, the defining characteristic and primary mission of divine prophets was the infusion of spirituality into the body of society. He has consistently identified spirituality as the most fundamental step taken by prophets in building a monotheistic society:

"The main task of the prophets was to inject spirituality, ethics, and the religious spirit into the people." (Statements of Ayatollah Khamenei on 18 May 2001)

This perspective clarifies the relationship between spirituality and other dimensions of social life. Spirituality is not a marginal or merely ornamental matter; rather, it is the foundation and driving force that makes reform in other spheres, politics, economics, and culture, both possible and meaningful. In the process of the emergence of the Islamic Revolution, this theory became a lived reality. Imam Khomeini, before being a political strategist in the conventional sense, was a moral mentor and a gnostic figure that, by breathing spirituality into society and reviving religious beliefs among the masses, provided the greatest social capital for the Revolution.

Accordingly, spirituality and religious ethics constituted the central pillar during the formative stage (emergence) of the Islamic Revolution. From the late 1960s, and particularly with the intensification of the movement in the 1970s, Imam Khomeini focused his efforts on articulating ethical and spiritual concepts within the context of popular struggle. His

statements transformed the religious beliefs and spiritual motivations of the Iranian people and encouraged them to actively participate in the revolutionary movement. By emphasizing the concept of religious duty, he framed resistance against the monarchy as a divine obligation, thereby enabling widespread popular mobilization.

One of the key factors in this mobilization was belief in the value of martyrdom in the struggle against tyranny, which emerged as a central component of the discourse of the Islamic Revolution (Khomeini, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 6, 491). According to Imam Khomeini, religious and spiritual beliefs played a pivotal role in the victory of the Islamic Revolution. These beliefs served as motivating and unifying forces that facilitated the collapse of the monarchy and the establishment of the Islamic Republic.

After the victory of the Revolution, spirituality and religious values continued to serve as one of the foundations of legitimacy for the nascent system. During the Sacred Defense (1980–1988), they played a decisive role in mobilizing forces and fostering motivation for resistance against foreign aggression. In numerous statements, Imam Khomeini emphasized that preserving spirituality, sincerity in action, and commitment to Islamic values was essential conditions for maintaining Iran's independence and its religious–national identity. In this regard, he stated:

"Only a people who possess spirituality can preserve their country; only such a people can save their nation and homeland. What brought our nation this far and granted it victory was precisely this spirituality." (Khomeini, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 17, 462)

In this statement, Imam Khomeini elevates spirituality from a personal virtue to a strategic principle for national survival. In his intellectual framework, the true power of a nation lies not in weaponry, but in the spiritual force and faith of its people.

3.1.2. The Manifestation of Spirituality in 'Āshūrā Symbols and Religious Identity

One of the most significant manifestations of ethics and spirituality in the emergence of the Islamic Revolution was the Muharram and Safar mourning rituals, especially in 1978. From an ethical and spiritual perspective, these rituals provided a platform through which people, influenced by 'Āshūrā's messages, moved toward resistance against the Pahlavi regime. The people reflected the message of Karbala in their everyday lives, and 'Āshūrā culture became a moral and spiritual model of resistance to oppression, self-sacrifice, and freedom.

Martyr Professor Morteza Motahhari points to the unparalleled role of this element in mobilizing society:

"Today we must think that if Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī (AS) were alive, what slogan would he choose if he wanted people to mourn for him?" He would say: "Shimr of 1,300 years ago is dead, recognize the Shimr of today." (Motahhari, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 273)

Motahhari's words indicate that, within the intellectual framework of the Revolution, the event of ‘Āshūrā is not merely a historical tragedy for mourning, but rather a paradigm of struggle and a source of meaning and motivation. Imam Khomeini astutely transformed ‘Āshūrā concepts such as "Hayhāt minnā al-Dhillah," (Far be it from us to accept humiliation) "Every day is ‘Āshūrā and every land is Karbala," and the confrontation between Ḥusayn and the Yazīd of the time into the core discourse of resistance. This transformed political struggle against the Pahlavi regime into a sacred religious and spiritual duty, endowing it with depth, fervor, and an immense social energy that no repressive force could contain.

Ayatollah Khamenei has repeatedly emphasized that, unlike revolutions driven solely by political or economic motives, the Islamic Revolution is rooted in faith in God, trust in divine promises, a spirit of sacrifice, and ethically grounded idealism. He regards the religious and spiritual nature of the Revolution as its principal distinguishing feature:

"This revolution is different from all other revolutions in the world."

(Statements of Ayatollah Khamenei on 11 February 2000)

This analysis highlights the essential difference between the Islamic Revolution and other major world revolutions, such as the French and Russian revolutions, which were largely founded upon materialist ideologies like liberalism and Marxism. The Supreme Leader identifies faith as the foundational element of the Revolution, present at all levels, from leadership to the masses. The people's deep faith, inclination toward divine justice, opposition to domination and moral corruption under the Pahlavi regime, and adherence to Qur'anic values collectively generated powerful spiritual motivations that mobilized the masses.

These characteristics distinguished the Revolution from materialist Western models and led to the formation of a cohesive collective identity grounded in religion and spirituality, an identity that remains the primary secret of the Revolution's emergence and endurance to this day.

3.2. The Role of Ethical and Spiritual Values in the Survival of the Islamic Revolution

The findings clearly demonstrate that after the victory of the Revolution, its survival and continuity have been directly dependent on the preservation and deepening of the very spiritual values that had functioned as the driving force during its formative phase. In his statements, the Leader of the Revolution has cited prominent manifestations of this faith-based resilience, including the conscious and widespread presence of the people at critical national and religious junctures; the magnificent, million-person funeral procession of Martyr Qasem Soleimani, which transformed into an unparalleled referendum in support of the Axis of Resistance; and the continuous participation in annual marches that symbolize the renewal of allegiance to revolutionary ideals. These massive social actions are not merely emotional or short-lived reactions, but rather emerge from a deeply rooted faith and a profound belief in the authenticity of the Revolution's ideals. Within this framework, spirituality functions as a strategic asset that strengthens national cohesion against destructive pluralisms, generates active resistance in the face of escalating economic pressures and psychological warfare by enemies, and prevents the penetration and hegemony of secular values and alien cultures.

Imam Khomeini, regarding the ultimate objective of the Revolution, states:

"The ultimate goal of the Revolution is inner transformation and a spiritual revolution, not merely changing the name of the government from a monarchical regime to an Islamic Republic... Are we supposed to go about our business and feel at ease? No, we are still on the path. We have not yet implemented the content of Islam, the reality of Islam, in Iran. Yes, we all voted for the Islamic Republic, that is correct; but Islam does not come by votes alone. Formally, Iran is now an Islamic Republic by the vote of the people, but the content of Islam must be realized within this Islamic Republic. Simply saying 'Islamic Republic' while all its dimensions remain un-Islamic does not constitute Islam. Those who once claimed Islam, *Mu'āwīya* himself shouted "Islam," prayed in congregation, and even led prayers... We will reach the final destination on the day when everything we have becomes Islamic." (Imam Khomeini, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 12, 415–418)

Based on Imam Khomeini's perspective, the "Survival" of the Islamic Republic is not a political–structural matter, but rather an existential and essential issue that is directly tied to spirituality. From his viewpoint, reliance on the "Form" of the system, namely the title "Islamic Republic" and the legal structure derived from popular vote, without infusing the "Content," which is inner transformation and a spiritual revolution, does not guarantee the system's survival. He conceives of the Revolution as a continuous and never-ending

"Process" of becoming Islamic, rather than a completed "Project" finalized in 1979. Consequently, any stagnation along this spiritual path signifies the beginning of decay. This inner transformation is not merely an individual moral recommendation, but a fundamental strategy for the system's survival through root-level confrontation with corruption, enhancement of efficiency, and deepening of substantive legitimacy. His crucial warning against "*Mu'āwīyan Islam*" addresses precisely this danger of "Substantive Distortion": "A system that preserves Islamic forms and rituals while being emptied of the spirit of justice and spirituality, thereby collapsing from within. Accordingly, in this line of thought, spirituality is not a peripheral matter but the foundation of strategic security and the existential condition for the survival of the Islamic Republic against its greatest threat, namely, identity alienation."

The continuity and resilience of the Islamic Revolution require a constant challenge by the Islamic Republic against erroneous cultural and social traditions. In a foundational discussion on cultural invasion in 1992 AD (1371 SH), the Leader of the Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei, clearly articulated this two-sided confrontation:

"When the Islamic Revolution came, it struck the chest of the Western aggressor like a fist, pushed him back, and halted the cultural invasion. In the early years of the Revolution, you suddenly saw that our people, within a short period, felt profound changes in their morals and spirituality. Forgiveness increased. Greed and avarice decreased. Cooperation increased. Inclination toward religion increased. Extravagance decreased. Contentment increased. These are cultural matters, Islamic culture. This pertained to the period when the enemy's daily efforts to sow seeds of negative morality had been halted, and an inclination and attention toward Islam had emerged. Once again, the Islamic culture, ethics, manners, and moral traits that were embedded in our people's nature were revived. Of course, this was not deep; depth emerges when work on the issue continues for several years. This opportunity did not arise, and the invasion gradually resumed."

This quotation reveals the mechanism of "Cultural Purification" as one of the pillars of revolutionary endurance. From the Leader's perspective, the survival of the Revolution cannot be ensured solely through military or political struggle; rather, it requires an ongoing "Cultural Jihad" to replace entrenched negative moral traits with Islamic virtues. Here, spirituality plays the role of an immune system that generates resistance against cultural invasion and preserves the authentic identity of society. Thus, the Revolution's durability depends on deepening the very ethical transformation that characterized its initial phase.

In continuation of these remarks, Ayatollah Khamenei, while emphasizing the enemies' efforts to weaken the commendable Islamic ethics of the Iranian people, also points to internal factors and stresses the necessity of continuous "Collective Self-purification" for the Revolution's survival. In his intellectual framework, revolutionary endurance is a dynamic process rather than a fixed achievement. Survival is contingent upon a two-front struggle: "Confronting external aggression and purifying internal afflictions. This perspective shifts the responsibility for endurance away from governance alone and transforms it into a collective duty to institutionalize ethics at all levels of society, neglect of which will lead to the gradual erosion of revolutionary achievements." (cf. Statements of the Supreme Leader on 21/05/1992)

In recent years, however, Ayatollah Khamenei has adopted an assertive approach toward "Western Culture," which he considers the result of the Revolution's adherence to ethical values. For instance, regarding the issue of women, he states:

"They asked me: what defense do you have against what Westerners say about the issue of women in your country? I said: "We have no defense, we have an offensive! On the issue of women, we are claimants against the West; we accuse the West. They are the ones oppressing women, humiliating women, lowering the status of women; in the name of freedom, in the name of employment, in the name of assigning responsibility, they subject women to spiritual, psychological, emotional pressures and personal and dignitary insults. They must answer for this."

(Statements of the Supreme Leader in a meeting with elite women on 22 May 2011)⁴

As noted, the assertive approach of Ayatollah Khamenei in recent years is rooted in the Revolution's deep commitment to ethical values, and his remarks on the issue of women represent a clear example of this stance. When he decisively declares, "We have no defense, we have an offensive," this offensive does not arise from military or political power, but from a position of superior moral authority. The foundation of this challenge lies in invoking core ethical concepts such as "Oppression," "Humiliation," and "Violation of Dignity," which, in his view, occur in the West under deceptive labels such as "Freedom" and "Employment." In reality, it is this firm belief and commitment to the inherent dignity of women that grants him the confidence to shift the arena and place the West, rather than himself, on trial as the primary defendant in this moral crisis. Thus, this "Claim-making" is not a political assertion,

⁴. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-print?id=12518&nt=2&year=1390&tid=3957>

but the outcome of ethical values upon which the Islamic Revolution was founded from its inception, and which in its second forty years have ensured the endurance and moral superiority of revolutionary culture over other cultures, particularly Western culture.

3.2.1. The Inseparable Link Between Spirituality and Justice-Seeking: The Backbone of Systemic Endurance

In the monotheistic worldview of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, spirituality and ethics are not merely personal emotions or individual experiences, but universal and system-building realities that define the moral, social, and political foundations of the Islamic system. This spirituality, which arises from deep faith in God, absolute servitude, and sincere devotion, possesses an inherent characteristic known as "Opposition to Oppression," which binds it inseparably to the concept of justice. According to this perspective, the coexistence of genuine spirituality with the acceptance of oppression, domination, or tyranny constitutes a fundamental contradiction. As he emphatically states:

"A spiritual person who compromises with oppression, with tyranny, with an unjust system of domination, what kind of spirituality is this? We cannot understand such spirituality." (Statements of Ayatollah Khamenei on 30 August 2005)⁵

This pivotal statement introduces "Revolutionary Spirituality" as the essence of the Islamic systems endurance. The survival of the Revolution depends on rejecting "Secular and indifferent spirituality" that retreats into individual isolation and reconciles with oppression. By defining spirituality as a justice-oriented and anti-oppression force, the Leader transforms the society's spiritual energy into a permanent power for confronting both internal injustice and external domination. This linkage prevents the Revolution from collapsing into conservatism and indifference, and keeps it constantly in a state of "Revolutionary Agency."

In Islamic logic, justice means placing everything in its proper position and preventing any form of transgression or oppression. A fundamental characteristic of this definition is the refusal to remain silent in the face of injustice and tyranny, as stated by Imam Ali (AS):

"The finest form of justice is supporting the oppressed." (Āmidī, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 2, 394; no. 2977)

Imam Ali (AS) further declares:

⁵. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=3304>

"Had it not been for the presence of the people, the completion of the argument by the existence of supporters, and the covenant God has taken from scholars that they must not remain silent in the face of the gluttony of the oppressor and the hunger of the oppressed, I would have cast the reins of the caliphate upon its shoulders." (Nahj al-Balāghah, Sermon 3)

As can be observed, these two pivotal statements from *Nahj al-Balāghah* fundamentally transform the paradigm of governance. Within this framework, governance is considered acceptable and legitimate only insofar as it effectively serves two principal objectives:

1. Establishing a system of truth and justice and combating all forms of falsehood in structure and practice;
2. Restoring the rights of the oppressed, eliminating class divisions, and actively defending the rights of the deprived against oppressors and affluent elites.

When Islamic spirituality is integrated with such a rational and ethical logic, the outcome is an unwavering commitment to supporting the oppressed and confronting the oppressors, not only at the domestic level but also on the global stage. This profound linkage between ethics, spirituality, and justice has also shaped the doctrine of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy. From the outset of the Revolution, principles such as supporting oppressed nations (including Palestine, Lebanon, and Yemen), opposing the hegemony of major powers, and rejecting any humiliating engagement with oppressive regimes have constituted enduring pillars of the country's foreign policy. These principles are rooted in the same "Anti-oppression Spirituality" that refuses submission to the system of domination even under the harshest conditions of pressure and sanctions. Morality grounded in spirituality elevates foreign policy beyond purely materialistic and interest-driven calculations, endowing it with an idealistic and value-oriented identity. Within this framework, "Support for the Oppressed" is not a negotiable political tactic, but a divine obligation and an intrinsic component of the Revolution's identity.

3.3. The Impact of Ethical and Spiritual Values on the Advancement of the Islamic Revolution

Within the intellectual framework of the two Leaders of the Revolution, ethical and spiritual values are not merely factors for survival and preservation of the status quo; rather, they constitute the driving engine and propulsive force behind the stage of growth, development,

and flourishing of the Islamic Revolution. This perspective elevates spirituality from an individual virtue to a strategic variable for civilizational development. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei, considers this achievement one of the most remarkable and even miraculous outcomes of the Revolution:

"The Islamic Revolution succeeded in significantly increasing spirituality and morality in the public sphere of society; this itself is another miracle of the active and forward-looking Revolution." (Statements of Ayatollah Khamenei on 11 February 2019)

This statement introduces an "Inverse Equation" relative to Western development paradigms. Whereas secular models regard development as a precursor to the decline of public religiosity, the revolutionary intellectual framework defines genuine societal growth and flourishing as contingent upon the deepening of spirituality and ethics. Accordingly, the indicator of progress in a revolutionary society is not merely gross domestic product or material infrastructure, but rather the "Caliber of spirituality and morality in the public sphere." This spirituality generates the social energy required for forward movement and for overcoming obstacles.

Martyr Professor Morteza Motahhari also emphasized this intrinsic linkage between spirituality and progress, considering it a necessary condition for realizing the Revolution's foundational ideals, such as justice. He stated:

"If we forget spirituality, we deprive the Revolution of a driving force," and in response to those who championed justice as their primary slogan, he asserted: "Without spirituality, justice is impossible." (Motahhari, n.d: 128)

Imam Khomeini located the root of this forward-driving power in an inner transformation and a collective transition from "Self-centeredness" to "God-centeredness" at the national level, a transformation that brought about victory and flourishing:

"This elimination of multiple inclinations and turning away from the self toward God, indeed, our nation turned away from itself and turned toward God. It disregarded the desires of the ego and focused entirely on establishing the Islamic Republic. This was orientation toward God; it was self-transcendence and attachment to God. This was the secret, the secret of the Revolution's victory and flourishing." (Khomeini: 1, 58)

In this analysis, Imam Khomeini identifies the "Transition from collective egoism toward divine will" as the core of the Revolution's soft power. Flourishing, in this view, is the product of a form of "Spiritual Engineering" in which individual and group interests are

subordinated to a transcendent ideal, namely, the realization of divine sovereignty. This "Purposeful Self-sacrifice" concentrates dispersed social energies at a focal point, generating an extraordinary capacity for growth and civilizational advancement that transcends material calculations.

In the Second Phase of the Revolution Statement, Ayatollah Khamenei offers a comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon, elucidating Imam Khomeini's role as a gnostic leader and his impact on the faith-based foundations of society, while enumerating various dimensions of this spiritual growth:

"Imam Khomeini significantly elevated the level of spirituality and morality in the public space of society. The religious and ethical approach in the Islamic Republic attracted receptive and luminous hearts, especially among the youth, and the environment shifted in favor of religion and morality. The struggles of young people in harsh arenas, including the Sacred Defense, were accompanied by remembrance, supplication, and a spirit of brotherhood and sacrifice... Mosques and religious spaces experienced unprecedented vitality. Waiting lists for spiritual retreats (*I'tikāf*) filled with thousands of young people, professors, and students... and queues for jihadi service camps expanded, all during a period in which the growing moral decline of the West had marginalized ethics and spirituality across large parts of the world. This, too, is another miracle of the active and progressive Islamic Revolution and system." (Second Phase of the Revolution Statement on 11 February 1979)⁶

This passage articulates a macro-thesis concerning the "Dual and synergistic function of spirituality" in the post-establishment era of the Revolution. On the one hand, spirituality functions as a cultural immune system that inoculates society against the expanding tide of secularism and the moral crises of modernity, thereby safeguarding identity (defensive function). On the other hand, and more importantly, it becomes a generator of social energy for growth and flourishing. Contrary to passive interpretations that reduce religiosity to conservatism, this intellectual framework demonstrates how spirituality can be translated into constructive action and innovative models of development. Phenomena such as "Jihadi service camps," "Faith-oriented scientific movements," and "Duty-based social participation" are not merely cultural activities; rather, they represent manifestations of an indigenous model of governance and development in which "Spiritual motivation" replaces or complements "Material motivation."

⁶. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?id=41673&nt=4&year=1397&tid=1246#100942>

Accordingly, the Islamic Revolution has not only resisted the global trend of spiritual decline, but has also succeeded in creating a "Positive Dialectic" between religiosity and progress. Within this dialectic, the deepening of spirituality leads to the enhancement of society's material and scientific capacities, while these advancements, in turn, provide a platform for the further flourishing of divine values. From the perspective of the Leader of the Revolution, this achievement constitutes proof of the unique effectiveness of the civilizational paradigm of the Islamic Revolution in its phase of growth and maturation. In the strategic doctrine of the two Leaders of the Revolution, spirituality is elevated from a cultural virtue to a strategic catalyst for the transition from system-building to civilization-building. By defining a synergistic relationship between deepened faith and accelerated development, this paradigm supplies the driving force necessary for civilizational evolution. Ultimately, this "Positive Dialectic" between spirituality and progress not only demonstrates the effectiveness of the Islamic Revolution's model in the growth phase, but also provides the essential soft and hard infrastructures required to realize the ultimate goal: the formation of a New Islamic Civilization as an inspiring and competitive global model.

Conclusion

By analyzing the intellectual framework of Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei, this study demonstrates that ethical and spiritual values are not peripheral variables, but rather the strategic foundation and the generating and sustaining cause of the Islamic Revolution across its three stages of "Emergence," "Survival," and "Advancement." The findings confirm that this doctrine, by elevating struggle to the level of a "Divine Duty" and redefining "Anti-oppression spirituality," has served as the driving engine and guarantor of national resilience. Accordingly, the linkage between politics and spirituality is defined as a vital and infrastructural principle for the Revolution's identity, cohesion, and macro-level orientation.

Strategic Implications and Practical Consequences

These findings constitute not merely a theoretical synthesis, but also carry undeniable strategic implications for preserving and advancing the Revolution:

- **A Strategic Warning to the Governance System:**

The most significant outcome of this research is a serious warning: "Any managerial approach that treats cultural and spiritual issues as "Secondary" or peripheral to economics and politics is directly weakening the vital artery and primary source of the system's soft power. Consequently, cultural and ethical policymaking must be placed at the center of macro-level planning as a matter of "National security necessity," rather than as a luxury."

- **Providing a Criterion for Damage Assessment:**

This study offers a key metric for diagnosing systemic vulnerabilities. The degree of "Disjunction between politics and spirituality" in the performance of officials and institutions can serve as an indicator for measuring deviation from original ideals and assessing the system's effectiveness against soft threats.

- **Modeling for Cultural Actors:**

For the cultural front of the Revolution, these findings emphasize that the most effective practical action lies not merely in surface-level activities, but in the reproduction and deepening of the same spiritual and ethical infrastructure that constituted the Revolution's generating cause. This requires a focus on collective self-purification, the promotion of justice-seeking, and the internal cleansing of society from entrenched negative residues.

Suggested Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study open up new horizons for researchers:

- **Survey-based studies:** Examining the degree of alignment and the gap between the "Doctrine of revolutionary spirituality" in the thought of the Leaders of the Islamic Revolution and the "Lived reality of religious faith" across different social strata in contemporary Iranian society;
- **Comparative studies:** Conducting a comparative analysis of the function of the "Spirituality factor" in the Islamic Revolution in comparison with other major world revolutions (both successful and unsuccessful), with the aim of identifying distinguishing features and the unique power-generating components of the Iranian model.

- **Institutional pathology:** Investigating the extent of success of responsible institutions in translating this intellectual framework into practical policies and effective executive programs, as well as identifying existing structural and functional obstacles.

Therefore, the final outcome of this research goes beyond a mere analytical proposition; it constitutes a roadmap demonstrating that the survival and dynamism of the Islamic Revolution depend on a continuous struggle (Jihad) to revive, deepen, and institutionalize the very ethical and spiritual essence that has been, and will remain, the point of its origin and the secret of its continuity.

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The Role of Women in the Construction of the New Islamic Civilization from the Perspective of Martyr Ayatollah Sayyid Mohammad Hosseini Beheshti

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ABSTRACT

Objective: In the process of achieving a new Islamic civilization, one of the fundamental issues is clarifying the position and role of women in this civilizational movement. This article examines the role of women in shaping Islamic civilization from the perspective of Martyr Ayatollah Beheshti. The main research question is: 'How is the role and status of women in realizing the construction of the new Islamic civilization explained from Beheshti's viewpoint?'

Method: To answer this question, the present study employed a descriptive-analytical approach, drawing on library and documentary sources. The findings indicate that Beheshti, with a transformative perspective, considers women as key agents in building the Islamic civilization and emphasizes their intrinsic human dignity.

