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Examining the Components of Legitimacy in Iran-Shahri Thought and Comparing Them with the Second Pahlavi Period

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Scientific Research Article history: Received: 2025-10-30 Received in revised form: 2025-12-10 Accepted : 2026-02-14 Available online: 2026-10-24 Keywords: Iran-Shahri Thought, Political Legitimacy, Second Pahlavi, Nationalism, Modernization.	Objective: This study examines the influence of Iran-Shahri political thought on the formation of legitimacy and the subsequent decline of the Second Pahlavi regime. The central research question concerns the extent to which this intellectual tradition affected the legitimacy of the Pahlavi monarchy and its role in the regime's decline. Method: This study utilizes a historical-analytical approach grounded in conceptual-comparative analysis. Data collection involved examining historical documents and library sources, as well as analyzing the policies and ideological symbols of the Second Pahlavi period, including textbooks and official events, in comparison with the indicators of Iran-Shahri thought. Findings: The Second Pahlavi regime incorporated symbolic elements of Iran-Shahri thought, such as king-centeredness, divine glory, antiquarianism, and Iranian nationalism, to construct symbolic legitimacy. However, essential components of this tradition, including the promotion of justice, the integration of religion and politics, rationalism, pluralism, and participatory institution-building, were not institutionalized within the regime's power structure. The divergence between symbolic and substantive Iran-Shahri thought, alongside imitative modernization, foreign dependence, anti-religious policies, injustice, authoritarianism, and excessive reliance on repression, contributed to the erosion of legitimacy and the widening of the state-society divide. Conclusion: The Second Pahlavi regime's selective and propagandistic use of Iran-Shahri thought failed to generate sustainable legitimacy, instead precipitating a legitimacy crisis. The lack of institutional realization of Iran-Shahri components, combined with contradictions between political discourse and social realities, was central to the monarchy's decline and the subsequent success of the Islamic Revolution. The findings indicate that symbolic appeals to historical traditions, without corresponding institutional and social foundations, are insufficient to consolidate political legitimacy.

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Introduction

Iran-Shahri political thought is regarded as one of the most important and enduring theoretical traditions in the history of governance in Iran. Over the centuries, this tradition has explained the relationship among power, society, and legitimacy on the basis of concepts such as king-centeredness, divine glory, the promotion of justice, cosmic order, the relationship between religion and politics, rationalism, and military authority. These components not only provide a conceptual framework for understanding the mechanisms underlying the continuity and decline of power in ancient Iran but also have the potential to be employed in the analysis of modern political systems. In this regard, the mode of governance and politics in ancient Iran represents a reproduced version of the “Mirror for Princes” tradition of the Sasanian era (Ahmadvand et al., 2017 AD/1396 SH: 32).

Despite its theoretical significance, the comparative analysis of the relationship between Iran-Shahri thought and governance structures in contemporary periods, particularly during the Second Pahlavi regime, has received limited scholarly attention. This research addresses this gap in the literature.

Although Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi increasingly utilized symbols, rituals, and concepts from Iran’s imperial heritage from the 1960s onward, it remains unclear to what extent this appropriation was institutional and substantive versus symbolic, propagandistic, and instrumental. This distinction is critical for analyzing the decline of the monarchy’s legitimacy within Iran’s specific social, cultural, and historical context.

Accordingly, the research question is as follows:

‘What impact did Iran-Shahri political thought have on the legitimacy of the Second Pahlavi regime, and what role did this intellectual tradition play in the process of the regime’s decline and downfall?’

In response, this study posits the central hypothesis that the Second Pahlavi regime’s engagement with Iran-Shahri thought was predominantly selective, symbolic, and driven by propagandistic objectives. While the regime frequently referenced imperial symbols, national myths, Achaemenid and Sasanian heritage, official celebrations, and cultural antiquarianism, it failed to institutionalize the core components of Iran-Shahri thought, such as social justice, pluralism, the integration of religion and politics, rationalism in governance, and political ethics, within its power structure. This incongruity between institutional and performative Iran-Shahri thought contributed to the erosion of legitimacy and the widening of the state-society divide.

The significance of this study is twofold. First, by adopting a conceptual-historical approach, it treats Iran-Shahri thought not merely as cultural heritage but

as a theoretical framework for analyzing political legitimacy in contemporary Iran, a perspective seldom addressed in existing literature. Second, the study demonstrates that state appropriation of historical traditions, when lacking social, institutional, and cultural linkages, fails to generate sustainable legitimacy. This analysis provides new insights into the interplay among ideology, tradition, and power in contemporary Iran and offers a framework for comparative studies of political legitimacy.