Findings: According to him, the active participation of women in scientific, ethical, and social fields, alongside the preservation of Islamic identity, is essential to advancing Islamic civilization. He believes that redefining the status of women within the framework of authentic Islamic teachings is necessary and opposes any imitation of rigid traditions or Western feminist discourses.

Conclusion: Beheshti considers the family as the central nucleus of civilization-building and emphasizes the importance of capable women in this context. Furthermore, he views the provision of educational and socio-political participation opportunities for women as essential for their effective presence in the path of realizing the new Islamic civilization. This article, by presenting a balanced Islamic model from Beheshti's perspective, proposes gender justice through the integration of Quranic principles with contemporary needs and, by critiquing both tradition and Western feminism, offers practical strategies for women's empowerment.

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Introduction

The construction of a new Islamic civilization, as a strategic horizon for contemporary Islamic societies, requires a comprehensive and purposeful revival of the intellectual, cultural, social, and ethical capacities of the Islamic Ummah. The participation of all social groups, particularly women, in this process is considered an undeniable necessity; women who act not as followers or complements but as independent and influential actors in producing culture, educating future generations, strengthening the family institution, and contributing to social and civilizational construction.

However, in many traditional or conservative approaches, the role of women in the Islamic civilization-building process has either been overlooked or marginalized. Conversely, some contemporary discourses, inclined toward non-native models incompatible with Islamic principles, have gone to extremes in redefining women's roles. This situation has created theoretical and practical gaps in understanding the actual position of women in contemporary Islamic society, underscoring the need for reconsideration in this domain.

Despite the clear emphasis of religious texts on human dignity, social justice, and women's responsibility, a comprehensive, native theoretical framework for their active participation in the process of Islamic civilization-building, particularly at the strategic level, has not yet been fully articulated. In this context, revisiting the ideas of thinkers who have interpreted Islamic sources with a jurisprudential and transformative approach can be enlightening.

One of the prominent figures in this field is Martyr Ayatollah Dr. Sayyid Mohammad Hosseini Beheshti. By combining jurisprudential knowledge, social awareness, and a justice-oriented approach, he provided an alternative model for the role and status of women in Islamic society, a model that neither relies on the elimination or reduction of women's roles nor on imitation of Western models, but emphasizes women's dignity, autonomy, and social responsibility within a religious framework.

The present study aims to clarify Beheshti's views on the role of women in constructing a new Islamic civilization, addressing the central question: 'How does Martyr Ayatollah Beheshti define the role and status of women in realizing this new Islamic civilization?' The research seeks to articulate Beheshti's perspectives and to provide a theoretical framework grounded in his writings, opinions, and intellectual foundations.

This study employs an analytical-interpretive approach and uses qualitative content analysis to draw on authentic Islamic sources and Beheshti's works to create a theoretical framework

for women's active, balanced, and purposeful participation in civilizational arenas, grounded in the interaction between Islamic tradition and contemporary exigencies. Ultimately, the research aims to present a rational, strategic, and Islamic consistent image of women's agency in constructing the new Islamic civilization and to propose strategies to strengthen this role across scientific, cultural, social, and ethical domains.

1. Research Background

Several articles have addressed this topic as part of the research background. These studies examine the role of women in constructing the new Islamic civilization from various perspectives:

- Yaseri et al. (2018 AD/1397 SH) provided a conceptual model analyzing women's role in the flourishing of Islamic civilization. They argue that women, through their educational role in the family and active participation in society, significantly influence the transmission of Islamic values and the spread of Islamic awakening. The model includes cultural, political, and economic dimensions.
- Zohourimanesh et al. (2024 AD/1403 SH) analyzed Beheshti's view on the political status of women. They showed that Beheshti, using Ijtihad, redefined concepts such as gender equality and women's social participation in Islamic discourse, emphasizing women's role in political and social activities.
- Farahi et al. (2024 AD/1403 SH) explored Beheshti's civilizational thought. They emphasized that Beheshti played an effective role in the awakening of the people and the Islamic Revolution, contributing significantly to the formation of the Islamic system by addressing various dimensions of Islamic civilization-building.
- Firahi (2012 AD/1391 SH) examined Beheshti's ideas in the theory of Ummah and Imamate, concluding that Beheshti played a fundamental role in the formation of Islamic civilization but did not have the opportunity to codify his jurisprudential and political thoughts systematically. These articles generally emphasize women's status and Beheshti's thought in the context of civilization-building.
- Shiroudi (2005 AD/1384 SH) studied women's socio-political role in contemporary Iranian society, examining their activities across three historical periods (the Constitutional Revolution and its pre- and post-periods). The article highlights the

active and decisive role of Iranian women in political and social transformations, rejecting passive or negative perspectives based on historical evidence.

- Thamani et al. (2020 AD/1399 SH) analyzed women's role in the new Islamic civilization, drawing on the Supreme Leader's thoughts, and concluded that women play a central role in seven domains: "Science, justice, spirituality, economy, independence, national dignity, and lifestyle."
- Moradi (2020 AD/1399 SH) examined women's mission in the new Islamic civilization, arguing that women, with equal human identity and Quranic dignity, have dual material and spiritual responsibilities: "In the family, safeguarding property, honor, and educating children with contemporary knowledge; in society, supporting the resistance economy, scientific presence, and political participation." This role requires awareness of both religious and modern sciences.

Considering the research background, the present article, focusing on Beheshti's integrated thought, explores women's status in jurisprudential-political dimensions. Unlike previous studies that primarily addressed women's general roles or revolutionary discourses, this article relies on Beheshti's views to present a coherent intellectual system in which women, combining educational and social roles, are central to achieving the Islamic civilization. It also emphasizes Beheshti's dynamic Ijtihad in shaping women's agency within an Islamic framework.

This study uses a descriptive-analytical method based on library and documentary sources. Data were collected through the examination of Beheshti's works, including books, articles, and speeches, as well as other relevant sources (e.g., the Qur'an, Hadith, and contemporary research), and through a comparative review of other Islamic thinkers' works. Qualitative content analysis with an interpretive-critical approach was employed to extract and explain Beheshti's perspectives on women's role in the new Islamic civilization; a comparative method was also used to critique and contrast traditional, Western feminist, and progressive Islamic readings. The credibility of the findings was ensured through the use of reliable sources and systematic analysis. This methodology enables a comprehensive, documented study of the topic.

By presenting Beheshti's balanced Islamic model, which simultaneously strengthens women's familial and social roles, this study addresses the tradition-modernity challenge. By critiquing

both restrictive traditional views and instrumental Western feminism, the article proposes an innovative solution: "Islamic gender justice."

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Foundations

The theoretical framework of this study, aimed at clarifying women's role in constructing the new Islamic civilization, is based on integrating the thought of Martyr Ayatollah Dr. Sayyid Mohammad Hosseini Beheshti with contemporary social science theories. This framework adopts a jurisprudential and reformist approach to provide a balanced, rational, and operational model that, while recognizing women's intrinsic dignity and social responsibility, positions them as central and active agents in building the Islamic civilization.

The theoretical framework consists of three primary levels:

- Ontological and Epistemological Foundations; based on religious and Qur'anic principles;
- Key Concepts and Intermediate Theory; based on Beheshti's thought;
- Analytical-Operational Model; utilizing contemporary social science theories.

2.1. Ontological Foundations: Dignity, Equality, and Human Responsibility

This study rests on three fundamental religious principles emphasized by Beheshti. These principles form the ontological basis for defining the status of women and men within an Islamic worldview:

- The Principle of Human Intrinsic Dignity

Referring to the verse "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam" (al-Isrā': 70), Beheshti considers dignity an inherent and non-gendered characteristic. This dignity is not the result of social or gender roles, but the very essence of human existence, and any inferior view of women is rejected. This principle serves as the intellectual basis for critiquing restrictive traditional views.

- The Principle of Equality in Human Essence

The verse "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female..." (al-Ḥujurāt: 13) emphasizes the inherent equality of men and women and defines human value

based on piety rather than gender. This equality provides a foundation for rejecting gender-based discrimination and recognizing women's potential across all social domains.

- **The Principle of Social Responsibility and Comprehensive Participation**

Multiple verses and Hadiths, such as "The believing men and believing women are allies of one another" (al-Tawbah: 71), along with women's active participation in early Islam, indicate that men and women share responsibility toward society. This principle challenges traditional views that confine women's social roles to the family and regard women's participation in enjoining good and forbidding evil, as well as in social structures, as a religious duty.

Summary of this section: "These three religious principles provide the epistemological framework for the study, creating a context in which women are not merely "Recipients of Rulings" but also "Responsible Actors" and "Direct addressees of divine commands" in the construction of society."

2.2. Intermediate Theory: Beheshti's "Islamic Gender Justice."

Beheshti presents, with a dynamic, Ijtihad-based approach, a coherent and practical theory of women's status that goes beyond basic religious principles. This study formulates his thought as the "Islamic Gender Justice" theory, an intermediate theory bridging general religious foundations and operational analysis, with three core pillars:

- **Equality in Intrinsic Dignity and Value**

Beheshti believes that gender differences should not lead to inequality in human value. Men and women are created from the same essence, and their dignity is equal.

- **Difference in Functions, Not Discrimination**

He acknowledges biological and functional differences between men and women. Still, he emphasizes that these differences are meant for role allocation according to divine wisdom, not as grounds for discrimination or social exclusion. This view aligns with the "Equality in difference" concept articulated by Allameh Tabataba'i and Martyr Motahhari.

- **Shared Responsibility in All Arenas**

This theory goes beyond the traditional role of women in the family, stressing the shared responsibility of men and women in all social, political, economic, and cultural fields. According to Beheshti, women can and must be active, influential agents in society.

This intermediate theory serves as a bridge between religious principles and operational analysis. It allows us to critique non-authentic traditions that impose limitations on women in the name of religion while distancing ourselves from Western feminism, which often equates equality with the denial of differences.

2.3. Analytical-Operational Model: Integration with Contemporary Theories

To operationalize Beheshti's theory and analyze women's practical position, this study draws on two contemporary social science theories. These theories help illustrate how women can move from theoretical recognition to practical agency in civilization-building.

A) Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields and Capitals

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), a French sociologist, proposed the theory of social fields and multiple forms of capital, offering a structural analysis of social inequalities. According to Bourdieu, social actors compete within various fields (political, economic, cultural, etc.), and the combination of capital determines their positions (Bourdieu, 1986).

Integration with Beheshti's Thought: This theory is used to analyze women's roles in Islamic civilization. It suggests that for women to play a central role in building Islamic civilization, they must actively participate in four key fields:

- Economic Field: By acquiring economic capital through employment and entrepreneurship;
- Cultural Field: By acquiring cultural capital through education and the transmission of authentic Islamic values;
- Social Field: By acquiring social capital through networking and involvement in civil and political institutions;
- Symbolic Field: By acquiring symbolic capital through redefining the Muslim woman's identity as an active, not passive, agent.

B) Kabeer's Empowerment Theory

Naila Kabeer argues that real empowerment occurs when women achieve both "Power within" (self-confidence) and "Power to" (social opportunities) (Kabeer, 1999). This theory defines empowerment in three key dimensions: resources (access to opportunities), agency (decision-making power), and achievements (tangible outcomes).

Integration with Beheshti's Thought: This theory serves as the operational model for Beheshti's ideas, showing how women can be empowered for civilization-building:

- Access to Resources: Beheshti's emphasis on education and participation means providing access to economic and cultural capital.
- Strengthening Agency: Emphasizing shared responsibility and women's right to choose enhances their agency in individual and social decision-making.
- Achieving Outcomes: The ultimate goal is achieving tangible results in the economic, cultural, and political development of Islamic society.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative content analysis. The research corpus includes all written works, speeches, and interviews of Martyr Ayatollah Dr. Sayyid Mohammad Hosseini Beheshti, focusing on key concepts such as human dignity, gender justice, social responsibility, and civilization-building.

Additionally, secondary data analysis is used to examine prior empirical research on women's social and political participation in Islamic societies, testing the practical applicability of Beheshti's "Islamic Gender Justice" theory while enriching the study's theoretical framework.

4. Innovation of the Theoretical Framework

The main innovation of this study lies in the systematic three-level integration of Beheshti's thought, transforming it into a coherent and practical theory of gender and civilization-building for the first time. This innovation has three key aspects:

- Formulating scattered ideas into a coherent theory: For the first time, Beheshti's ideas are synthesized into a middle-range theory called "Islamic Gender Justice."
- Integration of religion and social sciences: By bridging Qur'anic and Ijtihad-based foundations (Beheshti) with contemporary social science theories (Bourdieu and Kabeer), the framework provides analytical depth regarding women's role in Islamic civilization.
- Operationalizing a civilizational theory: Beyond theoretical discussion, this research transforms Beheshti's thought into a practical tool for policy analysis and planning, usable by policymakers and international institutions.

5. Summary of the Theoretical Framework and Beheshti's Perspective

Beheshti's approach is a moderate and Ijtihad-based perspective that neither falls into restrictive traditions nor adopts instrumental Western feminism. This study, for the first time, consolidates his scattered ideas into a coherent and practical theory of gender and civilization-building.

Our theoretical framework positions Beheshti's perspective as a foundational theory, which, combined with contemporary theories (Bourdieu and Kabeer), forms an analytical-operational model for examining women's role in building the new Islamic civilization.

6. Definition of Key Concepts

6.1. New Islamic Civilization

A new Islamic civilization is a justice-oriented, advanced society based on Islamic principles, emphasizing spiritual and ethical growth alongside material development. This civilization seeks to revive Islamic identity, strengthen Muslim unity, and provide an effective model for contemporary life. As a religious reformer, Beheshti emphasized reconstructing Islamic thought and grounding civilization-building in the Qur'an and Islamic principles.

According to him, Islamic civilization should be based on rationalism, justice, a religious worldview, ethics, a macro-perspective, religious democracy, the rule of law, and the principle of Velayat-e Faqih (Farooqi, 2024 AD/1403 SH: 112). Although the term "New Islamic civilization" appears infrequently in his works, his vision of a dynamic Islamic society aligns with this concept.

6.2. Women

In Islam, women are recognized as complete human beings with intrinsic dignity. They are equal to men in creation, human values, and spiritual rewards. Islam grants women specific rights and responsibilities that define their roles in family and society.

6.3. Women's Roles and Rights from the Qur'an

1. Equality in Humanity: The Qur'an explicitly states that men and women are created from a single soul and have no difference in human essence (al-Nisā': 1). This equality extends to spiritual values and rewards (al-Aḥzāb: 35).
2. Different Roles: While equal in essence, men and women have distinct roles and responsibilities in family and society. Women, as wives and mothers, play a central role in child-rearing and maintaining the family (al-Baqarah: 223).
3. Specific Rights: The Qur'an provides women with rights such as dowry, maintenance, inheritance, and property ownership (al-Nisā': 32), emphasizing good treatment and preserving dignity (al-Nisā': 19).

6.4. Women's Agency

Women's agency in the new Islamic civilization is active, multidimensional, and grounded in Islamic values across various life domains. Beyond their central family role, women participate in scientific, social, economic, and political arenas while preserving Islamic identity. This conscious presence safeguards dignity and advances Islamic society. Martyr Ayatollah Dr. Beheshti emphasizes that women's participation in family, education, and politics not only aligns with Islam but also strengthens the Islamic system (Beheshti, 1989 AD/1368 SH: 82).

7. The Status of Women in Society from Theoretical Perspectives: Traditional Views, Western Feminism, and Progressive Islamic Readings

The status of women in society has always been one of the most challenging subjects in social philosophy, theology, and gender studies. In this regard, three major perspectives have emerged, each explaining the role and position of women based on distinct theoretical foundations. These perspectives not only reflect historical and cultural transformations but have also exerted profound influence on social and legal policymaking.

7.1. The Traditional View: Restricting Women's Roles to the Family Sphere

This perspective rooted in limited interpretations of religious texts and historical customs, views women as weaker beings in need of male protection. Within this paradigm, women's roles are primarily confined to the private sphere, namely, child-rearing and domestic responsibilities. Inevitable misinterpretations of verses such as "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women" (al-Nisā': 34) have been used to justify the exclusion of women from public arenas (Motahhari, 1977 AD/1357 SH: 58).

This approach, by emphasizing rigid gender-based division of labor, overlooks women's social, political, and economic participation and, in some cases, even restricts their access to education and employment. Critics argue that this view stems from misreading of religious texts and the influence of pre-modern patriarchal cultures. Ahmad Zahrudin's (2024) study, "Gender Studies in the Qur'an: Interpretations of Women's Roles and Rights," demonstrates that although some traditional interpretations have limited women's roles, linguistic and contextual analyses of Qur'anic verses affirm women's active participation in social, economic, and political dimensions (Zahrudin, 2024: 3).

7.2. Western Feminist Perspective: Absolute Equality and Opposition to Traditional Structures

In contrast, Western feminism advocates absolute equality between women and men and critiques traditional family structures and gender roles. This approach, strengthened during the second wave of feminism (from the 1960s onward), portrays religion and religious institutions as tools for women's oppression (Millet, 1970: 42). Radical feminism, by denying any innate differences between men and women, calls for a complete redefinition of social relations based on equality.

However, this perspective faces challenges, including neglecting biological differences and weakening the family institution. Furthermore, some strands of liberal feminism, by emphasizing excessive individualism, fail to recognize the complementary roles of women and men in society.

7.3. Progressive Islamic Reading: Integrating Human Dignity with Social Responsibility

Between these two perspectives, thinkers such as Martyr Ayatollah Beheshti and Martyr Morteza Motahhari propose a comprehensive middle path through a progressive and Ijtihad-based interpretation of Islam. Referring to verses such as "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam" (al-Isrā': 70), Beheshti emphasizes the intrinsic equality of women and men in human essence and spiritual values (Beheshti, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 25).

Similarly, Motahhari, in "The System of Women's Rights in Islam," distinguishes between "Sameness" and "equality" in rights and explains Islam's balanced legal system. He argues: "Islam, while affirming equality in human dignity, acknowledges natural differences and complementary roles of women and men within the family and society." (Motahhari, 1977 AD/1357 SH: 72)

From these thinkers' perspective, Islam recognizes women's full social, political, and economic rights while acknowledging functional differences in specific domains. Beheshti cites exemplary figures such as Lady Khadijah, a successful entrepreneur and supporter of the Prophet's mission, and Lady Zaynab, a model of political and social resistance, to justify women's active participation in public life (Beheshti, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 2, 115). Motahhari similarly critiques demeaning interpretations of women's status, asserting: "Islam abolished pre-Islamic customs and granted women independent legal personality." (Motahhari, 1977 AD/1357 SH: 85)

This holistic perspective avoids both the excesses of traditionalism (which confines women to the private sphere) and the shortcomings of radical feminism (which denies natural differences). It defends women's fundamental rights in public domains while emphasizing the preservation of the family as society's central institution. Motahhari refers to this balance as "Gender justice," grounded not in "Mechanical equality" but in "Proportionality between rights and responsibilities." (Motahhari, 1977 AD/1357 SH: 93)

8. Theoretical Foundations of Women's Role in the Construction of the New Islamic Civilization from Beheshti's Perspective, with Emphasis on the Qur'an and Sunnah

Martyr Ayatollah Dr. Sayyid Mohammad Hosseini Beheshti, drawing upon authentic Islamic foundations and referencing the Qur'an and Sunnah, presents a comprehensive and reformist view of women's status and their role in building the new Islamic civilization. He emphasizes human dignity, equal rights, and shared responsibilities of women and men in constructing Islamic society. This section outlines the theoretical foundations of his perspective based on Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions as articulated by Beheshti.

8.1. The Principle of Human Dignity and Equality in Human Essence

Referring to the verse "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam" (al-Isrā': 70), Beheshti emphasizes in "The Status of Women in Islam" that women and men are equal in human essence and rejects any inherent discrimination against women (Beheshti, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 25). He maintains that civilization-building is impossible without utilizing the human capacities of both genders.

8.2. Shared Responsibility in Social Reform

Based on the verse "The believing men and believing women...", (al-Tawbah: 71) Beheshti considers women and men equally responsible for social reform, enjoining good, and forbidding evil, viewing this verse as a foundation for shared responsibility in civilization-building (Beheshti, 2013 AD/1380 SH: 2, 110).

8.3. The Central Role of the Family and Generational Training

Citing the verse "They are clothing for you, and you are clothing for them" (al-Baqarah: 187) and the hadith "Paradise lies beneath the feet of mothers," (Majlisi, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 43, 81) Beheshti identifies the family as the nucleus of civilization-building and regards women, as mothers and wives, as educators of a righteous generation (Beheshti, 2017 AD/1397 SH: 45).

8.4. The Necessity of Acquiring Knowledge

The verse "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" (al-Zumar: 9) and the hadith "Seeking knowledge is an obligation..." (al-Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 34, Hadith 1) highlight the necessity of women's education. Beheshti considers any obstacle to women's education contrary to Islam and regards knowledge as a prerequisite for civilizational participation (Beheshti, 2018 AD/1398 SH: 38).

8.5. Participation in Social and Political Arenas

By emphasizing role models such as Lady Khadijah in supporting the Prophet (PBUH) and Lady Zaynab in post-Karbala enlightenment, Beheshti views women's social and political participation as legitimate and essential for the dynamism of Islamic civilization (Beheshti, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 2, 115).

8.6. Gender Justice Instead of Absolute Equality

Distinguishing between justice and absolute equality, Beheshti stresses the realization of gender justice, meaning that rights and duties are organized in accordance with natural dispositions and differences between women and men. He argues that Islam aims to create fair opportunities for the flourishing of both genders' capacities (Beheshti, 2018 AD/1398 SH: 30).

8.7. Women's Economic Participation

Based on the practice of Lady Khadijah, Beheshti considers women's economic participation in line with Islamic values beneficial and necessary. He believes economic development without women's participation to be incomplete (Beheshti, 2019 AD/1399 SH: 52). Thus, the new Islamic civilization requires the conscious and active involvement of women in economic domains to achieve societal prosperity.

Overall, Beheshti's perspective is grounded in active, informed women's participation across all dimensions of Islamic civilization-building, firmly rooted in religious sources and in human dignity.

9. Analysis of Beheshti's Perspective on Women's Role in the Construction of the New Islamic Civilization

Martyr Ayatollah Dr. Sayyid Mohammad Hosseini Beheshti presented progressive and justice-oriented views on women's role in Islamic civilization. He believed that women could play a central role not only within the family but also across economic, social, cultural, scientific, and political domains in shaping the new Islamic civilization.

9.1. Gender Justice and the Elimination of Unjust Discrimination

Referring to the verse "Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women... Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward," (al-Aḥzāb: 35) Beheshti emphasizes equality between women and men in human dignity and spiritual values. In "The Status of Women in Islam," he states that the criterion of humanity is the divine spirit, and since both women and men possess it, neither is subordinate to the other (Beheshti, 2018 AD/1398 SH: 25).

This view aligns with Motahhari's assertion that "Islam regards women and men as two branches of the same root and two blossoms of the same branch." (Motahhari, 1977 AD/1357 SH: 43) It forms the basis for eliminating all forms of discrimination grounded in alleged inherent deficiencies of women.

Sayyid Hossein Nasr similarly emphasizes women's intrinsic dignity within Islamic civilization but interprets it through the lens of traditional wisdom, arguing that gender justice entails complementarity rather than uniformity of roles (Nasr, 2013: 67; 2016: 58).

Beheshti defines gender justice as the regulation of rights and duties in accordance with natural characteristics and social roles. He writes: "Gender justice in Islam means organizing rights and duties in a way that ensures balance and justice." (Beheshti, 2018 AD/1398 SH: 30) This perspective aligns with Allameh Tabataba'i's theory of "Equality within difference," (al-Mizan) which views natural differences as contributing to human societal perfection (Tabataba'i, 2000 AD/1390 SH: 4, 356). Like Imam Khomeini, who stated, "Woman is the educator of society." (Khomeini: 7, 132) Beheshti emphasized women's formative role.

By rejecting absolute equality, this view provides fair opportunities for women's talent development while eliminating unjust discrimination. Beheshti attributed discrimination against women to misinterpretations of religious texts and the influence of non-Islamic

cultures, asserting that Islam grants women unparalleled rights (Beheshti, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 2, 112).

He encouraged women to become aware of their rights and strive to reclaim them, stating: "Women must become aware of their rights and work to restore them. Islam grants women rights that place them in their true position." (Beheshti, 2019 AD/1399 SH: 48) This reflects his progressive outlook on women's active role in social reform and justice.

9.2. The Role of Women in the Family

Martyr Ayatollah Beheshti placed special emphasis on the central role of women in the family as one of the foundations of Islamic civilization. He believed that by fulfilling their roles as mothers and wives, women play an irreplaceable part in raising future generations in accordance with Islamic values.

In the book "Woman in Islam" (a collection of lectures and articles), he states:

"The family is the foundation and cornerstone of Islamic society, and the woman, as the axis of the family, whether in the role of mother or wife, plays a key role in strengthening and elevating this institution. Islam has granted women rights proportionate to their responsibilities, which must be implemented with justice and respect for human dignity." (Beheshti, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 45)

Likewise, in his speeches, he emphasized the educational role of women and stated:

"The role of motherhood is one of the most sensitive and valuable roles. The upbringing of children, which constitutes a major part of a mother's responsibilities, has a profound impact on building a healthy and dynamic society." (Beheshti, 1981 AD/1360 SH: speech at the Conference on the Role of Women in Islamic Society, Tehran)

This perspective aligns with the view of Ayatollah Javadi Amoli in "Woman in the Mirror of Glory and Beauty," where the family is described as "The smallest civilizational unit," (Javadi Amoli, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 112) as well as with Imam Khomeini (may he rest in peace), who stated:

"From the lap of woman emerge great men... The happiness and misery of nations depend on women." (Khomeini: 7, 338)

This view is also consistent with that of Morteza Motahhari, who maintained that "Child upbringing is the most important role of women." (Motahhari, 1978 AD/1357 SH: 87)

Martyr Beheshti further emphasized the importance of safeguarding the sanctity of the family and observing chastity and hijab, believing that these values, applicable to both women and men, are essential for preserving the moral health of society:

"Preserving chastity and observing hijab are mutual duties for both women and men, contributing to the strengthening of the family and the moral health of society." (Beheshti, 1981 AD/1360 SH: speech to a gathering of women)

Sayyid Hossein Nasr supports this view, arguing that women in Islamic societies bear responsibility for preserving cultural and moral values (Nasr, 2013: 85). He emphasizes that women's spiritual role in Islamic civilization-building takes shape through their influence in raising faithful generations and underscores the importance of the bond between tradition and family in Islamic civilization (Nasr, 2016: 72).

These perspectives demonstrate the significance of women's roles in nurturing future generations and strengthening the family as the cornerstone of Islamic society. They emphasize complementary roles for women and men, proportional rights and responsibilities, and women's social participation within the framework of Islamic values.

9.3. Women's Participation in Economic, Social, and Political Spheres

Martyr Beheshti, as one of the architects of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, strongly emphasized women's active participation in social and political arenas. He believed that women, as half of society, must play an effective role in major decision-making processes and in building Islamic society.

He stressed the equality of women and men in terms of human dignity and believed that women must enjoy the necessary rights to participate in shaping their political and social destinies. During the drafting of the Constitution, he supported women's participation in elections, holding political and social offices, and membership in political parties and organizations. In a speech delivered in 1979, he stated:

"A woman, like a man, has the right to participate in determining her political and social destiny and to use her abilities to advance society." (Beheshti, 1979 AD/1358 SH: speech to university students, Tehran)

In "Woman in Islam" (a collection of lectures and articles), he further notes:

"Women are not only half of society; through active participation in social, political, and cultural spheres, they can contribute to building a dynamic and healthy society." (Beheshti, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 52)

Martyr Beheshti also emphasized the importance of women's presence in decision-making positions, believing that such participation enriches decisions and enhances social justice. In another speech in 1980, he stated:

"Women's presence in decision-making positions, from parliament to social organizations, leads to diversity of perspectives and fairer decisions." (Beheshti, 1980 AD/1359 SH: speech at the Conference on the Role of Women in the Islamic Republic, Tehran)

This view aligns with that of Ayatollah Khamenei, who has stated:

"A Muslim woman must be present in scientific, political, and social arenas." (Khamenei, 1999 AD/1378 SH: speech to a gathering of women)

Similarly, Ayatollah Javadi Amoli writes in "Woman in the Mirror of Glory and Beauty":

"A Muslim woman must not only be a learner of knowledge, but also a producer of knowledge and a creator of culture. Islamic civilization will remain incomplete without women's scholarly participation." (Javadi Amoli, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 189)

Sayyid Hossein Nasr also considers women's participation necessary, though he believes their presence should be more concentrated in scientific, cultural, and religious domains rather than politics and management (Nasr, 2016: 95). He emphasizes that women's activity in Islamic society must remain within the framework of religious traditions and moral values (Nasr, 2013: 88).

International research likewise shows that women's political participation has a significant impact on countries' social and economic development. According to a study by Inglehart and Norris (2003), countries with higher levels of women's political participation enjoy better human development indicators (Inglehart and Norris, 2003: 134). Additionally, Moghadam's (2013) studies of Islamic countries demonstrate that progressive interpretations of Islam can enhance women's participation in the public sphere (p. 215).

Regarding women's economic participation, Duflo's (2012) research shows that increased female labor market participation not only contributes to economic growth but also leads to a fairer distribution of resources within families (Duflo, 2012: 1053). From a sociological perspective, Paxton and Hughes (2016) argue that women's presence in political institutions leads to more comprehensive policymaking and greater attention to social issues (p. 78).

In political science, Charrad's (2011) studies show that Islamic countries' approaches to women's rights vary widely and depend on religious interpretations and historical conditions (Charrad, 2011: 152). These findings align with the diverse perspectives of Islamic thinkers discussed above.

Thus, Beheshti, through a progressive and Islamic approach, regarded women's comprehensive participation in political, social, and cultural spheres as their undeniable right. He believed that women's active participation in major decision-making processes contributes to both social justice and societal progress.

9.4. Critique of Traditional and Western Perspectives

Beheshti critically examined both traditional and Western views on women, believing that each, in its own way, undermines women's human dignity. While respecting authentic Islamic traditions, he criticized traditional perspectives that deprive women of social and political rights, viewing such limitations as the result of misinterpretations of religious texts and contrary to the spirit of Islam.

In "Woman in Islam" (a collection of lectures and articles), he states:

"Islam opposes any unjust discrimination between women and men and has established rights proportionate to the human dignity and responsibilities of each." (Beheshti, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 47)

Criticizing inauthentic traditions, he stated in a 1980 speech:

"Much of what circulates under the name of tradition is the product of human minds and must be evaluated by rational and Islamic criteria, rather than being accepted merely because it is called tradition." (Beheshti, 1980 AD/1359 SH: speech at the Conference on the Role of Women in the Islamic Republic, Tehran)

As a social reformer, Beheshti simultaneously critiqued two intellectual currents. On one hand, like Motahhari, who argued that "some erroneous traditions are products of patriarchal societies," (Motahhari, 1978 AD/1357 SH: 23) he criticized distorted traditional interpretations:

"Much of what is propagated as tradition is in fact a human construct." (Beheshti, 1980 AD/1359 SH)

On the other hand, Beheshti criticized aspects of Western perspectives on women, arguing that Western culture, by instrumentalizing women and reducing them to mere sexual objects, undermines their human dignity. In a 1979 speech, he stated:

"We oppose any form of freedom that turns women into tools for pleasure or commerce, because this contradicts women's human dignity." (Beheshti, 1979 AD/1358 SH: speech to university students, Tehran)

Sayyid Hossein Nasr affirms this view, arguing that the West has turned women into economic consumers and advertising tools (Nasr, 2016: 122). He emphasizes that Islamic civilization should define women's roles based on Islamic wisdom rather than imitation of the West (Nasr, 2013: 110).

Like Imam Khomeini, who described Western culture as "The exploiter of women" (Khomeini: 5, 312), Beheshti criticized Western consumerism. In a 1981 speech, he stated:

"In Western culture, women are often presented as commodities for advertising and trade, a perspective that ignores their spiritual and social dimensions." (Beheshti, 1981 AD/1360 SH: speech to a gathering of women, Tehran)

Critiquing the one-dimensional Western view of women, Beheshti emphasized the balanced Islamic model. In a 1980 speech, he stated:

"Islam recognizes women as complete human beings with diverse dimensions, not merely as objects of pleasure, but as individuals with maternal, spousal, and social roles." (Beheshti, 1980 AD/1359 SH: speech at the Conference on the Role of Women in the Islamic Republic, Tehran)

Beheshti paid particular attention to the dualism dominating attitudes toward women, rigid traditionalism and extreme Western feminism. He believed that both approaches, in different ways, harm women's human dignity. He articulated his perspective through the concept of "Islamic gender justice," which integrates human dignity, functional differences, and women's social responsibility.

From Beheshti's perspective, traditional views, often shaped by limited and sometimes patriarchal interpretations of religious texts, restrict women to domestic roles and ignore their social and political rights. Such attitudes, especially in Islamic societies, are influenced more by tribal cultures than by authentic Islamic teachings. He emphasized that much of what is labeled "Tradition" is, in fact, a human construct subject to revision by reason and revelation.

Conversely, Western feminism, particularly in its second and third waves, has challenged traditional family structures and religious institutions through its insistence on absolute equality between women and men. For example, Kate Millett (1970) in *Sexual Politics* and Simone de Beauvoir (1949) in *"The Second Sex"* portray religion as a tool for women's subordination. Radical feminism, by ignoring innate differences between women and men, calls for uniform social roles, an approach that Beheshti regarded as a subtle form of injustice against women, as it detaches human roles from their natural and existential foundations.

Meanwhile, some Muslim feminists, such as Leila Ahmed, take a critical view of Western feminism. In *"Women and Gender in Islam,"* she demonstrates how Western feminism often lacks an accurate understanding of Muslim women's religious and cultural contexts, and how colonial powers have used women's liberation discourse to consolidate dominance in Islamic societies (Ahmad, 1992).

Similarly, Saba Mahmood, in *Politics of Piety*, shows through her analysis of Muslim women's experiences in Egypt that women's agency can be meaningful outside secular frameworks and grounded in religious faith (Mahmood, 2005). This analysis aligns with Beheshti's perspective, in which women's social presence within a spiritual identity is not only possible but desirable and civilizational constructive.

Ultimately, by proposing a third model, the "Progressive Islamic reading," Martyr Beheshti argues that women's human dignity and civilizational role must be redefined on the basis of authentic Islamic teachings, while accounting for social and cultural transformations. This model neither remains trapped in traditional passivity nor leads to cultural confrontation with the West; instead, it offers an indigenous, balanced, and forward-looking framework.

These perspectives demonstrate Martyr Beheshti's belief in presenting a balanced Islamic model for women, one that preserves Islamic values while enabling women's active and effective participation in society.

10. Challenges Facing Women in Participating in the Realization of the New Islamic Civilization and the Solutions Proposed by Martyr Ayatollah Beheshti

Martyr Ayatollah Beheshti believed that women, as half of the social body, play a central role in the realization of the New Islamic Civilization. However, numerous challenges hinder

women's participation along this path. In his writings, books, and speeches, he addressed these obstacles and proposed solutions for overcoming them.

10.1. Challenges

A) Misinterpretations of Religion and Inauthentic Traditions

Some traditional viewpoints, rooted in incorrect interpretations of Islam, confine women to limited roles (such as domestic duties) and regard their participation in social and political spheres as unnecessary or even contrary to Islamic law. These distorted religious interpretations and cultural customs deprive women of their social and political rights. According to Martyr Beheshti, such perspectives are incompatible with the true spirit of Islam.

B) Structural and Social Constraints

Certain cultural and tribal customs, such as severe restrictions on women's education or employment, prevent women's active participation in society. The lack of adequate support mechanisms for balancing family and social roles, along with cultural resistance to women holding decision-making positions, constitutes a significant barrier. According to Beheshti, these traditions are often human constructs and must be evaluated according to rational and Islamic criteria.

C) The Influence of Western Culture

The infiltration of Western culture, which, according to Beheshti, reduces women to instruments of pleasure and consumerism, threatens women's Islamic identity and disrupts their participation in achieving the goals of Islamic civilization. On the one hand, some currents interpret religious teachings narrowly and deem women's social participation incompatible with Islamic values; on the other hand, Western-influenced currents regard Islamic values as obstacles to women's progress. This false dichotomy can confuse women in choosing the correct path.

Western culture, through its instrumental view of women, presents them as commodities serving capitalism and consumerism. In contrast, Islam, by emphasizing women's dignity and constructive roles within the family and society, outlines a balanced path grounded in human nature. Islamic civilization will reach maturity only when women, while preserving their religious identity, participate actively and consciously in scientific, social, and cultural arenas.

10.2. Proposed Solutions

In his works and speeches, Beheshti adopted a comprehensive, forward-looking approach to women's issues, offering fundamental solutions to overcome challenges and strengthen women's participation in realizing the New Islamic Civilization. These solutions focus not only on structural reforms but also on intellectual and cultural transformation.

A) Reforming Religious and Cultural Interpretations: Establishing a New Intellectual Foundation

One of Beheshti's most crucial solutions was correcting erroneous perceptions of women's status in Islam. This approach consisted of two main components:

- Re-reading Religious Texts with an Authentic and Fair Approach

Beheshti believed that many prevailing interpretations of religious texts had deviated from Islam's true path due to cultural and historical influences. Emphasizing women's human dignity, he sought to extract their rightful status and equal rights from the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition. In "Woman in Islam," he explicitly states:

"Islam opposes any form of unjust discrimination between women and men and has established rights proportionate to human dignity for both." (Beheshti, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 47)

This perspective advocates an Ijtihadi and contextual approach to counter superficial and misogynistic interpretations.

- Critiquing Inauthentic and Irrational Traditions

Beheshti argued that although cultural traditions are part of social identity, they should not be treated as absolute authorities. In a 1980 speech, he emphasized:

"Much of what is widespread in societies under the name of tradition is the product of the human mind and must be evaluated according to rational and Islamic criteria." (Beheshti, 1980 AD/1359 SH: speech at the Conference on the Role of Women in the Islamic Republic, Tehran)

This critique paves the way for reassessing behavioral and social patterns rooted in gender-based prejudices.

B) Strengthening Women's Social and Political Participation: Creating the Conditions for Engagement

Beheshti considered women's active participation in society an Islamic and civilizational necessity and proposed two main strategies:

- **Guaranteeing Equal Social and Political Rights**

As one of the architects of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Beheshti supported women's rights to participate in elections, hold political office, and join civil organizations. In a 1979 speech, he stated:

"A woman, like a man, has the right to participate in determining her political and social destiny." (Beheshti, 1979 AD/1358 SH: speech to university students, Tehran)

This view presents women not merely as equal citizens but as active agents in decision-making processes.

- **Encouraging Women's Presence in Decision-making Positions**

He believed that women's presence at high levels of management and decision-making enriches perspectives and leads to fairer decisions. In a 1980 speech, he stated:

"Women's presence in decision-making positions leads to diversity of viewpoints and more just decisions." (Beheshti, 1980 AD/1359 SH: speech at the Conference on the Role of Women in the Islamic Republic, Tehran)

This approach emphasizes qualitative and impactful participation rather than mere formal inclusion.

C) Presenting a Balanced Islamic Model for Women: Integrating Multiple Roles

Beheshti articulated a model for women that combine preservation of Islamic identity and family roles with active social and cultural engagement. This model rests on two principles:

- **Balance Between Family and Social Roles**

He believed that motherhood and spousal roles are not obstacles to social participation but can provide a foundation for women's growth and fulfillment. In *Woman in Islam*, he describes women as "complete human beings with diverse existential dimensions," not confined to domestic roles alone (Beheshti, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 52). This view seeks to transcend the false dichotomy between homemaking and social presence.

- **Strengthening Islamic Identity and Protection from Instrumentalization**

In contrast to Western culture, which often commodifies women, Beheshti emphasized reinforcing women's Islamic identity through preserving chastity and human dignity. In a 1981 speech, he stated:

"We oppose any form of freedom that turns women into instruments for pleasure or commerce." (Beheshti, 1981 AD/1360 SH: speech to a gathering of women, Tehran)

This perspective presents Islamic identity as a shield against gender reductionism.

Conclusion

This study, which examined the role of women in realizing the New Islamic Civilization from the perspective of Martyr Ayatollah Dr. Sayyid Mohammad Hosseini Beheshti, demonstrates that his thought embodies an interpretive, rational, and balanced approach to redefining the status of Muslim women in Islamic society. Drawing upon Qur'anic principles, Prophetic tradition, and social analysis, Beheshti presents an alternative model of Muslim womanhood that neither remains confined within restrictive traditions nor falls into the trap of radical Western feminist paradigms.

In this model, women are regarded as beings endowed with inherent dignity, social agency, and civilizational capacity, roles realized both within the family as nurturers of righteous generations and in scientific, cultural, economic, and political arenas as active participants. By articulating the theory of "Islamic gender justice," Martyr Beheshti emphasizes a balance between rights and responsibilities rather than mechanical equality, considering such justice a prerequisite for women's effective participation in building Islamic civilization.

From his perspective, the New Islamic Civilization will remain incomplete without women's conscious, committed, and purposeful presence. His simultaneous critique of patriarchal traditionalism and instrumentalizing Western feminism, along with proposed solutions such as reforming religious interpretations, expanding education, strengthening Islamic identity, and guaranteeing women's social and political rights, constitutes a significant theoretical contribution of this research.

Ultimately, Martyr Beheshti's vision offers an indigenous, rational, and civilization-building model of Muslim womanhood that can serve as a foundation for justice-oriented gender policymaking, cultural planning, and sustainable development in Islamic societies. By integrating reason, revelation, and the demands of the contemporary world, this model actualizes women's capacities in the reconstruction of Islamic civilization and redefines their status in accordance with the Qur'anic ideal of the complete human being.

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Media Representation of the Assassination of Martyr Hassan Nasrallah; A Case Study: CNN Persian, BBC Persian, Al Arabiya Persian, and IRNA

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ABSTRACT

Objective: In the era of global communications, the media play a crucial role in explaining, interpreting, and framing international events, to the extent that the manner in which news about a phenomenon is presented and disseminated can significantly shape the beliefs and perceptions of audiences. One of the most important Middle Eastern events in 2024 was the assassination of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah on September 27, which received extensive media coverage. Given the importance of this issue, the main question of this article is: 'How has the assassination of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah been represented in four media outlets, CNN Persian, BBC Persian, Al Arabiya Persian, and the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)?'

Method: This study adopts a qualitative research method with a descriptive-analytical approach. Data were collected using library-based research. Van Dijk's Ideological Square theory constitutes the theoretical framework of the study.

Findings: The findings indicate that each of the four media outlets employed ideological discourse and utilized categories such as lexical selection, polarization, mental schemata, association, and indoctrination in representing the assassination of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah. In the representations by CNN Persian, BBC Persian, and Al Arabiya Persian, Hassan Nasrallah is positioned as the "Other" in opposition to the "Self," portrayed as an actor whose actions led to instability in the region and Lebanon, and whose assassination is framed as ushering the region into a new era. The central axis of all three media outlets is the legitimization of Israel's action. In contrast, IRNA positions Hassan Nasrallah as the "Self," depicting his assassination as a result of Israel's weakness and the aggressive nature of this regime. This media outlet portrays the Resistance Front as legitimate and the opposing side as illegitimate, while presenting a hopeful future for the resistance.

Conclusion: The ideological discourse of media outlets and their connections to their respective societies have a direct impact on how domestic and international events are covered. In fact, each media outlet presents a particular discourse in representing events based on its ideological objectives. In other words, the media do not function merely as mirrors reflecting reality; rather, they influence the social construction of reality. They seek to promote narratives shaped by power, ideology, and the dominant state discourse, and through this process, they shape public opinion.

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Introduction

The growth and diversification of news media in today's world indicate the increasing importance of media on the global stage. Media are not merely passive observers of events; rather, through intelligent use of media and psychological operations, they both construct events and direct them in line with the interests of power holders. In reality, media act as intermediaries between individual awareness and broader social structures, serving as meaning-makers. They do not operate as neutral mirrors of reality, but instead influence the social construction of reality (Mahdizadeh, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 9). Media selectively reflect reality in ways aligned with their preferences. In other words, due to their affiliation with specific ideological discourses, media attempt to construct and represent events in social, political, and other spheres.

One such event in which media played a significant representational role was the assassination of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah by Israel on September 27, 2024. Nasrallah's importance as the Secretary-General of Hezbollah and his role in supporting the Resistance Front, particularly Palestine following the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, turned this assassination into a global media bombshell. For an extended period, political analysts and officials commented extensively on the event; perhaps more significant than the physical assassination itself was the character assassination of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah through media interpretations and analyses. Each media outlet, based on its target audience, adopted a distinct news and analytical line in portraying and interpreting the event.

One key audience for these media outlets was Persian-speaking populations in Iran and neighboring countries, who constitute a substantial part of the Resistance Front. These media outlets sought to promote their ideological discourses within this audience through the context of Nasrallah's assassination. Accordingly, the main research question is: 'How was the assassination of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah represented in CNN Persian, BBC Persian, Al Arabiya Persian, and IRNA?'

The research hypothesis is that each of these media outlets represented the assassination within the framework of its ideological discourse and political interests. To test this hypothesis, a descriptive-analytical method and Van Dijk's discourse analysis approach were employed.

1. Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined the role of media in representing political news and phenomena. Among them are the following:

Ferdows Agha Golzadeh (2012 AD/1391 SH), in the article "Describing and Explaining Ideological Linguistic Structures in Critical Discourse Analysis," examined newspaper headlines to demonstrate that all texts can potentially contain ideological structures conveying meanings beyond their linguistic forms.

Sayyid Mehdi Sharifi and Nafiseh Ansari (2016 AD/1395 SH), in the article "Iranophobia in CNN News Dialogues: A Study Based on Critical Discourse Analysis," investigated the linguistic structures used by CNN's GPS host Farid Zakaria to promote anti-Iranian ideology. They analyzed 19 programs broadcast in 2013 related to Iran, applying Van Dijk's theory across textual (meaning, style, argumentation) and social-contextual (access and participants) dimensions.

Hossein Mohseni et al. (2022 AD/1401 SH) analyzed the critical discourse of the representation of Martyr Qassem Soleimani's assassination in "Asharq Al-Awsat." Their findings suggest that the newspaper portrayed the Middle East as an unstable environment in which Soleimani was an active agent, interpreting his actions as part of Iran's regional dominance in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

Christine Ogan et al. (2013) analyzed anti-Islamic narratives in Fox News programs, finding that audiences who trusted these programs were more likely to perceive Islamic values as conflicting with American values.

Zoran Jevtovic (2019) conducted a qualitative analysis of international media coverage of NATO's aggression against Yugoslavia, highlighting the role of global media propaganda in hybrid warfare.

Manar Amir Saleh (2021), in her master's thesis, examined the representation of the assassinations of Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in Iranian and American news using critical discourse analysis. The study showed that newspapers in both countries framed the events according to their ideological positions, using linguistic strategies such as activation, suppression, and lexicalization.

Unlike previous studies, the present research focuses on the representation of the assassination of Martyr Hassan Nasrallah in the news discourse of CNN Persian, BBC Persian, Al Arabiya

Persian, and IRNA. The topic, theoretical framework, and methodology distinguish this study from earlier research on media influence.

2. Theoretical Framework: Van Dijk's Ideological Square

Critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary field that examines language as a form of social practice, emphasizing how social and political power is reproduced through text and talk. From this perspective, language does not neutrally reflect worldviews, identities, and social relations; rather, it actively shapes and transforms them (Soltani, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 36). Events are thus narrated from specific perspectives. Consequently, critical discourse analysis focuses on uncovering underlying ideologies embedded in language and discourse (Agha Golzadeh, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 56).

The concept of "Self" and "Other" has long been explored across disciplines and remains complex. Individuals construct images of the "Other" through personal experience, education and socialization, and psychological positioning. Michel Foucault considers the self–other dichotomy a "Constructed Opposition," arguing that the Self can only be understood through the Other (Richardson, 2007: 65–66).

Teun A. van Dijk, one of the most prominent theorists in this field, argues that ideologies are primarily expressed through the ideological square. According to this model, emphasizing the positive aspects of "Us" and the negative aspects of "Them," while downplaying our own negatives and their positives, allows for ideological influence and gradual cognitive change. For Van Dijk, the general strategy of talking about others involves positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (Agha Golzadeh, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 45-47).

Cognition includes both individual and social cognition, encompassing beliefs, goals, evaluations, emotions, behaviors, and all mental representations. Society consists of microstructures (individual interactions) and macrostructures (intergroup relations) (Van Dijk, 2001: 96–99).

Van Dijk refers to his approach as "Socio-Cognitive Discourse Analysis," emphasizing the triangle of "Society, Cognition, and Discourse." In this framework, discourse is understood as a communicative event encompassing spoken interactions, written texts, gestures, facial expressions, layouts, images, and all forms of semiotic and multimodal representation (Van Dijk, 2000: 58–59).

Van Dijk argues for a robust logical framework to study the relationships between cognition, power, and discourse, as cognition has significant social dimensions. Social cognition processes profoundly shape the content and structure of collective mental representations. Examining social aspects of cognition and schemata, such as self-schemata and group schemata, reveals how individuals perceive, interpret, and act toward themselves and others, how they influence and are influenced, and how minds are controlled. This underscores the importance of adopting a socio-cognitive discourse analysis approach. Ideology influences mental structures in both discourse production and comprehension; thus, lexical choices and stylistic preferences are more influenced by ideology than by purely grammatical considerations (Van Dijk, 2001: 96–99).

In other words, lexical items are arranged alongside one another based on personal viewpoints and ideological affiliations, thereby forming discourse. Therefore, if we wish to return to the nature of ideologies, we must gain a deeper understanding of self-schemata and group-schemata. We must also examine the kind of image each individual and group holds of themselves and their group. According to Van Dijk's framework, when individuals think about themselves and their group, or when they are in conflict with other groups, they resort to a general discursive strategy to defend themselves and their in-group. This principle shapes the framework of ideological discourses and determines how people speak and write about themselves and others. Based on this principle, one is encouraged to say positive things about "Us" and negative things about "Them." (Van Dijk, 2000: 129–132)

Van Dijk believes that if we accept that ideologies are acquired, expressed, and reproduced through discourse, then this process must occur through a number of discursive structures and strategies (Agha Golzadeh, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 7). Accordingly, he introduces a conceptual tool known as the "Ideological Square," which is based on four pillars:

- A) Emphasizing the negative characteristics of the other;
- B) Emphasizing the positive characteristics of the Self;
- C) De-emphasizing the negative characteristics of the Self;
- D) De-emphasizing the positive characteristics of the Other (Van Dijk, 2000: 4344).

This ideological square is realized through various signs and strategies such as emphasis, foregrounding, active and passive constructions, and other mechanisms operating at different levels of discourse (Van Dijk, 2001: 98–99), encompassing a very broad domain. These four principles are not applied solely in intergroup conflicts and interactions with opposing groups;

rather, they often govern our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, consciously or unconsciously, even when we think about ourselves and others (Van Dijk, 2000: 43–44).

Within this theoretical framework, Van Dijk places particular emphasis on the concept of ideology, demonstrating that ideologies are primarily articulated through the ideological square. The term "Ideological Square" explains the dualistic and oppositional nature of dominant discourses in societies. The concept is derived from a four-sided structure that justifies social inequalities by polarizing individuals into "In-groups" (the Self) and "Out-groups" (the Other), through a dual process of foregrounding and marginalization (Agha Golzadeh, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 105). In fact, ideological discourses emphasize the positive attributes and actions of "Us" and the negative attributes and actions of "Them," while simultaneously downplaying the negative aspects of the in-group and the positive aspects of the out-group. In this study, Van Dijk's ideological square is employed to explain the media representation of the assassination of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah (Van Dijk, 2008 AD/1387 SH).

2.1. The Role of Media in the Production and Representation of Phenomena

Representation refers to the informational dimensions of media productions, including their symbolic and innovative aspects. In the public sphere, representation addresses fundamental questions such as "What" content should be selected for reflection and "How" it should be presented to audiences (Hall, 1997: 20-21). The concept of representation is heavily indebted to the work of Stuart Hall. From his perspective, we reconstruct the world through representation. Hall defines media as part of the "Politics of meaning-making" and argues that media assign meaning to events occurring in the world. He maintains that media define reality; rather than merely transmitting existing meanings, they create meaning through the selection, presentation, reproduction, and re-articulation of events (Hall, 2003: 132–134). Since every reality contains multiple potential meanings, media, by virtue of their power, decide which meanings to assign to events.

In critical communication studies, representation is defined as the production of meaning through conceptual and discursive frameworks. What we call "Reality" does not exist outside the process of representation. This does not imply the absence of a material world; rather, it underscores the necessity of assigning meaning to that material reality (Williams, 2003: 145-146). Stuart Hall argues that nothing meaningful exists outside discourse. Therefore, the task

of media studies is not to measure the gap between reality and representation, but to understand how meanings are produced through discursive practices and formations. Representation, in essence, is the production of meaning through conceptual and discursive frameworks (Calvert et al., 2002: 200). In reality, we construct and reconstruct the world through representation.

Hall categorizes theories of representation into three approaches: "Reflective, intentional, and constructive." The reflective approach assumes that meaning resides in objects, people, ideas, or events in the real world, and that language functions as a mirror reflecting their true meaning. The intentional approach argues that meaning is imposed by the author or speaker through language; words mean what the speaker intends them to mean. In contrast, the constructionist approach holds that neither objects and events nor language users alone can fix meaning; objects and events have no inherent meaning. Rather, meaning is constructed through systems of representation. Social actors use conceptual and linguistic systems, along with other representational systems, to construct meaning, give the world significance, and communicate meaningfully with others (Hall, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 356-359).

News production, as a form of social construction of reality, is influenced by numerous factors and forces. Intra-organizational and extra-organizational factors, as well as dominant discursive elements within societies, all contribute to the construction of news. This is particularly evident in television news and in the representation of foreign events (Harrison, 2006: 71). Media systems, as representational systems, are themselves managed and controlled by powerful structures that legitimize certain meanings while delegitimizing others. Consequently, some ideas and meanings are amplified while others are marginalized. From this perspective, representation can be considered ideological, as media representation can construct biased narratives in favor of dominant ideological interests (Laughey, 2007: 79).

In this context, Hall defines media as part of the "Politics of meaning-making," arguing that media assign meaning to events occurring in the world. In other words, media distort reality; instead of merely transmitting existing meanings, they create meaning through selective presentation, reproduction, and re-articulation of events (Williams, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 176). Accordingly, dominant groups seek to maintain their hegemony by controlling media as tools of representation, overseeing the formation of social representations, the structuring of models, and the production of actions and discourses to preserve power (Hall, 2003: 48-49).

Thus, through the process of representation, dominant discourse assigns meaning to news events based on its cognitive ideology, reproducing and sustaining itself in the process.

In news production, representation refers to the process that leads to the construction of news; more precisely, representation is a “flow of messages” that are socially constructed (Laughey, 2007: 79). Rather than debating the degree of correspondence between text and reality, it may be more appropriate to examine how news media contribute to constructing versions of reality. Media practices reproduce hidden beliefs, ideologies, and discourses; however, in order to maintain consensus and the appearance of free choice, these activities remain concealed or fundamental values and structures are obscured. These foundational structures, ideologies and discourses, remain hidden, assumed to be correct, and are disseminated in everyday discourse as common sense (Bicharanlou, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 38).

Accordingly, it appears that the media representation of the assassination of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah is not based solely on factual reality, but is influenced by the ideological discourses of each media outlet. Each outlet, in line with its objectives, constructs a distinct representation of the same reality based on the following components:

First, lexical selection involving words with positive or negative evaluative connotations. Different types of discourse, depending on their subject matter and objectives, align with specific lexical choices. Lexical analysis has traditionally been central to ideological and linguistic studies, as selected vocabulary reflects values and norms and serves as a tool for evaluative judgment (Motamednejad and Mahdizadeh, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 21).

The second characteristic is polarization or otherness making. This component includes two subcategories: "How the Self or in-group and its associated values are described and presented, and how the other or out-group and its associated values are described and presented in news texts." Identifying the position and function of pronouns used in the text assists researchers in recognizing polarization and otherness making, as pronouns reflect the text producer's attitude toward others (Forghani, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 51).

The third component consists of presuppositions or mental schemas that are taken for granted and influence an individual's judgment, evaluation, and definition and conceptualization of realities. Schemas emerge through language and repeated interactions in the form of discourse. Discourses are always produced on the basis of mental schemas, and discourse producers reveal only part of these schemas. According to Van Dijk, the reason for employing mental schemas is that they are perceived as correct and provide a model for interpreting events (Nishida, 1999: 758-759). Therefore, in critical discourse analysis, all schemas enter textual propositions strategically and indirectly.

Norman Fairclough argues that presuppositions are not inherent features of a text, but rather part of the text producers' interpretation of the intertextual context. Many formal features of a text point to these presuppositions. At the level of textual interpretation, Fairclough considers definite articles and subordinate clauses to be two important features in this regard (Fairclough, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 43).

The fourth component is implicit meanings of the text (implication and suggestion). At the stage of text analysis and interpretation, identifying implicit concepts and connotations helps the researcher to determine what non-explicit and hidden meanings exist in a given proposition, what intentions the textual actor has in using such meanings, and what implications or connotations their use entails (Forghani, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 51).

3. Research Methodology

This study employs Van Dijk's theoretical approach to critical discourse analysis and a qualitative descriptive–analytical method to examine the representation of the assassination of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah. Data were collected through library research from printed and online sources during the period from September 2024 to February 2025, drawing on four news agencies: "CNN, BBC, Al Arabiya Persian, and IRNA." The reason for selecting these four outlets was to examine the coverage of four prominent media organizations from the United States, Europe, the Arab world, and Iran that produce content for Persian-speaking audiences. From each outlet, two news texts were randomly selected in accordance with Table (1) and analyzed based on four indicators: lexical choice, polarization, mental schemas (presuppositions), and implication and suggestion.

Table (1): Statistical Population of the Study

Publication Date	News Report Title	News Agency
29 December 2024	Israel's intelligence penetration: the fall and destruction of Hezbollah's super-terrorist	CNN
23 February 2025	Israel's decisive message over the funeral ceremony of Hassan Nasrallah	CNN
29 September 2024	Reactions to the killing of Hassan Nasrallah; from celebrations in Brussels to symbolic funeral in Baghdad	BBC Persian

28 September 2024	Hassan Nasrallah; an Iran-affiliated cleric who held Lebanon in his grip	BBC Persian
30 September 2024	Hezbollah: the shield that slipped from Khamenei's hand	Al Arabiya Persian
14 February 2025	Ban on Iranian aircraft landings and clashes between the Lebanese army and Hezbollah elements around Beirut airport	Al Arabiya Persian
1 October 2024	The blood of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah strengthens the Resistance Front	IRNA
9 November 2024	Hezbollah is alive: the path of the great figures of resistance is unbreakable	IRNA

Source: Authors, 2024 AD/1403 SH

4. Representation of the Assassination of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah in Four Media Outlets

4.1. Representation in CNN Persian

CNN is the most important news media outlet in the United States and one of the most widely viewed news networks in the world. This agency reflects the political atmosphere prevailing in the White House and U.S. global governance. Consequently, in its discourse, the world is depicted in a binary of friends and enemies. On the one hand, the United States is presented as the true representative of the world, entrusted with the mission of leading it and guiding it through various crises; on the other hand are opponents of the American order, who are portrayed as the cause of turmoil, unrest, and instability in different regions of the world. From this media's perspective, Iran and its allied groups fall into the latter category. With this background, we examine CNN's representation of the assassination of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, an individual who, from this outlet's viewpoint, is considered a representative of Islamist currents opposed to the United States and Israel and a regional ally of Iran.

Table (2): Representation of the Assassination of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah in CNN Persian

Functional Category		Text No. 1: Israel's intelligence penetration: the fall and destruction of Hezbollah's super-terrorist	Text No. 2: Israel's decisive message over the funeral ceremony of Hassan Nasrallah
Lexical Choice)	Positive	Israel's intelligence dominance, Israel's victory parade	Israel's intelligence penetration, Israel's legitimate right to self-defense, execution of justice
	Negative	Super-terrorist, man wanted by the United States, the decline of Hezbollah's star	A large funeral due to Hezbollah's need to display power
Polarization	In-group	Israel, the United States, Lebanese society	Israel, the United States, Lebanese society
	Out-group	Hezbollah, Iran, resistance groups	Hezbollah, Iran, resistance groups
Mental Schemas		The main assumptions of this text are that Israeli intelligence penetration is an example of Israel's upper hand against Hezbollah. Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah has been killed as a wanted super-terrorist.	The main assumptions of this news: Despite Hezbollah's display of power at Hassan Nasrallah's funeral, the flight of Israeli planes demonstrated Israel's decisive superiority.
Implication and Suggestion		The text seeks to create the image that Israel's action in assassinating Hassan Nasrallah was within the framework of legitimate	The text seeks to create this image; after the killing of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah and other Hezbollah commanders,

	defense, because Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah has always threatened Israel's national security. Also, with the killing of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, justice was served in his case.	Israel now has a decisive advantage over Hezbollah, and Hezbollah is now in a precarious position.
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Source: Authors, 2024 AD/1403 SH

In analyzing CNN's ideological discourse, it can be argued that mental schemas have influenced this outlet's orientation toward the assassination of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah in two dimensions. First, the mental schema that frames Hezbollah as a terrorist organization leads this network to portray Israel's action as legitimate and even as an instance of justice. From this perspective, Hezbollah's missile attacks on Israel and its role in political tensions in Lebanon and the Levant are highlighted as examples of Hezbollah's negative political consequences. Consequently, this media outlet attempts to depict the assassination of Martyr Hassan Nasrallah as a positive and desirable action by Israel. In this regard, influenced by its ideological discourse, the outlet establishes a boundary between "Us" and "Them." The in-group includes Israel and Western society (which this media equates with the global community), while Hezbollah and the Resistance Axis led by the Islamic Republic of Iran are placed in the out-group. Furthermore, to marginalize the massive funeral ceremony of Martyr Hassan Nasrallah, CNN Persian emphasizes Israel's show of power through aircraft flights, portraying Israel as superior to the Resistance Axis (emphasizing the positive aspects of the in-group and downplaying the positive aspects of the out-group).

4.2. Representation in BBC Persian

The BBC, as one of the most important media outlets affiliated with the British government, has for more than half a century sought to safeguard Britain's interests across the world. The dominant discourse of this media is based on the superiority of the white Western human over others and on the binary classification of countries as developed and underdeveloped. Within this discourse, underdeveloped countries are expected to follow the Western path to achieve development, and what the West, and its representative, Britain, has done over two centuries

in different parts of the world is framed not as colonialism and exploitation, but as the promotion of democracy and civilization. In this media outlet as well, the Middle East is depicted as a realm of good versus evil, with the West and Britain positioned on the side of good, and Iran, Hezbollah, and other groups affiliated with the Resistance Front placed on the side of evil. Within this discursive framework, the media representation of the assassination of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah by BBC Persian is evaluated.

Table (3): Representation of the Assassination of Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah in BBC Persian

Functional Category		Text No. 1	Text No. 2
		Reactions to the killing of Hassan Nasrallah; from celebratory drinking in Brussels to a symbolic funeral in Baghdad	Hassan Nasrallah; an Iran-affiliated cleric who held Lebanon in his grip
Lexical Choice	Positive	Israel's military power, celebratory drinking in Brussels, distribution of sweets, political jokes, mockery and sarcasm regarding the manner of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah's assassination	Israel's precise and targeted strike, succession dilemma, Israel's message to Iran, shift in the balance against Iran, decline of Hezbollah's power
	Negative	Symbolic funeral, myth-making	Iran's interference in Lebanese affairs, Nasrallah's influence on Lebanon's political equations, man wanted by the United States
Polarization	In-group	Israel, the global community	Israel, the global community
	Out-group	Hezbollah, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraqi resistance groups, the Houthis	Hezbollah, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraqi resistance groups, the Houthis
Mental Schemas (Presuppositions)		The main presupposition of this text is that the global community, and even Arab societies, with the exception of	The main presuppositions of this text are that the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah demonstrates Israel's high operational

	resistance forces, is pleased with the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah.	capability and that, beyond creating a succession crisis, it will reduce the political weight of Hezbollah and Iran in Lebanon and the region.
Implication and Suggestion	The text portrays reactions to Nasrallah's assassination in a way that suggests the global community is happy about the killing of a violent and warmongering individual. Within this framework, the symbolic funeral held by Iraqi resistance groups is depicted as an unsuccessful attempt at myth-making.	The narrative suggests that the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah, considered a powerful arm of Iran in Lebanon and the Levant, has weakened Hezbollah's position in Lebanese political equations and shifted the balance of power against the Islamic Republic of Iran in Lebanon and the region. The succession crisis further intensifies this situation.

Source: Authors, 2024 AD/1403 SH

The approach of BBC Persian toward Hezbollah and the assassination of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah is similar to that of CNN Persian, although it adopts a more moderate tone. Based on its binary in-group/out-group framework, this media outlet identifies the global community, the Arab world, Hezbollah's internal opponents, and Israel as the "in-group," while Hezbollah and resistance forces led by the Islamic Republic of Iran are classified as the "out-group." Accordingly, the actions of the in-group, including the assassination of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, are portrayed as desirable actions aligned with the interests of the global community and the Arab world. By highlighting the happiness of the global community over Israel's action, the outlet attempts to legitimize the assassination.

Furthermore, by critically addressing the myth-making surrounding Hassan Nasrallah in the Arab world (for example, the symbolic funeral in Iraq), BBC Persian seeks to undermine the positive aspects of the Resistance Axis. On the other hand, by emphasizing Hezbollah's negative aspects, such as the succession crisis, its declining role in Lebanon's political equations, and the regional shift in balance against the Islamic Republic of Iran (emphasizing the negative traits of the "Other"), the outlet attempts to convey the image that Hezbollah's

loss has altered the regional balance of power to the detriment of the Resistance Axis (the "Other") and to the benefit of Israel. This shift is presented as one that could advantage the global community (the "In-group"). Overall, as in CNN's discourse, support for Israel and its actions, along with efforts to demonize Hezbollah and portray it as responsible for developments in Lebanon and the region, are clearly evident. The world depicted by these two media outlets is one in which the world and the region, without Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, would be a better place filled with peace and progress.

4.3. Representation of the Assassination of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah in Al Arabiya Persian

Al Arabiya Persian is a television channel affiliated with the government of Saudi Arabia that began its activities in 2008. This outlet was established in opposition to Qatar's Al Jazeera network and Iran's Al-Alam, with the aim of providing media coverage for Saudi Arabia's regional policies. Through this media outlet, Saudi Arabia seeks to advance its political discourse, including the promotion of Wahhabism, hostility toward Iran and Shiites, the promotion and advertisement of Saudi Arabia's spiritual and political leadership in the Islamic world, and antagonism toward the Resistance Front in the region. The negative outlook of this media toward the Resistance Front has resulted in representations of resistance-related events that differ from those of other regional media. Below is an examination of how the assassination of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah is represented in this outlet.

Table (4): Representation of the Assassination of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah in Al Arabiya Persian

Functional Category		Text No. 1	Text No. 2
		Hezbollah: the shield that slipped from Khamenei's hand	Ban on Iranian aircraft landings and clashes between the Lebanese army and Hezbollah elements around Beirut airport
Lexical Choice	Positive	Weakening of Hezbollah, weakening of the Islamic	Security measures of the Lebanese government,

		Republic of Iran	intervention of the Lebanese army to suppress Hezbollah unrest
	Negative	Hezbollah fighters, Hezbollah's dependence on the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah's negative role in Lebanon's political equations	Setting people's cars on fire, attack on a convoy belonging to UNIFIL forces
Polarization	In-group	Arab world	Arab world, United Nations forces
	Out-group	Iran, Hezbollah, Israel	The Islamic Republic of Iran and Hezbollah
Presuppositions		The main presupposition of this text is that Hezbollah acts as an agent of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Levant, and that the assassination of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah inflicted a severe blow to Iran's interests in Lebanon.	The main presupposition of this text is that Hezbollah is the primary cause of tension in Lebanon's political developments, and that the Lebanese government is the main opponent of Hezbollah's rise to power.
Implication and Suggestion		This news item emphasizes Hezbollah's destructive role in the political developments of Lebanon and the Arab world, seeking to demonstrate Hezbollah's responsibility for political unrest in Lebanon.	This news item seeks to imply and instill the discourse that the assassination of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah has weakened the Resistance Axis (the "Other") led by the Islamic Republic of Iran vis-à-vis the Arab world and the Islamic world, and that this event could be considered a positive outcome for Lebanese society

		and the Arab world.
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4.3.1. Ideological Discourse Analysis of Al Arabiya Persian

Al Arabiya Persian's approach to the assassination of Martyr Hassan Nasrallah is based on a binary division of "In-group," which includes the Arab world and Hezbollah's internal opponents, and "Out-group," which includes the Resistance Axis led by the Islamic Republic of Iran and Israel. The main difference between Al Arabiya's discourse and that of CNN and BBC lies in this polarization. Unlike the two aforementioned media, Al Arabiya does not place Israel in the "In-group" but, influenced by Arab public opinion, considers Israel as part of the "Out-group." From this perspective, Hezbollah and its commanders, due to their ties to the Islamic Republic of Iran, are considered the most influential variable in Lebanon's political unrest. Therefore, in choosing vocabulary, Al Arabiya uses terms such as "Fighters" and "Iranian proxy forces" for Hezbollah members and "Rebellion" and "Instability" to describe their actions. Consequently, the assassination of Martyr Hassan Nasrallah and the subsequent weakening of Hezbollah could reduce the Islamic Republic of Iran's influence in Lebanon and the Levant. Additionally, the outlet portrays post-Nasrallah events by emphasizing Hezbollah's negative role in political unrest (e.g., confrontations with the Lebanese army).

4.4. Representation of the Assassination of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah in IRNA

IRNA is the official news agency of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This agency seeks to cover domestic news independently of political currents and perspectives. Its dominant discourse is aligned with the official Islamic Revolution. Therefore, it aims to reflect the Iranian government's view of regional developments within the framework of principles such as opposing oppression and tyranny, maintaining independence, supporting the oppressed, combating colonialism, exploitation, and arrogance, and promoting justice and morality globally. Since supporting Hezbollah is consistent with the principle of supporting the oppressed and the ideals of the Islamic Revolution aimed at defeating Israel, IRNA represents the assassination of Martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah differently from the previously discussed media outlets.

Table (4): Representation of the Assassination of Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah in IRNA

Functional Category		Text No. 1	Text No. 2
		The blood of Martyr Hassan Nasrallah strengthens the Resistance Front	Hezbollah is alive: The path of the resistance elders is unbroken
Key Propositions	Positive	Martyr's blood – strengthening the resistance discourse – culture of sacrifice – steadfastness	Hezbollah's power – invincibility – continuity of the resistance path
	Negative	Israel's occupation – attacks on civilians	Israel's fear of Hezbollah – brutal assassination – aggression
Polarization	In-group	The Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah, and other resistance groups	The Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah, and other resistance groups
	Out-group	West, Zionist regime, and conciliatory forces	West, Zionist regime, and conciliatory forces
Mental Schemas (Presuppositions)		The assassination of Martyr Hassan Nasrallah will not weaken the Resistance Axis; instead, the culture of sacrifice and martyrdom strengthens Hezbollah and ensures the continuity of the resistance path.	The path and influence of Hezbollah in the Resistance Axis continue despite the martyrdom of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah. Ultimately, victory in the confrontation with the Zionist regime belongs to the Resistance Axis.
Implication and Suggestion		This text seeks to imply that, despite attacks by Israel; Hezbollah	This text implies that due to Hezbollah's strong organizational structure and

	remains a powerful institution and can continue to play a significant role in the Resistance Axis and regional developments.	the culture of martyrdom and sacrifice, the assassination of senior Hezbollah commanders will not weaken Hezbollah. The assassination reflects Israel's fear of Hezbollah's power.
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4.4.1. Explaining IRNA's Ideological Discourse Regarding the Assassination of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah

IRNA's polarization revolves around the confrontation between the Resistance Axis and Islamic movements in the Muslim world (in-group) versus the Zionist regime and its supporters, including the United States, the West, and conciliatory forces (out-group). The main assumption of this media's ideological discourse emphasizes the righteousness of the Resistance (highlighting in-group positives) and the falsehood of the opposing side (highlighting out-group negatives). From this perspective, the assassination of Martyr Hassan Nasrallah will not weaken the Resistance Axis (minimizing in-group negatives); instead, the culture of sacrifice and martyrdom (highlighting in-group positives) ensures the continuity and cohesion of Hezbollah. Furthermore, the assassination does not indicate Israel's strength (marginalizing out-group positives) but demonstrates Israel's weakness and fear of Hezbollah's power (emphasizing out-group negatives). In describing Israel, this media uses the term "Zionist regime" and "Assassination" to describe its actions, while for Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah it uses terms like "Martyr," "Leader of the Resistance," and "Jihad in the path of God," which carry exalted religious meanings.

Conclusion

The type of ideological discourse in media and its ties to society directly affect the coverage of events domestically and internationally. Each media outlet, based on its ideological objectives, presents a specific discourse in representing events. The findings of this study confirm that the representation of the assassination of Martyr Hassan Nasrallah in CNN Persian, BBC Persian, Al Arabiya Persian, and IRNA is shaped by their ideological discourse.

Moreover, the categories that indicate the type of representation can be analyzed through four components: lexical choice, polarization into "In-group" and "Out-group," mental schemas, and implication/suggestion.

The study's findings show that, given CNN and BBC's ideological connections to Western world values and norms, their approach to representing the assassination of Martyr Hassan Nasrallah frames it as a desirable outcome for the global (Western) order. These media consider Western order as a model and portray actors challenging this order as engaging in undesirable behavior. By minimizing in-group negatives (the assassination by Israel) and highlighting Hezbollah and Nasrallah as the out-group, these outlets seek to legitimize Israel's actions while delegitimizing Hezbollah and Nasrallah.

Al Arabiya Persian also considers Hezbollah as the out-group, but unlike CNN and BBC, it also includes Israel in the out-group. From this perspective, the Arab world, including Hezbollah's internal opponents in Lebanon and the global community, is considered the in-group, while the Resistance Axis led by the Islamic Republic of Iran and Israel is the out-group. By emphasizing Hezbollah's negative role in Lebanon's political unrest and its dependence on Iran, Al Arabiya seeks to convey that Nasrallah's assassination, by weakening the Resistance Axis, benefits the Arab world.

Finally, IRNA's representation demonstrates a different and contrasting ideological discourse from the other three media. From this perspective, the assassination of Martyr Hassan Nasrallah not only highlights the weakness and fear of Israel (emphasizing out-group negatives) but will not weaken Hezbollah (minimizing in-group negatives). The culture of sacrifice and martyrdom in Hezbollah (highlighting in-group positives) is considered the most important factor for the vitality of the Resistance Axis and Hezbollah.

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The Arena of Political Competition among Rival Domestic Discourses in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Case Study: 1997 AD/1376 SH–2013 AD/1392 SH)

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The political arena of the Islamic Republic of Iran constitutes a site of confrontation among rival discourses that seek to establish their own hegemony through the semantic articulation of fundamental concepts such as the "People," "Guardianship," "Justice," and "Law." This competition, primarily between the Reformist and Principlist currents, not only shapes policymaking trajectories and the distribution of power, but also reflects a deeper semantic struggle over political legitimacy. Nevertheless, existing studies have largely been either mono-discursive or confined to specific historical junctures, leaving a noticeable gap in comprehensive analyses of this discursive confrontation across a continuous period.

Method: This study adopts a qualitative approach and employs Critical Discourse Analysis grounded in the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. The data consist of official statements, key speeches, press materials, and documentary texts produced by the two dominant political currents during the period 1997 AD/1376 SH–2013 AD/1392 SH. These materials were selected through purposive sampling and analyzed with a focus on central signifiers and their modes of articulation.

Findings: The findings indicate that the Reformist discourse, centered on signifiers such as the "People," "Law," and "Political Development," and the Principlist discourse, emphasizing "Velayat-e Faqih," "Islamic Values," and "Justice," each sought to redefine the field of meaning in their own favor. The study demonstrates that discursive competition during this period was dynamic, unstable, and highly contingent upon political and social contextual factors.

Conclusion: The analysis of rival discourses during this period reveals that Iran's political arena is characterized by an ongoing semantic confrontation in which each discourse attempts to establish hegemony by reconfiguring central signifiers and strategically mobilizing political and social contexts. This semantic struggle reflects a structural tension embedded in the relationship between republicanism and Islamism within Iran's political system.

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Introduction

Within the political sphere of the Islamic Republic of Iran, political discourses function not merely as semantic frameworks for interpreting political issues, but also as instruments for organizing power, representing legitimacy, and guiding public opinion. Since the early 1990s, alongside a relative opening of the political space, two prominent political discourses with distinct articulatory identities have emerged and consolidated: "Reformism and Principlism." Each of these discourses has relied on specific key concepts in its effort to dominate the political arena and to prevail over its rival through the redefinition and reproduction of fundamental notions such as the "People," "Guardianship," "Freedom," "Justice," "Law," and "Development." This conceptual struggle extends beyond electoral competition and constitutes, in effect, an attempt to establish semantic hegemony within a polarized society.

The significance of the present study lies in its focus on the period from 1997 to 2013, which is widely recognized as a critical phase of political, social, and discursive transformation in the Islamic Republic of Iran. This period begins with the rise to power of the Reformist government following Mohammad Khatami's electoral victory in 1997 and concludes with the end of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's second presidential term in 2013. During these years, not only did two administrations with fundamentally different political orientations govern the country, but also competing and, at times, conflicting projects of meaning-making came to dominate the public sphere. The selection of this temporal scope is particularly important because discursive confrontation between Reformism and Principlism reached its peak, coinciding with key events such as the 2nd of Khordad *movement*, the student movement, the ninth and tenth presidential elections, and the post-election protests of 2009, events that reshaped not only political practices but also discursive formations.

During this period, Reformists emphasized concepts such as civil society, the rule of law, civil liberties, and political development, proposing a project aimed at expanding religious democracy within the institutional framework of the Islamic Republic. In contrast, Principlists, through a reinterpretation of concepts such as justice, Velayat-e Faqih, revolutionary values, and resistance to cultural threats, sought to reassert the original ideals of the Islamic Revolution. This confrontation was marked by social polarization, semantic mobilization, and attempts at hegemonizing meaning. From this perspective, each discourse endeavored to articulate floating signifiers into a coherent chain of signification in order to establish its preferred interpretation as the "dominant meaning" within society.

Despite the growing body of research on political discourse analysis in Iran, a substantial gap remains in comparative analyses of political discourses grounded in a coherent theoretical framework such as Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory. Many existing studies are either purely descriptive or limited to the analysis of a single discourse, neglecting the dynamic and relational nature of discursive competition. Laclau and Mouffe's theory, with concepts such as articulation, floating signifier, empty signifier, closure, and hegemony, provides a powerful analytical toolkit for understanding the mechanisms of semantic competition among political discourses and for illuminating the deeper dimensions of conceptual struggles.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the arena of competition between Reformist and Principlist discourses during the period 1997–2013 through the theoretical framework of Laclau and Mouffe. The central research question is: 'How did rival political discourses in the Islamic Republic of Iran shape the arena of political competition between 1997 and 2013 through the articulation of floating signifiers and efforts to establish hegemony?' In addressing this question, the study analyzes the representation of meaning through each discourse's key concepts, the symbolic mechanisms of legitimacy construction, and the modes of discursive confrontation.

The scope of the research is deliberately confined to this period and focuses on the comparative analysis of the two political discourses that exerted the greatest influence on power configurations in the Islamic Republic. The article proceeds by first reviewing the key concepts and relevant literature, followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework. It then presents the research methodology and empirical analysis across two main sub-periods (the Khatami and Ahmadinejad administrations). Finally, the findings are discussed and interpreted, and concluding remarks are offered. This study seeks to provide a more precise understanding of the dynamics of political discourses in contemporary Iran through a rigorous, theory-driven analysis grounded in credible sources.

1. Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework

1.1. Definition of Key Concepts

A) Political Field

In the theory of Laclau and Mouffe, the political field is understood as a discursive space in which discourses compete over meaning. It is a structural and discursive arena into

which floating signifiers enters in pursuit of semantic stabilization and legitimacy (Howarth et al., 2000: 6).

The political field comprises floating signifiers, diverse discourses, and multiple actors, within which meaning is continuously articulated and rearticulated in confrontation with semantic rivals (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 110–112). This theoretical perspective is particularly applicable to the analysis of Iranian politics, as it enables the researcher to examine how rival discourses—such as Reformism and Principlism, construct meaning and how semantic competition unfolds across different periods. Moreover, the structure of the political field renders discursive analysis operational by facilitating the identification of nodal points, floating signifiers, and semantic operations.

B) Hegemony

Hegemony refers to the process through which a discourse articulates floating signifiers in favor of its own legitimacy and temporarily stabilizes a framework of meaning. Laclau and Mouffe emphasize that hegemony should not be equated with absolute or fixed domination; rather, meaning is always contingent, incomplete, and dependent on ongoing competition (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Hegemony thus denotes the provisional and relative fixation of meaning within the discursive field. As Laclau and Mouffe argue, "Hegemony must be understood as a contingent and incomplete process, not as a total form of domination." (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 3–4) At its core, the concept of hegemony concerns the question of who prevails in shaping politics and society, namely, which political force determines dominant patterns of behavior and which definitions of signifiers and signifieds become socially dominant. In this study, hegemony is analyzed as the manner in which Reformist or Principlist discourses become temporarily stabilized and how they block or absorb the signifiers of rival discourses. In this sense, hegemony serves as an explanatory structural tool for understanding channels of political legitimacy and semantic competition in Iran's public sphere.

C) Articulation

Articulation is the process through which floating signifiers are linked and temporarily fixed within a discursive structure. Laclau and Mouffe conceptualize articulation as the practice that constructs the field of meaning within discourses and enables hegemonic positions to emerge. It allows semantic elements to be connected and stabilized, thereby forming a discourse and generating political identity (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 113). In the context of this study,

analyzing articulation enables an examination of how floating signifiers such as "Justice" or the "People" are incorporated into distinct structures of meaning within each discourse. Articulation plays a strategic role in understanding discursive stabilization and semantic competition, as hegemony is achieved when successful articulation leads to the relative closure of rival discourses.

D) Master Signifier

In Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, the nodal point (or central signifier) refers to a signifier that functions as a point of relative stability, articulating other signifiers around it and organizing their meanings. This signifier plays the role of the axis of discourse and, in its effort to create semantic coherence within the chain of equivalence, refers other concepts back to itself. In other words, as a semantic nodal point, the central signifier seeks to order floating signifiers in such a way as to produce a temporary fixation of meaning within the discursive field (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 114). These signifiers not only stabilize meaning but, by virtue of their position at the center of the semantic chain, also provide the conditions for the inclusion or exclusion of other signifiers.

From another perspective, the term central signifier refers to a person, symbol, or concept around which other signifiers are gathered and articulated. The central signifier functions like the main pole of a tent: if it is removed, the entire structure collapses. Discourse is a coherent system, and the dominant signifier constitutes its core; the gravitational force of this central core (the nodal signifier) draws other signs toward itself (Khalaji, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 54). "Semantic coherence" is achieved through the articulation of signifiers around the central signifier (Kasraei and Poozesh Shirazi, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 344).

In political discourses, the central signifier is typically a symbol or concept at the intersection of identity, power, and legitimacy. For example, in the discourse of Islamic Republic conservatism, Velayat-e Faqih functions as the central signifier, organizing concepts such as "Justice," "Independence," and "Revolutionary Values" around itself. By contrast, in reformist discourse, the signifier the people plays this role, articulating notions such as "Rule of Law," "Civil Society," and "Freedom" around it (Sotoudehnia et al., 2020 AD/1399 SH: 330). In analyzing the political discourse of the Islamic Republic, identifying the central signifier of each current helps to elucidate the mechanisms of competition, negation, representation, and the imposition of meaning among rival discourses.

E) Floating Signifier

A floating signifier is a sign that has not yet acquired a fixed meaning and can be articulated by different discourses in the course of discursive competition. Signifiers such as "Justice," "Freedom," and "The People" are capable of absorbing diverse meanings (Laclau, 2005: 133). A floating signifier is one whose signified remains fluid (unstable); in other words, it possesses multiple signifieds, and different political groups compete to attach their preferred signifieds to it (Kasraei and Poozesh Shirazi, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 345).

In this study, identifying key floating signifiers and examining how they are articulated by reformist or conservative discourses is essential for analyzing their hegemonic projects. The analysis of floating signifiers demonstrates that meaning is produced through interpretive competition and that no signifier possesses an absolute meaning; rather, meanings emerge as the outcome of discursive struggle.

F) Binary Construction

In Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, binary construction constitutes one of the fundamental mechanisms of meaning-making and refers to the process through which concepts and identities are defined via binary oppositions. In this process, meaning is not established in isolation but rather in relation to an "Other" or an antagonistic counterpart. Accordingly, a discourse must define an opposing or contradictory position in order to stabilize its own meaning and legitimacy, such as "Us" versus "Them," "Guardianship" versus "Westernization," or "Religious Democracy" versus "Secularism." These oppositions not only delineate semantic boundaries but also function as instruments for organizing social forces around a central signifier (Howarth, 2000: 103). Indeed, the identity of any discourse is contingent upon the existence of other; hence, discourses continuously engage in processes of otherness to constitute their own identity (Kasraei and Poozesh Shirazi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 230).

Within the political arena of the Islamic Republic of Iran, binary construction has played a pivotal role in the formation and reproduction of rival discourses. The Principlist discourse commonly frames Reformists through signifiers such as "Tolerance," "Westernization," or the "Erosion of Values," while simultaneously presenting itself as the defender of "Authentic Islam," "Justice," and "Guardianship." Conversely, Reformists depict their opponents as symbols of "Authoritarianism," "Monopolization," or the "Imposition of an official interpretation of religion." In this sense, binary construction is not merely a linguistic

opposition but a form of discursive organization with political, normative, and social consequences that underpins the foundations of semantic competition in Iran's political sphere (Tajik, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 213).

1.2. Review of the Literature

In the field of political discourse analysis in the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly regarding the competition between Reformist and Principlist discourses, numerous studies have been conducted using qualitative, discourse-analytic, and content-analytic approaches. However, most of these studies are either confined to specific periods or focus on a single discourse, thereby neglecting a comprehensive, theoretically grounded comparative analysis. Below, selected key Persian- and English-language studies relevant to the present research are summarized to facilitate comparison and critical assessment.

Table 1. Review of Selected Previous Studies

Research Issue	Year	Author(s)	Research method	Research Conclusion
Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory as an Effective Tool for Understanding Political Phenomena	2009 AD/1388 SH	Mohammad Salar Kasraei & Ali Pouzesh Shirazi	Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis	Introduces articulation, floating signifiers, and hegemony as tools of political analysis; critiques conceptual fragmentation in domestic applications of the theory.
A Critique and Evaluation of Laclau's Discourse Analysis and Its Application to Politics	2012 AD/1391 SH	Bahram Akhavan Kazemi	Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis	Emphasizes postmodern limitations and the necessity of theoretical localization in Islamic political studies.
Analyzing the Formation and Consolidation of the Islamic Revolution	2013 AD/1392 SH	Yadollah Honari & Ali Azarmi	Discourse analysis	Demonstrates that the Islamic Revolution produced a discursive

Discourse Based on Laclau and Mouffe's Theory				system centered on "Jurisprudential political Islam," with extreme nationalism and Western secularism functioning as constitutive Others.
The Discourse of the Islamic Revolution and the Requirements for Disseminating Its Values in the Era of Globalization	2016 AD/1395 SH	Mohsen Rezaei Jafari et al.	Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis	Argues that through Shi'i Islamic foundations, ijthihad, and expediency, the revolutionary discourse can achieve hegemonic expansion under globalization.
A Comparative Study of Reformist and Principlist Signifiers in the Sixth and Seventh Parliaments	2019 AD/1398 SH	Mir Ebrahim Sedigh et al.	Comparative and theoretical framework of discourse analysis	Suggests that without theoretical innovation and institutional reform, both discourses risk declining legitimacy and accessibility.
Theological–Political Strategies for Regulating Political Competition in the Islamic Republic	2019 AD/1398 SH	Ali Aghajani	Theological Ijtihad method (rational inference and quotation from religious sources)	Proposes moderate political theology and institutionalized pluralism as solutions to tensions between Islamism/Republicanism and unity/diversity.
Modes of Struggle in the Political Competition of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Subject: The period of reformists and	2023 AD/1402 SH	Ali Jan Moradi Joo	Descriptive–analytical	Identifies Reformist reliance on intellectual elites and social movements, and Principlist reliance on religious networks and state

fundamentalists)				media.
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The innovation of the present study lies in its direct and systematic examination of the discursive field of competition between the two officially dominant political currents, Reformism and Principlism, during the period 1997–2013. This domain has received limited attention in structured research, as most existing analyses focus either on the discourse of the Islamic Revolution or on single-discourse studies. Drawing explicitly on Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical framework and emphasizing concepts such as floating signifiers, articulation, and hegemony, this article analyzes meaning-making processes within a structurally competitive discursive field.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

Understanding the mechanisms of competition among political discourses in the Islamic Republic of Iran requires a theory capable of simultaneously explaining power, meaning, and hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, with its post-structuralist foundations and emphasis on conceptual struggle in the public sphere, provides an appropriate analytical framework. Moving beyond classical essentialism, this theory conceives meaning not as fixed or definitive but as the product of articulatory processes within discourse (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 112).

In this framework, discourse is understood as a network of signifiers organized around central or empty signifiers. The meaning of a signifier is not derived from reference to an external essence or objective truth but from its differential relations with other signifiers within the discursive structure (Howarth, 2000: 101). Rival discourses thus attempt to stabilize their preferred semantic order through articulation while exposing the contingency and instability of alternative meanings.

A key concept in this theory is articulation, defined as the process through which a discourse links dispersed signifiers into a coherent chain of meaning. For example, the Reformist discourse may articulate signifiers such as the "People," "Law," and "Freedom" into a chain that directly contradicts the Principlist discourse organized around "Guardianship," "Justice," and "Islamic Values."

Equally central is the concept of hegemony, which refers to a condition in which a discourse successfully imposes its semantic order upon others, transforming it into the dominant meaning (Laclau, 2005: 93). Such hegemony is always provisional, contingent, and subject to challenge; consequently, the political field remains perpetually open to discursive reconfiguration. In the Islamic Republic, political discourses have persistently sought to consolidate hegemony through conceptual mobilization and the exclusion of others (Hejazi and Bahrami, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 11).

Another foundational concept is the floating signifier. Signifiers such as the "People," "Justice," or "Democracy" are inherently open to multiple interpretations and can be appropriated by different discourses (Glynos & Howarth, 2007: 36). Hence, the political field is fundamentally a site of struggle over the interpretation and ownership of these signifiers. In Iran, for instance, the "People" may signify loyal supporters of Velayat-e Faqih in the Principlist discourse, while in the Reformist discourse it denotes rights-bearing civic actors.

The notion of the empty signifier plays a crucial role in unifying chains of signification. Concepts such as "Islam," "Revolution," "Iran," or "Guardianship" can be partially emptied of fixed content, allowing diverse social groups to project their own meanings onto them without achieving full semantic unity (Laclau, 2005: 98). This indeterminacy enhances political mobilization and facilitates hegemonic inclusivity (Hejazi and Bahrami, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 12).

Laclau and Mouffe's theory emerged from the Essex School, an interdisciplinary approach concerned with the interrelations among power, language, and ideology. By moving beyond traditional left-right dichotomies, the Essex School emphasizes semantic struggle in modern societies and its role in the reproduction of power (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 8). From this perspective, discourse analysis is particularly effective for multi-discursive societies such as Iran in identifying symbolic practices, semantic closures, and hegemonic transformations.

Based on this theoretical framework, the present study examines the formation, persistence, and confrontation of the two dominant political discourses in Iran, Reformism and Principlism, through their competition over central signifiers, semantic articulation, and hegemonic consolidation. Given that Laclau and Mouffe's theory acknowledges the inherently antagonistic and incomplete nature of meaning, it offers a flexible and robust framework for analyzing this dynamic field of competition.

Ultimately, the theoretical framework of this article rests on the assumption that in the political arena of the Islamic Republic, fundamental concepts do not exist in isolation but are engaged in constant semantic struggle. Political discourses, through their internal structures of

meaning, not only represent power but actively reproduce it. Accordingly, analyzing rival discourses through Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical tools enables the identification of hegemonic strategies, exclusionary mechanisms, resonance effects, and processes of semantic redefinition within Iran's political competition.

2. The Political Field of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Since its establishment in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been constituted by a synthesis of two structural components: Islamicity as the ideological content and Republicanism as the political form and mechanism. Article one of the Constitutions defines the system as an Islamic Republic, in which Republicanism represents the institutional framework and Islamicity its substantive foundation (Mirzadeh Kouhshahi and Farsi, 2022 AD/1389 SH: 131).

In the revolutionary and constitutional discourse, Imam Khomeini's interpretation emphasized that Republicanism derives from popular choice, while Islamicity gains legitimacy from divine will and religious authority. These two elements are not contradictory but complementary: "Isلمicity cannot endure without popular support, and Republicanism lacks meaning without religious content." (Khosravi et al., 2016 AD/1395 SH: 134) There are also perspectives that claim a theoretical contradiction exists between Islamicity and republicanism within the Islamic Republic. In particular, some liberal and non-religious currents regard republicanism as being in conflict with Islamicity, while others argue that this semantic tension is merely nominal and that the discursive reality of the system demonstrates that the two have been employed in a complementary manner (Arasta, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 11).

Through an analysis of the discourse of the regime's legitimacy, Palizban shows that following the victory of the Revolution, the utopian atmosphere gave way to discursive competition, and the dominant discourse of the Islamic Republic came to confront two sub-discourses: traditionalist Islamicity and modern republicanism. This competition reflects the system's will to articulate the two concepts within a single discursive framework (Palizban, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 117). Soltani likewise notes that the official revolutionary discourse, embodied in the political system of the Islamic Republic, articulated two central signifiers, "Isلمicity" and "Republicanism." Islamicity represented religious identity, juristic authority, and the Velayat-e Faqih, while republicanism represented popular participation, the rule of law, and free elections (Soltani, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 231).

In addressing why Iran's political field was formed around Islamicity and republicanism, it can be argued that these two concepts function as discursive nodal points around which other sub-discourses coalesced. Discourses such as antagonism toward the West, liberal secular republicanism, or justice-oriented movements each emphasized one of these two axes in order to stabilize their political identities (Palizban, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 121).

Consequently, the political field of the Islamic Republic can be understood as a dynamic space of discursive competition in which Islamicity, as the substance of religious legitimacy, and republicanism, as the framework of popular legitimacy, constitute its two principal pillars. This meaningful combination provides the mechanism for the system's durability while simultaneously preserving the potential for ongoing discursive transformation.

3. Characteristics and Requirements of the Discursive Competitive Field in the Islamic Republic of Iran

1) Bipolar Structure

Since the 1990s, Iran's political structure has been characterized by a bipolar discursive configuration consisting of the Principlist (or conservative) discourse, which emphasizes Velayat-e Faqih and religious identity, and the Reformist discourse, which seeks legitimacy through popular sovereignty and political participation. This bipolarity is indicative of a struggle over meaning, as each discourse attempts to marginalize its rival by foregrounding its own normative values and questioning the human or divine legitimacy of the opposing camp.

From the perspective of political field theory, this polarization signifies the emergence of two parallel fields of critique and legitimacy, each enabling a discourse to stabilize its hegemonic element around a nodal signifier, "Guardianship" for Principlists and the "People" or "Freedom" for Reformists. This structural binary significantly constrains the space for a genuine third or centrist discourse, as semantic competition is institutionally configured as antagonistic, compelling moderate positions to gravitate toward one of the two poles.

Although additional internal discourses, such as justice-oriented movements, have emerged, the overall framework of competition continues to revolve around these two dominant poles (Bay et al., 2019 AD/1398 SH: 375). Hence, bipolarity constitutes a structural feature of the discursive field, reflecting both the historical trajectory of contemporary Iranian politics and the intensified drive of discourses to stabilize meaning and power.

2) Struggle for the Accumulation of Political Capital

Discursive competition between Principlists and Reformists in Iran's political field is fundamentally a struggle over the accumulation and stabilization of political capital, understood as political legitimacy and access to decision-making institutions. Discourses seek to reinterpret the meaning and sources of legitimacy in their own favor (Bay et al., 2019 AD/1398 SH: 380).

Principlists ground their symbolic capital in the signifier of "Guardianship" and religious legitimacy, maintaining that political legitimacy should flow primarily from above, through Velayat-e Faqih, rather than solely from popular vote (Ghasemi et al., 2020 AD/1399 SH: 53). In contrast, Reformists locate their capital in signifiers such as the "People," "Freedom," and "Free Elections," arguing that legitimacy originates from below, through popular will rather than exclusively through religious authority.

This semantic struggle has generated a strategic competition over words, symbols, and narratives, from official statements to electoral slogans, each seeking hegemonic recognition within the political field. The outcome has been the emergence of period-specific dominant discourses (relative hegemonies), as observed during the Khatami and Ahmadinejad administrations. Accordingly, contestation over discursive political capital constitutes a core dimension of the competitive field, transforming struggles over meaning into struggles over political legitimacy.

3) Adherence to Velayat-e Faqih: The Formation of a Discursive Habitus

Another defining feature of Iran's political competitive field is the formal and structural adherence to Velayat-e Faqih, which has become institutionalized as a **discursive habitus** within the system. Principlists explicitly derive their legitimacy from allegiance to the Supreme Leader, while other discourses must also demonstrate compatibility or loyalty to Velayat-e Faqih in order to achieve political legitimacy (Ghasemi et al., 2020 AD/1399 SH: 56).

This discursive habitus shapes the articulation of key signifiers such as "Guardianship," "Leadership," and "Religious Authority," marginalizing alternatives, such as secular or non-guardianship-based positions, even when they enjoy popular support. The normalization of this habitus functions as a mechanism for controlling meaning and preventing discursive deviation toward political exclusion.

At the same time, it generates a form of relative semantic closure: "Discourses that emphasize popular sovereignty without sufficient reference to Velayat-e Faqih risk having their religious

legitimacy questioned. Thus, discursive adherence to Velayat-e Faqih is not merely an indicator of formal authority but a crucial mechanism for stabilizing the political field and delimiting acceptable political alternatives."

The political field of the Islamic Republic is rooted in a distinctive articulation of Islamicity and *Republicanism*, institutionalized through the Constitution, politico-religious leadership, and a combination of elected and appointed institutions. Within this overarching field, political competition, particularly between Reformist and Principlist discourses, takes place in a sub-field governed by specific rules, including discursive bipolarity, competition over political capital, and commitment to Velayat-e Faqih.

The following table conceptually distinguishes between the general political field and the specific requirements of the discursive competitive field in Iran.

Table 2. Comparison of the Political Field and the Discursive Competitive Field in the Islamic Republic of Iran

No.	Key Issues of the Political Field in the Islamic Republic	Characteristics and Requirements of the Political Competition Field in the Islamic Republic
1	The dual combination of Islamicity and republicanism in the political and legal structure	The existence of an active bipolarity between reformist and principlist (conservative) discourses, each offering a different interpretation of Islamicity and republicanism
2	A political structure based on the Velayat-e Faqih and divine sovereignty alongside elected institutions	The requirements of competition within the framework of preserving the system and adhering to the principle of the Guardianship of the Jurist, even when criticizing the performance of official institutions
3	A religion-based political field with ideological capacity for mass mobilization	Competition over the appropriation of key concepts such as justice, the people, freedom, development, and resistance; each discourse seeks to define its own specific meaning of these signifiers

4	Interaction and occasional tension between religious legitimacy and popular acceptance	The necessity of articulating floating signifiers within a framework that simultaneously produces social acceptance and religious validation
5	Discursive shifts influenced by domestic and regional developments (such as the 2nd of Khordad, the 2009 elections, and sanctions)	The fluidity of the competitive field and the possibility of continual redefinition of discourses in response to changing conditions, crises, and political opportunities
6	The significant influence of non-elected institutions in decision-making processes	Competition within an institutionally constrained and often unequal arena, where media and institutional resources are distributed unevenly among discourses
7	The use of symbolic tools, religious rituals, and ideology for legitimacy-building	The requirement to employ rituals, religious language, and symbolic instruments to stabilize hegemony and effect the semantic exclusion of rival discourses
8	The importance of official discourse in organizing governance institutions and macro-level policymaking	Competition at a level beyond elections, encompassing media, formal education, the judiciary, and religious and cultural institutions

This table represents an effort to conceptually and functionally distinguish between two levels of political dynamics within the structure of the Islamic Republic. On the one hand, it examines the general and foundational components of the political field, such as the duality of Islamicity and republicanism, the role of formal and traditional institutions, and the authority of the Velayat-e Faqih. On the other hand, it focuses on the characteristics and requirements of the field of political competition, including the bipolar nature of the discursive structure (Reformist/Principlist), struggles over the acquisition of symbolic capital and power, and the formation of dispositions of conformity or differentiation. This conceptual distinction facilitates a clearer understanding of the mechanisms of political action in Iran and demonstrates how macro-level structures shape, constrain, or direct the rules of political competition.

4. Research Methodology

1) Research Design and General Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis, drawing on Laclau and Mouffe's Essex School framework. Rather than treating political competition merely as a set of policy positions, the study conceptualizes it as a field of meaning, hegemonic struggle, and signifier articulation.

2) Temporal Scope and Rationale

The study covers the period from 1997 to 2013, spanning from the beginning of Mohammad Khatami's Reformist presidency to the end of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's second term. This period was selected due to its intense discursive confrontations, significant political shifts, and heightened conceptual rivalry over key signifiers such as the "People," "Law," "Guardianship," and "Freedom."

3) Corpus and Data Sources

The unit of analysis consists of discursive texts produced by the two dominant political currents. These include key speeches, party statements, and editorials from influential newspapers, electoral debates, official media positions, and campaign materials. Data were selected purposively based on national circulation, discursive impact, and analytical relevance to Laclau and Mouffe's framework.

4) Coding Procedure

Data coding was conducted in three stages:

1. Open coding: identification of key signifiers and initial concepts;
2. Axial coding: organization of codes into broader categories (central signifiers, floating signifiers, articulations);
3. Selective coding: identification of equivalently chains and hegemonic axes.

5) Analytical Process

Analysis proceeded through identifying discursive elements, extracting central and floating signifiers, and examining strategies of hegemonic fixation, semantic closure, and exclusion. Concepts such as empty signifier, chain of equivalence, and otherness making guided interpretation.

6) Analysis of central signifiers and articulations

In reformist discourse, the central signifier the people is articulated in such a way that concepts such as "Freedom," "Civil Society," and "Rule of Law" are positioned in a meaningful chain around it. By contrast, principlists place the signifier Velayat (Guardianship) at the center of their discourse and organize concepts such as "Justice," "Islamic Values," and "Service" in a chain articulated around it. The manner in which these signifiers are articulated reveals the ideological orientation of each discourse within the field of competition.

7) Examining hegemony and the closure of meaning

Each of the discourses under study has sought, through the use of symbolic, media, and institutional resources, to stabilize its preferred meanings and to close the semantic space to the rival discourse. These efforts have at times met with relative success, but in other instances have failed due to social resistance or counter-discursive challenges. A dynamic analysis of these interactions demonstrates that none of the discourses has been able to fully secure hegemonic fixation.

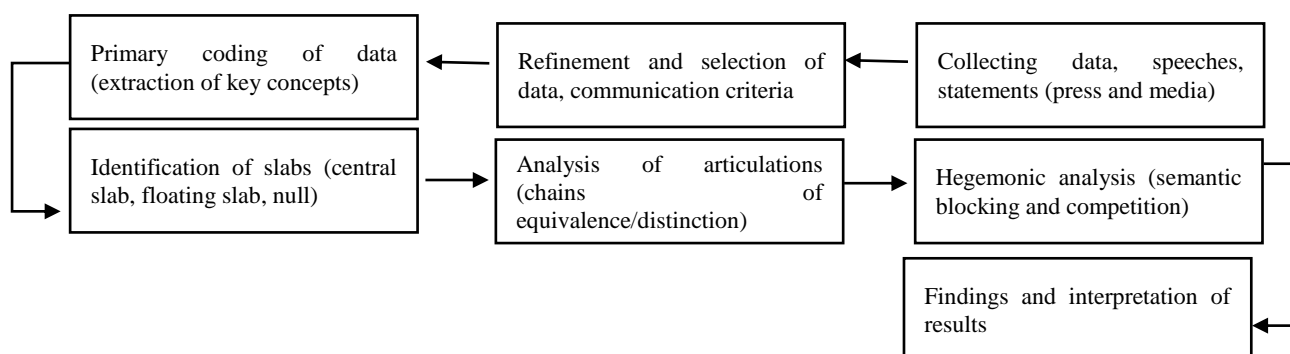
8) Reliability report

To ensure the accuracy and consistency of the coding process, two measures were employed. First, expert review by a specialist in political discourse analysis was conducted, during which the extracted categories were evaluated and validated. Second, Cohen's kappa coefficient was calculated between two independent coders. The result yielded a value of 0.82, indicating a high level of agreement and reliability in the coding process.

9) Methodological advantages in understanding the dynamics of discursive competition

The application of Laclau and Mouffe's theory in this study enables a multilayered understanding of political contestation in Iran. Unlike purely descriptive or structuralize analyses, this approach allows for the examination of meaning-making mechanisms, the construction of the other, and attempts at discursive monopolization. Accordingly, the methodology employed not only serves to address the research question but also offers a model for analyzing discursive competition in other political contexts.

Figure 1. Flowchart of the research methodology



5. Research Findings

1) Formation of the Political Discursive Field in the Islamic Republic

The findings indicate that the political field of the Islamic Republic has been fundamentally structured around the dual articulation of Islamicity and Republicanism. However, divergent interpretations, prioritizations, and articulations of these two elements by competing political discourses have shaped the trajectory of Iran's political dynamics. Both Reformist and Principlist discourses have selectively emphasized aspects of this duality, rearticulating key signifiers such as the people, guardianship, law, justice, and freedom, thereby transforming political competition into a sustained struggle over meaning.

2) Reformist Discourse and Democratic Articulation

Between 1997 and 2005, the reformist discourse articulated a chain of equivalence centered on the master signifier the people, incorporating floating signifiers such as political development, civil society, rule of law, and freedom. This discourse sought to constitute itself, through differentiation from authoritarianism, as the embodiment of republicanism and a representative of political modernization. At the semantic level, reformists attempted to transform the political field into a space of dialogue, transparency, and legitimate competition; however, these efforts encountered persistent resistance from entrenched institutions.

3) Redefinition of Principlist Discourse and the Consolidation of the Signifier of Velayat

In response to the reformist discourse, principlists from the early 2000s endeavored to stabilize the signifier Velayat as the central nodal point, articulating around it signifiers such

as revolutionary values, social justice, anti-corruption, and service to the underprivileged (Seddigh et al., 2019 AD/1398 SH: 218). During the Ahmadinejad presidency, this discourse, through the use of populist and accessible rhetoric, opposition to elitism, and reliance on leadership, offered a redefinition of popular Islamism and temporarily captured a significant portion of the discursive field.

4) Floating Signifiers and Semantic Contestation

Signifiers such as the people, law, justice, and even freedom functioned as floating signifiers and constituted the primary terrain of contestation between the two discourses. Each discourse attempted to anchor these signifiers to its own preferred meanings. For instance, reformists defined the people as bearers of will and citizens' rights, whereas principlists construed them as a faithful mass loyal to leadership. This semantic rivalry penetrated the core of Iran's political field and generated substantial theoretical and practical challenges (Mirzaei & Rabbani Khorasgani, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 45).

5) Structural Responses of Power Institutions to Discursive Competition

One of the key findings indicates that the institutional structure of the Islamic Republic, by prioritizing the principle of Velayat-e Faqih and appointed bodies, exhibits greater affinity with the principlist discourse. This overlap enabled principlists to benefit from broader institutional and media support, granting them greater access to hegemonic and exclusionary mechanisms. Conversely, the reformist discourse repeatedly faced restrictions, containment, and political or media marginalization.

6) The Impossibility of Absolute Hegemonic Fixation

Despite extensive efforts by both discourses to impose their preferred meanings on central signifiers, neither succeeded in achieving full hegemonic closure (Karimi, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 176). Events such as the 2009 presidential election and its aftermath revealed a profound semantic crisis, intensified discursive confrontation, and the impossibility of complete closure by a single discourse. During this period, Iran's political space remained less a domain of unified meaning than an arena of ongoing struggle and discursive rearticulating.

7) The Role of Media and Rituals in Discursive Reinforcement

The findings demonstrate that media outlets, religious ceremonies, and revolutionary symbols functioned as crucial instruments for meaning fixation and discursive confrontation. Both currents sought to articulate floating signifiers in their favor and inculcate them within public

opinion. The Principlist discourse, in particular, relied heavily on official media and ritualized practices, such as Friday prayers and mass rallies, for the reproduction of its discourse.

8) A Third Discourse? Openings or Blockages

At certain moments within the studied period, attempts emerged to transcend the traditional binary and construct alternative discourses. However, these efforts were largely absorbed into one of the two dominant discourses or were prevented from materializing due to institutional blockages. Consequently, the field of competition remained largely confined to these two discourses, with transformations occurring primarily in intra-discursive or adaptive forms.

Overall, the findings indicate that the political field of the Islamic Republic is, on the one hand, highly meaning-centered and grounded in discursive competition, while on the other hand, its institutional structure tends to privilege the stabilization of a particular discourse. This tension between structural constraints and semantic dynamism has rendered the political arena a permanent site of interaction, exclusion, and redefinition. Although neither discourse achieved complete semantic closure or absolute hegemony, Principlism, especially in the latter period, was able to impose a broader degree of semantic stabilization due to its access to institutional power resources (Izadi and Rezaei Panah, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 66). Reformism, despite its conceptual capacity and social support, failed to consolidate its dominant meaning due to the absence of sustained supportive structures (Aghajari et al., 2022 AD/1401 SH: 311).

Table 3. Sample Data Coding Based on Laclau and Mouffe's Theory

Raw Text / Data	Initial Code	Core Category	Type of Signifier	Articulation/ Chain of Meaning	Discursive Position
The people are the true owners of the country (Speech by Mohammad Khatami, 1998)	People	Republicanism	Central Signifier	People → Law → Freedom → Political Development	Reformist
The Constitution is our red line	Constitution	Political Institutionalization	Floating Signifier	Law → People → Civil Society	Reformist

(Interview, Sobh-e Emrooz, 1999)					
Civil society is a tool for collective participation (Khatami, 2000)	Civil Society	Political Participation	Floating Signifier	Civil Society → Freedom → Reform	Reformist
Velayat-e Faqih is the axis of the system's identity (Supreme Leader, 2005)	Velayat-e Faqih	Islamic Legitimacy	Central Signifier	Velayat → Justice → Islamic Values	Principlist
Justice is the foundation of governmental legitimacy (Ahmadinejad, 2007)	Justice	Social Justice	Floating Signifier	Justice → Service → Velayat	Principlist
"Western cultural invasion threatens the youth" (Friday Prayer Sermon, 2003)	Cultural Threat	Confrontation with other	Floating Signifier	Cultural Threat → Velayat → Islamic Identity	Principlist

This table shows that the raw data (speeches and official texts) were first transformed into initial codes. These codes were then categorized into core categories, and their positions as either central signifiers or floating signifiers were identified. Finally, based on the articulations, the semantic relationships among signifiers were mapped within chains of

equivalence and difference, and each case was attributed to either the reformist or the Principlist discourse.

Subsequently, the key findings of the study are presented in the form of an analytical table. The table is organized comparatively and illustrates the various dimensions of discursive competition between the reformist and Principlist currents in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1997–2013), from the perspective of the key concepts of Laclau and Mouffe’s theory (central signifier, articulation, hegemony, and so forth).

Table 4. Analytical Findings of the Two Main Discourses in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1997–2013)

Analytical Dimension	Reformist Discourse	Principlist Discourse
Central Signifier	People	Velayat-e Faqih
Key Floating Signifiers	Law, Freedom, Civil Society, Political Development	Justice, Service, Islamic Values, Cultural Threat
Nodal Point	Republicanism, Right to Choose	Islamism, Leadership
Mode of Articulation	People-centered chain emphasizing participation and transparency	Velayat-centered chain emphasizing obedience, security, and order
Source of Legitimacy	Popular will, elections, intra-system reform	Religious authority, revolutionary tradition
Discursive Instruments	Free press, electoral debates, intellectuals, universities	Friday prayers, state media, official cultural institutions
Competitive Strategy	Democratic expansion, dialogue, anti-monopoly	Defense of values, exclusion of rival discourse
Hegemonic Status	Fragile and unstable	Relative and institutionally reinforced
Outcome	Semantic blockage, limited political continuity	Relative stabilization, intensified closure

This table illustrates the formation of a structured field of semantic competition in the Islamic Republic, within which the two main discourses, reformism and principlism, have sought to

stabilize their central signifiers and impose their hegemony over the political field. While reformists emphasized the signifier *the people* and concepts associated with democracy, transparency, and structural reform, principlists, drawing on *Velayat-e Faqih* (the Guardianship of the Jurist) and concepts such as justice, cultural threat, and Islamic values, sought to institutionalize their discourse. The analysis indicates that although both discourses have been influential in the political field at different periods, the structural support of official institutions for the principlist discourse has placed it on a path toward relative stabilization, whereas the reformist discourse has encountered institutional obstacles and political closures. This structural confrontation persists and reflects the dynamism, poly-vocally, and ongoing struggle over meaning in the political space of the Islamic Republic.

6. Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

1) Discursive Competition as a Struggle over Meaning and Legitimacy

The competition between reformist and Principlist discourses in the Islamic Republic of Iran is not merely electoral or partisan, but fundamentally a struggle over the meaning of core political concepts. Signifiers such as people, Velayat, law, freedom, and justice possess no fixed meaning; rather, they are continuously contested. Each discourse seeks to impose its own interpretation in pursuit of hegemonic dominance.

2) Central Signifiers and Temporary Fixation of Meaning

The reformist discourse, centered on *the people*, and the Principlist discourse, centered on Velayat, articulated chains of equivalence that both highlighted their values and excluded the other. Nonetheless, neither discourse succeeded in fully fixing meaning throughout the entire period, underscoring the fluidity of the discursive field.

3) Discursive Instruments and Power Resources

Reformists relied primarily on the press, intellectuals, universities, and public debates, whereas Principlists benefited from institutional resources such as state broadcasting, Friday prayers, and religious-cultural organizations. This asymmetry generated discursive inequality, enabling Principlism to achieve periods of dominance while reformism was frequently marginalized.

4) Instability of Discursive Closure

No discourse achieved total semantic closure. Critical junctures, most notably the 2009 election, reactivated marginalized meanings and returned them to the center of contestation. This persistent instability confirms Laclau and Mouffe's emphasis on the contingency of meaning and the perpetual struggle required to stabilize it.

5) Institutional Structure and Discursive Balance

The political structure of the Islamic Republic privileges certain discourses through institutional support. Principlism, due to its proximity to appointed institutions, enjoyed sustained advantages, whereas reformism remained dependent on electoral institutions and civil society—contributing to its instability over time.

6) Symbolic Confrontation at the Discursive Level

One of the most important arenas of competition is the battle over symbols, key vocabulary, and statements. Each discourse, through the repeated use of specific terms, ideological rituals, and the representation of a particular narrative of the Revolution, has sought to present itself as the authentic embodiment of the discourse of the Islamic Revolution. For example, Principlists constructed and emphasized terms such as resistance to arrogance, insight, sedition, the Imam's line, and loyalty to the Guardianship, while reformists produced meaning through concepts such as demand-making, rule of law, accountability, and religious democracy.

7) Reactions to changes in governments and discursive dynamics

Although changes in governments have led to relative shifts within the discursive field, lasting hegemony has not been attainable for either discourse. The Khatami administration strengthened reformist discourse but encountered institutional closure. The Ahmadinejad administration reinforced Principlist discourse, yet intra-discursive tensions and performance crises prevented the full consolidation of hegemony. Consequently, political changes have not necessarily resulted in durable transformations of the discursive field.

8) The challenge of continuity and reproduction of discourses

One of the key findings of the study is the absence of institutionalized mechanisms for the meaningful continuity and long-term stabilization of discourses. Neither reformism succeeded in effective institutionalization, nor did Principlism manage to attract a broad spectrum of

independent elites. This condition has rendered discursive competition fragile, unstable, and often dependent on temporary political agencies. The persistence of discourses has largely remained at the symbolic level and has lacked deeply institutionalized structural foundations.

9) The concept of the other, which plays a central role in identity formation in Laclau and Mouffe's theory, can be examined at three distinct yet interconnected levels:

(A) The external other or foreign enemy: Both discourses, especially Principlism, invoke the west, and more specifically the United States and global arrogance, as a common enemy and external other. This construction fosters internal cohesion and mobilization by generating a shared sense of threat. In reformist discourse, although this antagonism is less pronounced, it is generally reframed as resistance to imposition rather than total confrontation.

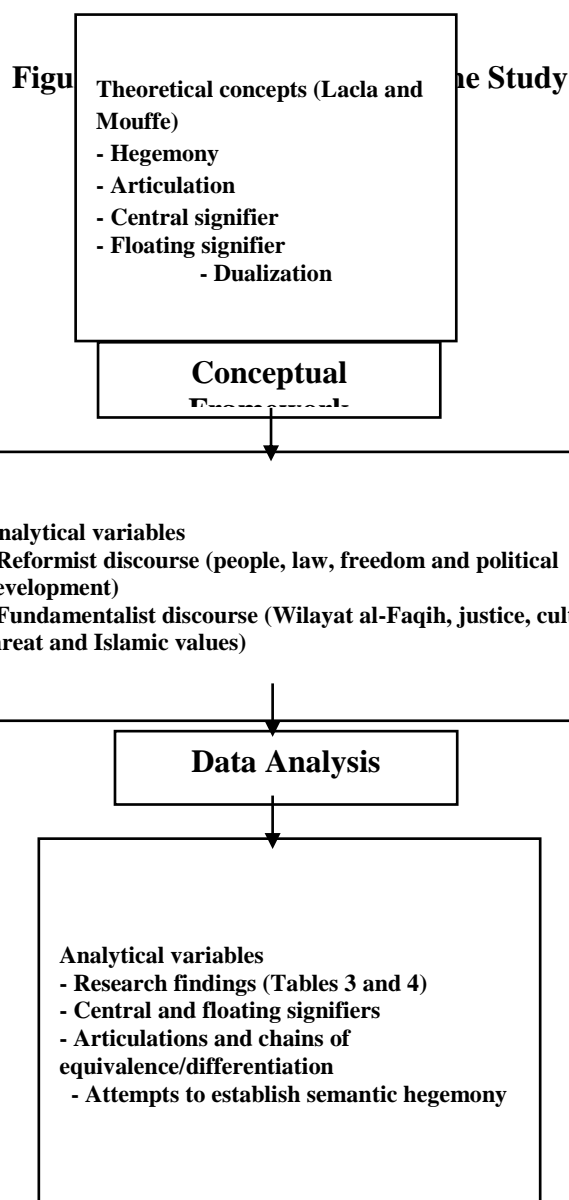
(B) The internal Other or political opponent; this level refers to groups and movements that fall outside the dominant discursive framework of the system and are excluded as anti-system or subversive (such as monarchists and armed opposition groups). This form of otherness making delineates political red lines.

(C) The discursive other or intra-system rival: The most significant level in the present analysis is the mutual positioning of these two discourses as each other's discursive other. Principlist discourse marginalizes reformists with labels such as westernized, weak-willed, and deviant, while reformist discourse portrays Principlists as authoritarian, monopolistic, and traditional. This level of otherness making constitutes the core of the struggle for hegemony within the political field of the Islamic Republic, where each discourse seeks to legitimize itself as the authentic representative of both Islamicity and republicanism by excluding the other. An examination of this dimension reveals how the identity of each discourse is contingent upon the definition and rejection of its rival.

10. Analytical conclusion and overall interpretation

Overall, discursive competition in the Islamic Republic of Iran during this period manifested primarily as a struggle over meaning within the field of political power, a struggle that, although articulated through different concepts, consistently aimed at semantic domination and political hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical framework provides an effective analytical tool for understanding this competition, moving beyond purely structural or normative analyses and rendering the dynamic nature of this field intelligible.

7. Conceptual Model of the Study



The conceptual model of the present research illustrates how the foundational concepts of Laclau and Mouffe's theory, namely hegemony, articulation, central signifier, floating signifier, and binary opposition, serve as the theoretical framework for analyzing the field of political competition in the Islamic Republic of Iran. These concepts are operationalized as analytical variables and applied to two main discourses: "Reformism (centered on signifiers such as people, law, freedom, and political development) and Principlism (centered on Velayat-e Faqih, justice, cultural threat, and Islamic values). Subsequently, the research findings, presented in tabular form, elucidate the relationships between central and floating

signifiers, articulations, chains of equivalence and difference, and each discourse's efforts to stabilize semantic hegemony. In this way, the conceptual model delineates the logical trajectory of the research from theory to data and ultimately to findings, thereby ensuring the analytical coherence of the article."

Conclusion

The conclusions of this study are derived from a field-based and theory-driven discourse analysis of the period 1997–2013 in the Islamic Republic of Iran, a period during which the country's political field became the site of overt and complex competition between two official discourses: reformism and Principlism. During this time, both discourses sought to stabilize their hegemonic positions within the political and cultural domains by articulating central and floating signifiers. Grounded in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory and focused on concepts such as hegemony, articulation, floating signifiers, and semantic closure, this analysis provides a structural understanding of the formation, persistence, confrontation, and decline of these discourses.

First, the study demonstrates that the political field of the Islamic Republic is characterized by a dual structure arising from the combination of Islamicity and Republicanism. Each discourse has attempted to interpret and absorb these two components into its central signifier. Reformists, centered on the signifier people and chains such as rule of law, freedom, civil society, and political development, sought to strengthen the republican dimension. Principlists, by contrast, centered their discourse on Velayat and articulated elements such as "Justice, cultural threat, resistance, and service provision" in an effort to consolidate the Islamic dimension of the system and reinforce their semantic hegemony.

The findings indicate that neither discourse succeeded in achieving complete semantic closure or stable hegemonic fixation during the period under review. Reformism entered the political field during the Khatami administration with novel concepts, yet its hegemony remained fragile due to resistance from formal power structures and the empowerment of rival currents. Conversely, Principlism supported institutionally during the Ahmadinejad administration, expanded its signifiers, but operational challenges, internal fragmentation, and declining social capital prevented it from fully stabilizing its hegemony.

Notably, the competition between these discourses unfolded both at the level of macro-concepts; such as people, law, Velayat, and justice; and at the level of instruments and structures. Reformists relied on free media, intellectuals, and civil dialogue, whereas

Principlists mobilized official institutions, religious rituals, and the symbolic capital of the Revolution. This asymmetry in discursive instruments produced unequal access to the field of meaning and politics, temporarily shifting the balance of power in favor of Principlism.

From a theoretical perspective, applying Laclau and Mouffe's framework to the analysis of official discourses in the Islamic Republic enables a nuanced understanding of meaning production, the construction of the other, and the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion within the arena of power. Within this framework, meaning is not fixed or essentialist but rather a contingent outcome of articulation and hegemonic power. This semantic contingency explains why discourses in Iran have remained fluid, unstable, and perpetually competitive rather than achieving total dominance.

Moreover, the study demonstrates that discourses in the Islamic Republic are not merely intellectual narratives but political projects aimed at organizing and stabilizing specific meanings. These projects reach their peak during moments of crisis or elections, when floating signifiers such as law, people, Velayat, and freedom become the primary terrain of discursive struggle, and each current seeks to impose its interpretation at the societal level.

At the same time, weaknesses in long-term institutionalization, the absence of coherent theoretical networks, and heavy dependence on political agents have rendered these discursive competitions fragile and shallow. This condition is particularly evident in the reformist discourse, which; despite its greater conceptual capacity for reconstructing republicanism and democracy; failed to achieve hegemonic consolidation due to structural blockages and its inability to generate sustainable support organizations.

In conclusion, the discursive field of the Islamic Republic of Iran, despite the persistence of the reformist, Principlist binary, remains continuously opens to redefinition and semantic shifts. Neither discourse has been able to impose a final meaning; rather, an ongoing struggle over meaning production and the representation of political legitimacy persists. While this condition may foster political dynamism, it simultaneously carries the risks of social capital erosion, blockage of public participation, and declining trust in competitive political processes. Accordingly, future research should move toward hybrid, multi-discursive, and participatory models in order to provide deeper and more comprehensive analyses of Iran's political field.

Research Recommendations

The present study opens new horizons for future research. First, it is recommended that the temporal scope be extended to subsequent periods in order to examine discursive transformations after 2013 and the role of social media in redefining discursive competition. Second, greater attention to subsidiary and emerging discourses, such as student justice-seeking movements, social movements, and socio-cultural currents, can offer a more pluralistic portrayal of Iran's political field. Third, combining qualitative and quantitative methods (such as network analysis or quantitative content analysis) may enhance analytical rigor and objectivity. Fourth, comparative studies between Iran and other countries (e.g., Turkey or Egypt) could help identify the distinctive features of the Iranian model. Finally, future research should devote greater attention to online discourse and social media, which have emerged in recent years as one of the most significant arenas of discursive competition.

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Examining the Role and Narration of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization in the (2022 AD/1401 SH) Protests in Iran

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study analyzes the role of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK) in representing and steering the nationwide protests of autumn 2022 in Iran from the perspective of psychological operations and hybrid warfare. It demonstrates how the organization sought to construct a fabricated social reality against the Islamic Republic of Iran through targeted narrative-building.

Method: The research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), based on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model (1995) and Teun A. van Dijk's cognitive-ideological framework (2006). Data were purposively collected from the organization's official media outlets (Simaye Azadi, Iran Azadi, statements of the National Council of Resistance, and affiliated social media channels) from September to December 2022 and systematically analyzed.

Findings: By employing techniques such as emotional provocation, antagonistic binary construction (us vs. them), appropriation of the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom," simulation of the scale of uprising, making hero of protesters, victimization, persistent labeling of the ruling system, and the discursive linkage of internal and external "Resistance," the MEK produced a fully ideological and regime-change-oriented narrative of the protests. In doing so, it played an active role in the project of hybrid and cognitive warfare against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Mahsa Amini functioned as a "Discursive nodal point," while the Iranian woman was framed as the "Revolutionary Subject," constituting the central signifiers of this narrative.

Conclusion: During the 2022 protests, the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization did not merely reflect reality; rather, it acted as an active agent in constructing a fabricated social reality and engineering public opinion. Its performance should be understood as part of a broader strategy of narrative warfare and psychological operations against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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Introduction

In recent decades, Iranian society has experienced multiple waves of social protests, movements that, while ostensibly rooted in economic and occupational demands, carried political and discursive messages at deeper levels. This trend became particularly pronounced from the early 2010s onward, manifesting in increasing complexity, structural tensions, and the emergence of deep social cleavages. In this context, various factors, including economic inefficiencies, the erosion of social capital, and the intensification of perceptual-media warfare by external actors, have contributed to the formation of multilayered, discursively driven protests that blur the boundary between public grievances and regime-change projects. Within this trajectory, the nationwide protests of 2022 following the death of Mahsa Amini represent a critical turning point in Iran's protest dynamics. These protests were distinctive in their geographical spread, the intensity of reactions, and the level of involvement by foreign and anti-regime actors. Unlike many previous protest waves, this period was marked by engineered narrative construction and multilayered hybrid warfare centered on opposition organizations and foreign media outlets, which transformed a social incident into a political-security crisis (Nasri, 2022 AD/1401 SH; Momeni, 2023 AD/1402 SH).

Within this framework, the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK), as one of the most prominent opposition groups to the Islamic Republic, sought to play a guiding and destructive role in the 2022 protests by leveraging media outlets, social networks, fake news, and cognitive warfare. This organization, whose record includes collaboration with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War and the assassination of officials of the Islamic Republic, has, over the past decade, placed particular emphasis on projects of "Soft Regime Change" and infiltration into the minds and psyches of Iranian society through media and psychological operations (NCRI, 2022; Iran Interlink, 2023).

During the nationwide protests of 2022, the MEK attempted to actively shape public opinion by employing advanced psychological operations techniques. For years, the organization has based part of its regime-change strategy on the production and redistribution of narratives rooted in exaggeration, fabrication, and data distortion. During the 2022 protests, it sought to continue this strategy using newer media environments and more sophisticated psychological techniques. Given the organization's long history of politically exploiting domestic events in Iran, analyzing its psychological operations mechanisms can offer a useful model for understanding external media interventions in Iran's social transformations.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following main question: ‘How, and through which techniques, did the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization attempt to intervene in the 2022 protests through media and psychological operations and influence public opinion inside Iran?’ This question is particularly significant because, in recent years, the organization’s psychological operations have moved beyond classical forms toward extensive use of new digital platforms, including social networks, anonymous Telegram channels, fake Twitter accounts, bot networks, and the construction of artificial celebrities. Therefore, a scientific examination of this trend contributes to a deeper understanding of how the organization’s discourse is constructed in the new media environment.

The significance of this research can be examined from two perspectives: "First, providing a systematic and evidence-based analysis of the psychological–media mechanisms of one of the most active regime-change opposition groups; and second, assisting academic, media, and security institutions in identifying emerging forms of cognitive warfare and developing effective countermeasures. Moreover, by addressing a highly contemporary issue, this study helps fill existing research gaps in soft security and cognitive warfare."

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the techniques, methods, and mechanisms of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization’s psychological operations during the 2022 protests.

Secondary objectives include:

- A) Identifying the organization’s media narrative-building techniques on social networks.
- B) Examining the linkage between these narratives and anti-Iranian foreign actors.
- C) Analyzing the impact of the organization’s psychological operations on domestic audience perceptions.

This study addresses the following key questions:

1. What psychological and media techniques did the MEK employ during the 2022 protests?
2. What narratives did the MEK produce and disseminate during this period?
3. How these operations were connected to other foreign media actors?
4. To what extent did these operations influence public perception within Iran?

The main hypothesis of the research is that the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization, through cognitive warfare techniques and extensive use of social media platforms, sought to shape public perception in line with its regime-change objectives by presenting a specific narrative of the protests. Within this framework, techniques such as emotional narrative construction, exaggeration of violence, fabrication of statistics, victim-centered imagery of protesters, and

the sanitization of the organization's own image were pursued through targeted dissemination of content in Persian-language media environments.

This research adopts a qualitative approach and employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Its theoretical framework is based on Norman Fairclough's three-level model, textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice, and is reinforced by Teun van Dijk's context-oriented approach.

The analytical corpus consists of the MEK's official media content, including Simaye Azadi (<https://www.mojahedin.org>) and the National Council of Resistance of Iran (<https://www.ncri.org>), during the period from September to December 2022. Data were selected purposively and analyzed at lexical, semantic, and contextual levels. This method enables an examination of the linguistic, ideological, and social-contextual dimensions of the organization's narrative construction.

The research population includes all media productions of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization from October 2022 to March 2024. Due to the extensive volume of data, purposive sampling was conducted, focusing on the most viewed and most interacted-with content published on social media platforms and official websites. Emphasis was placed on content that generated the highest levels of redistribution and audience engagement. Data analysis was conducted using Critical Discourse Analysis with a focus on linguistic, semantic, and visual components. Each media message was examined based on the following axes:

- A)** The manner of representing actors (the people, the state, and the organization).
- B)** Psychological techniques employed (arising emotion, exaggeration, victimization).
- C)** Intertextual links and references to external sources.
- D)** Visual indicators and semiotic elements.

To validate the findings, two methods were employed:

1. Comparing the results with other credible domestic and international studies in the field of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization's psychological operations.
2. Reviewing the findings by two independent experts in media and psychological warfare to assess analytical accuracy and prevent potential bias.

The present study demonstrates several innovative features. First, it focuses on a systematic academic analysis of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization's psychological operations within a contemporary event that has thus far received limited scholarly attention. Second, the use of the organization's primary-source materials alongside a rigorous theoretical framework elevates the research beyond descriptive analysis toward a critical and analytical examination.

Third, linking the organization's discourse to broader trends of hybrid and cognitive warfare against the Islamic Republic of Iran strengthens the study's geopolitical dimension.

Despite studies on media discourse analysis of opposition groups, the novelty of this research lies in examining, using primary data and within a hybrid warfare framework, the media narratives produced by the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization regarding the 2022 protests. This innovation can be articulated along several key axes: the application of Critical Discourse Analysis to opposition media; a focused examination of a specific organization with a complex, multilayered history in soft warfare; and the analysis of a live, ongoing event that remains present in the collective memory of Iranian society. From this perspective, the study not only offers scholarly findings but may also serve as a foundation for formulating counter-policy strategies in the domains of media and soft security.

1. Theoretical Framework: Social Protests and Narrative Construction

For a systematic and scientific analysis of media discourse, it is essential to recognize that media are not merely conveyors of messages but function as active agents in the construction of social reality. Through selection, emphasis, and omission of elements of reality, media create specific narratives of events that can shape public perception. Media narrative construction is a meaning-making process through which media, using language, imagery, and semantic structures, produce a version of reality that may or may not correspond to objective reality. This process becomes particularly salient during crises such as social protests, when competition among narratives for dominance over public opinion reaches its peak.

1.1. Key Concepts: Protest, Narrative, and Media Agency

Given the central role of media in assigning meaning to social protests, it is necessary, prior to engaging with the theoretical framework of discourse analysis, to clarify the foundational concepts upon which this study is based: "Protest, narrative, and media agency. These concepts facilitate a deeper understanding of the context of the 2022 protests and establish a clear connection between discourse theories and the empirical analysis."

1.1.1. Protest

In its general sense, protest is a social action that emerges in response to unjust conditions, oppressive structures, or widespread dissatisfaction. Depending on the social, political, and cultural context, it may range from symbolic expressions to street-level mobilization. From a discursive perspective, protest is not merely a behavioral reaction but a means of redefining collective identity and articulating political alternatives in the public sphere (Tilly, 2004: 3–4). In media discourse, how protests are narrated shapes their meaning and position within collective memory and public opinion.

1.1.2. Narration

Narration extends beyond a mere sequence of events; it is a meaning-generating structure that provides events with form, direction, and logic. In discourse studies, media narratives function as tools for organizing social experience by selecting actors, constructing causal relations, and emphasizing or omitting specific elements (Toolan, 1988). Every narrative contains an evaluative and ideological framework and is stabilized in media through language, imagery, sound, and repetition. Political organizations, particularly in times of crisis, employ narrative construction to present their interpretation of reality as the dominant reading.

1.1.3. Media Agency

A media agency is a conscious, strategic use of communication tools to influence public opinion, mobilize actors, and construct social reality. In the era of new media, political organizations and movements are not merely content producers but active players in the arena of meaning. The Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization, through its satellite television channel "Simaye Azadi," its official website (<https://www.mojahedin.org>), and sustained activity on social media platforms, utilizes media as a tool for self-representation and distortion of the "Other." The organization's media agency constitutes a systematic effort to produce and disseminate alternative discourse, create emotional polarizations, and channel political emotions through narrative construction (Mojahedin.org, 2022).

In social science literature, theorists such as Stuart Hall and Nick Cobley (Hall, 1997; Cobley, 2001) emphasize that media, through framing, subject selection, metaphor usage, and lexical emphasis, do not merely reflect reality but actively "Redefine" it. Media narrative thus

represents a form of ideological representation capable of legitimizing or delegitimizing political actors.

Within this framework, media discourse analysis must move beyond surface-level description and address hidden mechanisms of narrative construction, power structures, and linguistic strategies. Media effectively "Mediate Reality," and analyzing this mediation requires approaches such as Critical Discourse Analysis and cognitive discourse analysis.

Accordingly, analyzing the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization's discourse on the 2022 protests requires a precise, multilayered theoretical framework. Political discourse, particularly during periods of social crisis, is not merely a reflection of reality but an integral component of the production of meaning, power, and legitimacy. Understanding the linguistic, media, and ideological mechanisms of organizations, therefore, requires reliance on theories capable of revealing the hidden layers embedded within media messages.

1.2. Fairclough's Model

To uncover the latent layers of media discourse, Norman Fairclough's theoretical framework in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides an effective analytical tool. Through his three-dimensional model, Fairclough demonstrates how discourses simultaneously reflect and reproduce social realities. These three dimensions include:

1) Textual Level

This level involves close analysis of vocabulary, syntactic structures, metaphors, omissions, and modes of reference. Here, language is examined as a tool for organizing meaning.

2) Discursive Practice

This dimension focuses on the processes of discourse production, distribution, and consumption, revealing how texts are constructed, disseminated through media, and interpreted by audiences.

3) Social Practice

This level addresses the broader social context, power relations, ideologies, and institutional structures within which discourse is produced. Fairclough (1995; 2003) emphasizes that discourse functions both as a means of representing the world and as an instrument of power and domination. He conceptualizes discourse analysis as a form of "Social Critique" that exposes the hidden ideological mechanisms embedded in language. Within this framework, the media discourse of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization can

be analyzed as an ideological instrument for shaping public opinion, delegitimizing the governing system, and constructing an alternative narrative of events.

This model enables the present study to systematically examine the organization's narrative construction mechanisms by integrating analyses of language, discursive processes, and social context.

1.3. Teun A. van Dijk's Discourse Theory

Alongside Fairclough's approach, Teun A. van Dijk's cognitive discourse analysis is employed to gain deeper insight into the ideological dimensions of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization's media discourse. Van Dijk conceptualizes discourse not merely as text or speech, but as a multidimensional structure intertwined with cognitive systems, collective memory, and audience mental processes. According to him, language is the primary instrument for representing ideology and controlling social cognition (Van Dijk, 1998; 2006). One of the key concepts in van Dijk's model is the "Us/Them dichotomy." In this framework, ideological discourses divide the world into a virtuous, victimized, and resistant "Us" versus an oppressive, illegitimate, and hostile "Them," guiding audience cognition toward a particular interpretation of reality. This binary structure is especially effective in opposition discourses, serving as a powerful tool for social polarization and political mobilization.

Van Dijk argues that ideological discourses influence collective memory and audience orientation through mechanisms such as selective repetition of key terms, use of emotional metaphors, emphasis on victimhood, and the omission or distortion of opposing viewpoints (Van Dijk, 2006). This model is particularly illuminating for analyzing media discourses operating within political crises, such as the 2022 protests, where narrative competition plays a decisive role.

In the present study, van Dijk's approach enables us to demonstrate how the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK), through the use of emotional language and polarized imagery, not only represents reality but also seeks to engineer the audience's cognition and construct an "Alternative Truth."

By combining Fairclough's three-dimensional model with van Dijk's cognitive framework, a comprehensive and coherent analytical structure is provided for examining media discourse, particularly in crisis contexts. Together, these two theories enable a multidimensional reading of texts that attends simultaneously to the linguistic and structural levels of messages, the

processes of meaning production and reproduction, and the broader ideological and social contexts in which discourse operates.

1.4. Media Discourse Analysis of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization

In the context of the 2022 protests, the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization sought to leverage its media capacities to construct a specific, directional narrative of events. This narrative was not merely a collection of news reports or analytical commentaries, but rather the outcome of a complex process of linguistic, cognitive, and ideological representations formed within the arena of narrative warfare.

In the following sections, drawing on the aforementioned theoretical framework, the MEK's media discourse will be systematically analyzed at three levels, linguistic, discursive, and social, to clarify how the organization has used media language to participate in reality construction, cognitive control, and the engineering of public opinion.

1.4.1. First-Level Analysis: Language and Textual Structures in the Organization's Narrative

During social protests, language functions not merely as a communicative tool but as a political and discursive action in the construction of social reality. From Fairclough's perspective, the first level of Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on the close examination of linguistic elements within texts, vocabulary, syntactic structures, metaphors, omissions, referential strategies, and semantic patterns, all of which shape audience perception (Fairclough, 1995).

In the media discourse of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization, language is used not only to convey news but also to create an alternative, emotionally charged narrative of the protests. Through the repetitive use of keywords such as "Khamenei's IRGC forces," "The brutal regime," "Martyrs of the path to freedom," and "Shots fired at the heart of Iran," the organization seeks to portray the Islamic Republic as a "Violent Other," while simultaneously representing protesters as symbols of an "Oppressed people." Within this linguistic structure, concepts are heavily ideological, and the use of war-like, bloody, and heroic metaphors amplifies emotions, inciting collective sentiment (Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization, 2022b; retrieved from <https://www.mojahedin.org/news/848573>).

Within van Dijk's theoretical framework, such language exemplifies the "Us/Them" dichotomy, in which "Us" encompasses people, victims, and protesting youth, while "Them" refers to the military, government leaders, and ruling power structures. The attribution of the most negative characteristics to the other (such as "Criminal," "Killing Machine," and "Agent of repression") alongside heroic portrayals of "Us" constitutes a classic mechanism of cognitive control and ideological bias induction (Van Dijk, 2006). See also the political discussion on the prospects of a "Revolutionary Uprising" broadcast on *Simaye Azadi* (2022 AD/1401 SH), retrieved from <https://www.mojahedin.org/news/849045>.

Lexical analysis reveals that MEK-affiliated media not only select specific terms but also reinforce them through persistent and selective repetition in headlines, captions, subtitles, and voice-overs, thereby contributing to the normalization of violence and making emotional of reality. This linguistic strategy serves to construct a narrative depicting a "People's battle against a brutal enemy." (Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization, 2022 AD/1401 SH (b); see also <https://www.mojahedin.org/news/848573>)

1.4.2. Second-Level Analysis: Production and Reproduction of Protest Discourse

The second level of Fairclough's CDA model examines discursive processes, how media texts are produced, through which channels they are distributed, and how audiences consume and interpret them (Fairclough, 2003). This level represents the intersection of text with institutional and media structures, where media act not merely as reflectors of events but as active agents in meaning engineering and public opinion management.

During the 2022 protests, the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization employed a coherent and multilayered media apparatus to produce and reproduce protest discourse. This apparatus included:

1. The satellite television channel *Simaye Azadi*;
2. The news-analytical website *Iran Efshagar* (<https://mojahedin.org>, 2022);
3. Active social media accounts (Twitter/X, Instagram, Telegram) utilizing targeted hashtag campaigns;
4. Documentary videos, edited subtitles, and daily podcasts (Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization, 2022 AD/1401 SH (b); <https://www.mojahedin.org/news/848573>)

Across these platforms, messages were reproduced in a guided and repetitive manner, from continuous broadcasting of scenes of repression and bloodshed, to the magnification of victim

figures such as Mahsa Amini and Nika Shakarami, to quasi-journalistic analyses emphasizing the "Imminent collapse of the regime" (<https://mojahedin.org>).

In Fairclough's framework, such representations constitute not merely media content but discursive actions aimed at reproducing ideology and constructing political reality.

Moreover, the organization amplified its message through cooperation and discursive synergy with foreign Persian-language media outlets such as Iran International, Voice of America, and occasionally BBC Persian. This process of "Mutual reflection and reinforcement" created a form of discursive synergy through which a particular narrative of the protests gained legitimacy and circulation across multiple media platforms (BBC Persian, 2022).

From van Dijk's perspective, this process illustrates the gradual consolidation of collective memory through the repetition of specific propositions and the use of lexical branding. Each exposure to images of confrontation and recurring terms such as "Repressive regime" or "Freedom movement" adds a new cognitive layer to the audience's mental schema

1.4.3. Third-Level Analysis: Social Context, Ideology, and the Objectives of MEK Discourse

At the third level of Fairclough's analysis, attention shifts to the social context and power structures within which discourse emerges, operates, and contributes to their reproduction or destabilization (Fairclough, 1995). At this stage, analysis moves beyond text and media production into the domain of ideology, domination, resistance, and struggles for legitimacy.

As a political actor positioning itself as an alternative to the Islamic Republic, the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization has consistently sought to exploit moments of crisis, particularly popular protests, to gain legitimacy and embed itself within collective memory. The 2022 protests, as one of the most extensive and resonant social mobilizations of the past two decades, provided the organization with a strategic opportunity to promote a radical and regime-change narrative as the dominant discourse through its media outlets (Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization, 2022 AD/1401 SH (a); <https://www.mojahedin.org>).

Within the organization's media discourse, concepts such as "Nationwide uprising," "Revolutionary Leadership Council," and "National Liberation Army" are carefully selected and reproduced (Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization, 2022 AD/1401 SH (b)). Statements by the so-called Liberation Army broadcast on *Simaye Azadi* (27 Mehr 1401 / October 19, 2022; <https://www.iranntv.com>) serve simultaneously to:

- Emphasize the "Popular" nature of the protests.
- Consolidate the organization's role as the "Only organized force ready to replace the system."

This process corresponds precisely to what van Dijk describes as discursive strategies of speaker legitimization (van Dijk, 1998): presenting oneself as the authentic voice of the people while depicting the other as a repressive, bloodthirsty, and irreformable regime (Simaye Azadi, 2022 AD/1401 SH).

Furthermore, the repeated use of statements such as "This uprising marks the end of the system," "Resistance units are expanding," or "The Liberation Army is ready to enter Iran" constitutes part of the organization's linguistic policy aimed at constructing a sense of imminent regime collapse. These techniques can be analyzed through Fairclough's concept of discursive presupposition, whereby specific meanings are naturalized without being explicitly stated.

Additionally, the organization's media narratives operate heavily on emotional registers. From the portrayal of grieving mothers to edited scenes of street repression, all elements are designed to generate anger, empathy, and a perceived necessity for collective action. This aligns with van Dijk's conceptualization of the cognitive dimension of discourse and the engineering of beliefs and attitudes.

Ultimately, the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization's discourse surrounding the 2022 protests represents an attempt to redefine Iran's reality from the perspective of a structured opposition equipped with media tools, aiming to monopolize revolutionary discourse in the minds of domestic and international audiences.

In sum, analysis of the MEK's media discourse regarding the 2022 protests demonstrates that the organization has consciously employed linguistic, syntactic, semantic, and discursive mechanisms to represent a particular version of reality and, through it, strengthen its position in the field of political struggle. From Fairclough's perspective, this discourse derives meaning not only at the lexical or syntactic level but also in ideological and social domains, serving to reproduce or redefine power relations. Simultaneously, van Dijk's framework clarifies how cognitive mechanisms and semantic strategies are utilized to persuade audiences, create polarizations, and stabilize specific beliefs within the target society. Accordingly, the MEK's media discourse can be understood as a coherent effort at narrative construction, meaning production, and collective memory formation during moments of

crisis, an effort in which media function not merely as reflectors of reality but as effective agents in its construction.

Given the theoretical framework presented, particularly Fairclough's three-level model and van Dijk's ideological approach, it is now necessary to more precisely elaborate the foundational concepts upon which the forthcoming analysis is based. Three key concepts, "Protest" as a social and political action, "Narrative" as a meaning-making tool, and "Media Agency" as a strategy of discourse production and representation, provide a deeper understanding of the discursive function of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization's media. These concepts serve as mediating links between theory and empirical analysis, paving the way for the subsequent chapter.

2. The Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization and the Narrative of Protests: Narrative Functions and Media Strategies

Following the analysis of the media discourse of the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK), the focus now turns to the organization's modes of narrative construction regarding the 2022 protests. By drawing on its media capacities, most notably *Simaye Azadi* (Freedom TV) and its official website (<https://www.mojahedin.org>), the MEK has sought to craft a representation of street unrest that aligns with its own discursive objectives. This process of narrative construction is not merely aimed at presenting a particular image of social reality; rather, from the perspective of political discourse, it constitutes an effort to redefine the organization's relationship with society and the ruling power. In this section, the MEK's master narratives and subsidiary narratives concerning the protests are examined, with particular emphasis on the dominant themes circulating in its official media outlets.

2.1. The Master Narrative: The People–Regime Binary as a Battle Between Good and Evil

At the core of the MEK's media narrative of the 2022 protests lies a moral–evaluative binary between a "Wronged, aware, and heroic nation" and a "Repressive, corrupt, and illegitimate government." This binary serves as the overarching framework for the organization's media discourse and is repeatedly reproduced across its messages, reports, statements, and visual productions. Within this narrative, the protests are not framed as a social or economic crisis but rather as a "Freedom-seeking uprising" and a "revolutionary movement," the legitimate

historical continuation of decades-long struggles by the Iranian people against "Religious Dictatorship." (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2006)

For example, in a visual report broadcast by *Simaye Azadi* on 17 September 2022 entitled "The Response of the Uprising People to the Repressors in the Streets of Tehran," scenes depict young protesters confronting security forces. Throughout the video, the narrator emphatically declares:

"This generation will not return; this uprising is a revolution; these people are the Army of Freedom." (*Simaye Azadi*, 2022 AD/1401 SH; <https://www.iranntv.com>)

This symbolic language not only portrays the people as conscious agents but also places them within the organized framework of the "Army of Freedom," a term uniquely associated with the organization's military wing, the National Liberation Army of Iran.

Recurring slogans such as "Death to the oppressor, whether Shah or Supreme Leader," "Woman, Life, Freedom," and "Army of Freedom, Freedom, Freedom," prominently highlighted in the MEK's visual and written reports, serve to reinforce this narrative binary and intensify revolutionary rhetoric (MEK Website, 2022 AD/1401 SH; <https://www.mojahedin.org>).

In its official statements, particularly during the early weeks of the protests, the MEK persistently reiterates concepts such as "Nationwide uprising," "The risen people," "The National Council of Resistance," and "The National Liberation Army of Iran." For instance, Statement No. 69 of the National Council of Resistance (21 September 2022) declares:

"These protests are not a blind reaction, but the manifestation of the Iranian nation's historical will to overthrow the entirety of the Velayat-e Faqih regime. The National Council of Resistance, the sole democratic alternative, stands ready to transfer sovereignty to the people."

(MEK, 2022 AD/1401 SH (b); <https://www.mojahedin.org>)

Within this framework, the organization presents itself not as an external actor but as an integral part of the "Collective will of the nation," possessing the capacity to lead and guide the protests. Repeated references to notions such as "Organizational Readiness," the "Leader of the Resistance" (Maryam Rajavi), and the "Revolutionary Leadership Council" in official statements all serve to consolidate this narrative position (MEK, 2022 AD/1401 SH (a); <https://www.ncr-iran.org/fa/>).

Strategically, this master narrative pursues three objectives:

- 1) Delegitimizing the Islamic Republic by portraying it as the "Enemy of the people."
- 2) Legitimizing the protests by representing the people as "Conscious and heroic subjects."
- 3) Consolidating the role of the MEK as the sole organized force and political alternative.

This narrative construction exemplifies the "Construction of reality through language," a concept central to critical discourse analysis, particularly within Norman Fairclough's theoretical framework, where language is used to represent events in accordance with discursive and ideological objectives (Fairclough, 1995). From Van Dijk's perspective, such narrative representations contribute to the stabilization of structures of domination and resistance at both cognitive and social levels (Van Dijk, 2006).

2.2. The Narrative of Woman as a Revolutionary Subject

In the MEK's media discourse surrounding the 2022 protests, Iranian women are represented not merely as symbols of suffering or repression, but as revolutionary, conscious, and pioneering subjects within the "Battlefield for freedom." This representation goes beyond conventional portrayals of women as victims, positioning them instead as heroes, leaders, and active agents, thus simultaneously carrying a strong political-ideological charge (Van Dijk, 2006: 123). Within this framework, the portrayal of women functions not only as an expression of identity but also as a discursive strategy for legitimizing resistance.

The central symbol of this representation is undoubtedly Mahsa Amini, a young woman whose death, according to the MEK's narrative, ignited a women-led revolution against religious dictatorship. In much of the organization's media content, Mahsa Amini is referred to as "Another name for freedom." For example, in a special *Simaye Azadi* program titled "Mahsa: The Silenced Voice of All Iranian Women" (broadcast on 24 September 2022), the host states:

"Mahsa was not just a girl; she was the initiator of a revolution. She became the standard-bearer of women who were suppressed for decades but now stand upright."

(*Simaye Azadi*, 24 September 2022 AD/1401 SH; <https://www.mojahedin.org>)

Similarly, an official MEK statement issued on 17 September 2022 declares:

"The killing of Mahsa Amini is the boiling point of rage that has burned for years in the hearts of Iranian women. This blood marks the beginning of an uprising, an uprising that women will lead."

(MEK, 2022 AD/1401 SH (a); <https://www.mojahedin.org/news/87560>)

In this narrative, Mahsa is portrayed as a symbol of suppressed yet resistant women, from which a broader image of women as the vanguard of revolution emerges. Such representation not only aligns with the organization's ideological structure, which emphasizes female leadership, but also serves as a strategy to legitimize women's centrality within the discourse of resistance. This process can be explained through the concept of "Semantic polarization" in critical discourse analysis, whereby women are positioned as the positive pole in opposition to the system of Velayat-e Faqih as the negative pole (Fairclough, 2001: 69).

For instance, posts published during the first week of October 2022 on the MEK's official Telegram channel (@MojahedinTV) feature images of Mahsa Amini accompanied by phrases such as "Iranian women began with Mahsa; they will end with overthrow." Expressions like "Woman, the flame of revolution" and "Woman, the end of Velayat" alongside Mahsa's image clearly indicate that this portrayal goes beyond individual commemoration and functions as a semantic tool for political narrative construction (Fairclough, 2001: 84).

2.2.1. Mahsa Amini as a Symbol of Discursive Rupture

Within the MEK's narrative system, the death of Mahsa Amini functions not merely as a tragic event but as a nodal point, a concept derived from Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse referring to points around which other signifiers are organized (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 112). The organization frames Mahsa's death as a symbolic rupture in the existing order, a rupture that, in its view, marks the beginning of the end of the Velayat-e Faqih system and transforms Mahsa into the central signifier of the protests.

In a statement published on the organization's official website on 17 September 2022, Mahsa Amini is described as "The undeniable symbol of public hatred toward the morality police and the entire misogynistic system." The statement continues:

"This blood will not sleep; Mahsa is no longer just a name, but the beginning of a path that will continue until the victory of the Iranian people."

(MEK, 2022 AD/1401 SH (a); <https://www.mojahedin.org/news/87560>)

From Van Dijk's (2006) perspective, the primary function of such narratives is to mobilize collective memory in the service of discursive identity formation. By representing Mahsa as a young woman whose death awakened the conscience of society, the MEK facilitates the

production of a unifying narrative, one that simultaneously positions the ruling system as the primary enemy and protesting women and youth as victim-heroes (Van Dijk, 2006: 173).

From Fairclough's (1995) viewpoint, this narrative constitutes part of the "struggle to control the meaning of events." By framing Mahsa's death as a direct outcome of the political-religious system, the organization seeks to challenge the dominant definitions offered by official media and to present an alternative meaning to public opinion.

Consequently, Mahsa Amini is portrayed not only as a victim of state violence but as a signifier of the collapse of the ruling system's discursive legitimacy. This portrayal provides the organization with a foundation for linking the 2022 protests to its broader narrative of "Regime Overthrow," a goal repeatedly referenced across its discourse at different levels (2022; <https://www.mojahedin.org/i/news/87812>).

2.2.1.1. Subsidiary Narrative 1: The Nationwide Uprising as a Point of Historical Accumulation

In the MEK's media discourse, the 2022 protests are not framed as isolated incidents or momentary reactions but as a "Nationwide Uprising" with deep historical, social, and revolutionary roots. Expressions such as "Nationwide revolt," "The uprising of the Iranian people," and "Coordinated popular struggle" were repeatedly used on *Simaye Azadi* TV and the organization's official news platforms, particularly throughout October 2022 AD/1401 SH (*Simaye Azadi* TV, October 2022 AD/1401 SH; <https://www.mojahedin.org>).

The purpose of this narrative is to foster a perception of national unity against the ruling system, minimizing geographical fragmentation and replacing it with a cohesive, coordinated image of the "Nation" confronting the "Regime." In numerous media contents, the organization references events such as the June 20, 1981, uprising and the protests of the 1990s and 2010s, attempting to portray the 2022 protests as a natural continuation of its historical struggle.

From a discourse-analytical perspective, the repeated use of action-oriented terms such as "Uprising," "Revolution," and "People Risen up," alongside the omission or marginalization of terms like "Limited Protest" or "Unrest," reflects deliberate lexical engineering by the organization, engineering aimed at legitimizing structural change and de-stigmatizing armed resistance (Fairclough, 2001: 52).

2.2.1.2. Subsidiary Narrative 2: Unarmed People versus Armed Repression, Constructing a Heroic Image of the Victim

In continuation of the organization's narrative line, the moral and evaluative binary of "unarmed people/armed repression" is strongly emphasized. By underscoring the protesters' defenselessness and the state's violence, the organization seeks to guide the audience toward a moral judgment. Expressions such as "People with Empty Hands," "Cries against bullets," and "Unarmed youth" are repeatedly used across the organization's official media outlets, including its website (<https://www.mojahedin.org>) and *Simaye Azadi*, as well as its Telegram channel (MojahedinTV@, October 2022 AD/1401 SH).

For example, a report entitled "Who Fired at the People?" states:

"It was not the people who committed violence. It was the government that responded to cries with bullets. What we witnessed in the streets of Sanandaj, Zahedan, and Tehran was the most one-sided form of state violence imaginable."

(<https://www.mojahedin.org/news/87859>)

From Van Dijk's perspective, this type of discourse relies on ideological polarization: "We, the oppressed and unarmed" versus "They the repressive and heavily armed." Such a structure simultaneously generates empathy and legitimizes resistance (Van Dijk, 2006: 174). By employing a "Victim dramatization" strategy, this narrative stirs the audience's moral outrage and enhances the legitimacy of the protest.

2.2.1.3. Subsidiary Narrative 3: Linking Domestic and Exiled Resistance, Unifying the Front of Struggle

In its media narrative, the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization seeks to establish a strategic and discursive link between "Street-level struggles inside the country" and "Organized resistance abroad." This linkage serves not only to reinforce the legitimacy of the protests but also to consolidate the organization's central role in these developments (cf. *Simaye Azadi*, 2022 AD/1401 SH (a)).

In many programs and analyses broadcast on "Simaye Azadi" television, a sense of shared fate and alignment is depicted between protesters in the streets and members or supporters of the organization in exile. For instance, reports from rallies in Paris, Berlin, or Stockholm show men and women holding photographs of those killed in the protests while chanting slogans identical to those voiced by protesters inside Iran. This media representation conveys

a clear message: resistance is unified and transcends borders (Simaye Azadi, 2022 AD/1401 SH (b); <https://www.mojahedin.org>).

One official organizational statement declares:

"The uprising of the Iranian people in the streets is the continuation of the same path that organized resistance in exile began decades ago. Today, the blood of martyrs in the streets of Tehran is linked to the cries of their comrades in Camp Ashraf."

(Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization of Iran, 2022 AD/1401 SH, Official Statement; <https://www.mojahedin.org/i/news>)

Within Fairclough's theoretical framework, this representational strategy can be understood as an instance of intertextuality, that is, the linking of diverse texts and narratives to construct a coherent discourse (Fairclough, 1992). Through this method, the organization reproduces its claim to centrality and historical continuity in the resistance movement.

Simultaneously, this narrative aims to construct an image of a "Unified front of resistance" confronting a "Monolithic and repressive regime." Such binary framing not only elevates the organization's legitimacy in the eyes of the audience but also strategically allows it to present itself not as an external force, but as an integral part of the "National uprising of the Iranian people." (Van Dijk, 1998; <https://www.mojahedin.org>)

2.2.1.4. Subsidiary Narrative 4: "Woman, Life, Freedom," Discursive Appropriation and Identity Rearticulation

The slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom," which became one of the central symbols of the 2022 protests, was not merely echoed in the MEK's media but reinterpreted and redefined to align with the organization's historical identity and ideological discourse (<https://www.mojahedin.org>, 26 September 2022).

In many "Simaye Azadi" programs, this slogan is presented not simply as a feminist or social demand, but as "The distilled essence of the people's resistance against dictatorship." In other words, the organization seeks to rearticulate the slogan within its own ideological framework and connect it to its historical tradition of struggle (Simaye Azadi, 2 October 2022; 24 October 2022).

For example, in an analytical discussion on the program "Resistance Special," the host states: "The slogan 'Woman, Life, Freedom' means the end of despotism; it means freedom for the entire nation, and this is precisely the cause for which the Mojahedin have sacrificed their

lives for years. Women such as Ashraf Rajavi are living embodiments of this slogan in contemporary Iranian history."

(Simaye Azadi, 26 October 2022; live broadcast)

Here, a form of semantic appropriation is evident: "The organization attempts to redefine circulating protest concepts within its own conceptual framework. From the perspective of Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis, this constitutes a purposeful discursive act aimed not merely at reflecting reality but at reconstructing reality within an ideological framework."

(Van Dijk, 2008: Discourse and Power)

Moreover, the emphasis on the historical role of women within the organization, from Ashraf Rajavi to the all-female Leadership Council, causes the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" to be presented in the organization's media not only as a call for gender equality, but as proof of the organization's ideological progressiveness in the project of liberation. This rearticulation represents an effort to marginalize competing discourses and consolidate the organization's position as the authentic, deeply rooted discourse of emancipation ("The Role of Women in Leading the Freedom Movement," *Resistance Face* special issue; <https://www.mojahedin.org>).

2.3. Media Narrative Construction and the Organization's Discursive Strategy

An examination of the MEK's master narrative and subsidiary narratives regarding the 2022 protests reveals that the organization's discourse goes beyond mere representation of social developments. By employing narrative mechanisms, it actively seeks to engineer meaning and construct political reality. The master narrative of an "Uprising for Overthrow" functions as a central framework within which multiple subsidiary narratives are embedded, gaining coherence through functions such as legitimizing struggle, articulating collective identity, consolidating the organization's role as the vanguard of protests, and delegitimizing state authority (cf. analyses published in the section "Iran Rises Up" on the organization's official website: <https://www.mojahedin.org>).

Within this structure, the use of discursive binaries "People/Repressors," "Woman/Oppression," "Sacrifice/Betrayal," or "Martyrdom/Crime," creates an emotionally and morally charged opposition between the state and the people. Through images, slogans, symbols, and the re-reading of events within the organization's historical narrative, the protests are reframed from isolated acts of dissent into a "Continuous revolutionary

movement" tied to the organization's ideological lineage (cf. for example, *Simaye Azadi* documentaries on the anniversaries of the November 2019 victims and the 2022 protests; *Simaye Azadi*, 30 October 2022).

In other words, the organization's narrative construction is not simply a representation of reality, but an active media practice aimed at imposing a particular interpretation of events, legitimizing the organization's strategy, and achieving discursive hegemony within the arena of social struggle. This narrative function positions the organization not at the margins of the protests, but at their symbolic center (National Council of Resistance of Iran, "The Protests of the Iranian People and the Role of Organized Resistance," 30 October 2022; <https://www.mojahedin.org>).

Conclusion

The analysis of the MEK's media discourse surrounding the 2022 protests demonstrates that the organization, as a longstanding opposition force, has utilized its media capacities to produce and disseminate narratives that not only reflect events but are explicitly designed to shape public opinion, reinforce its own discursive legitimacy, and undermine the official discourse of the Islamic Republic. By placing particular emphasis on the death of Mahsa Amini, the organization elevated this event as a "Symbol of discursive rupture," thereby fostering collective identification and providing a foundation for legitimizing the master narrative of a "Nationwide uprising against the regime."

The persistent use of binary oppositions such as "People/Government," "Women/Repressors," and "New Generation/Obsolete System," combined with narrative devices like heroization, victimization, and labeling, constitutes a core strategy for constructing the meaning of the protests. These patterns are deployed to arouse emotion, mobilize affect, and alter perceptions of state authority, demonstrating that media here functions not as a mirror of reality but as an active agent in constructing social reality, in line with the theoretical frameworks of Van Dijk and Fairclough.

Analysis of the linguistic, discursive, and ideological layers of the MEK's media output reveals that the organization's primary objective is to construct a coherent and radical narrative of public discontent, one in which the organization positions itself as the defender and representative of the people, while the government is depicted as the agent of repression and violence. This representation not only challenges the legitimacy of the dominant

discourse but also reconstructs, in the audience's mind, the legitimacy of radical political actions, including violence or rebellion, by portraying the people as defenseless victims.

Ultimately, the MEK's media discourse regarding the 2022 protests reveals a clear pattern of deliberate narrative construction, ideological language use, and psychological operations. Rather than primarily documenting on-the-ground realities, this pattern serves to expand the organization's confrontational discourse and strengthen its position among opponents of Iran's political system.

In light of these findings, comparative analysis of the narrative strategies employed by other opposition groups, including Persian-language foreign media and other ethnic or political movements, could open new avenues for a deeper understanding of media functions in social protests. Additionally, examining how these narratives are received by domestic audiences remains a crucial topic for future research, offering insights into the interaction between the production and consumption of protest discourse.

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