1. Research Review

The scholarly literature related to “Iran-Shahri thought and political legitimacy” can be categorized into two principal areas. The first consists of studies that explain the conceptual and historical foundations of Iran-Shahri thought. In contrast, the second comprises studies examining the characteristics of legitimacy and the structural crises of the Second Pahlavi regime. The present study seeks to integrate these two areas within a single analytical framework and examine the relationship between the components of Iran-Shahri thought and the legitimacy model of the Second Pahlavi regime. Accordingly, the review of the literature indicates that combining these two scholarly currents addresses a research gap that has received comparatively little attention to date.

1.1. Theoretical Studies on Iran-Shahri Thought

A substantial portion of the existing theoretical literature focuses on reconstructing the components of Iran-Shahri thought within the context of Iran’s political history. These studies regard Iran-Shahri thought as an intellectual tradition through which political authority in ancient Iran was justified and reproduced on the basis of fundamental elements such as king-centeredness, the promotion of justice, cosmic order, divine glory, the relationship between religion and the state, rationalism, and military capability (Zamani Mahjoub, 2008 AD/1387 SH; Tabataba’i, 2001 AD/1380 SH; Rezaei Rad, 2010 AD/1389 SH; Khalatbari et al., 2010 AD/1389 SH; Ashraf, 1973 AD/1353 SH; Ahmadvand et al., 2017 AD/1396 SH).

1.2. Studies on the Legitimacy of the Second Pahlavi Regime

The second body of literature consists of works that have examined the legitimacy of the political structure of the Second Pahlavi regime from sociological, political, and historical perspectives. In general, these studies emphasize that Mohammad Reza Shah’s legitimacy during the final decades of his reign was weakened by a combination of factors, including excessive reliance on repression, weak participatory institutions, contradictions between political discourse and practice, foreign dependence, and social inequality (Abrahamian, 1982;

Salehi, 1988; Skocpol, 1982), which the present article also draws upon.

Studies by Ansari (2017) and Ramezani (2004) have likewise emphasized the “Performative” dimension of Pahlavi legitimacy. These works indicate that the 2,500-year celebrations, the title *Aryamehr*, and antiquarian rituals had a primarily symbolic and propagandistic function rather than being manifestations of substantive institutional realization. At the social level, moreover, they had adverse effects because of prevailing inequalities and livelihood-related crises. This point is also utilized in the present article’s critique of the symbolic legitimacy of the Pahlavi regime.

An important point emerging from the literature review is that none of the previous studies has employed Iran-Shahri thought as the principal analytical framework for interpreting the legitimacy and decline of the Second Pahlavi regime. Accordingly, this field has faced a “Research Gap” regarding its relationship with Iran-Shahri thought. The political structure of the Second Pahlavi regime has not previously been examined systematically from both conceptual and operational perspectives.

Therefore, the novelty of this article lies in its attempt, for the first time, to compare the conceptual indicators of Iran-Shahri thought, such as justice, king-centeredness, divine glory, and military capability, with the policies, discourse, and practices of the Second Pahlavi regime and, from this perspective, to reassess the “Legitimizing Factors” and the “Factors Contributing to Decline.”

2. Theoretical Foundations: Iran-Shahri Political Thought

The term Iran-Shahri thought in the pre-Islamic period was used to describe a particular type and method of governance, especially with regard to legitimacy. This mode of thought, which represents the model of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled in the Iranian Empire (Sissa, 2012: 15), concerns the survival and continuity of the governmental structure in light of social, political, and cultural relations (Khalatbari et al., 2008 AD/1387 SH: 2). At the same time, failure to observe the conceptual propositions of Iran-Shahri political thought, given the historical consciousness and general culture of a nation, appears to be a factor contributing to the decline and collapse of government. To gain a deeper understanding, the following sections examine the indicators and conceptual propositions of Iran-Shahri political thought.

2.1. King-Centeredness and Cosmic Order

Cosmic order is of great importance in Iran-Shahri political thought. In this context, myths addressed the political justification of the legitimacy of the political system and its political figures. They sanctified these figures by connecting the

earthly system of life with the cosmic order. For example, the king was regarded as the representative of the cosmic king. The earthly king, known as the *shahri-yar* in ancient Iran, was the center of various commands concerning both the celestial and earthly orders (Pouladi et al., 2014: 3).

The rationale underlying cosmic order is that the universe, as a coherent whole, is governed by Ahura Mazda, and that this cosmic order must be administered by an ideal princely government so as to harmonize with the earthly order and correspond to earthly society. It is precisely for this reason that Iran-Shahri political thought speaks of an ideal prince occupying a prominent position (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 74). Thus, Ahura Mazda, as the greatest of the gods, created Darius and entrusted the kingship to him; by the will of Ahura Mazda, Darius was king (Malandra, 1983: 50). To the extent that, according to the principles of Iran-Shahri thought, which emerged from Zoroastrian political theology, the king was regarded as being like God on earth (Tabataba'i, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 115), he enjoyed divine support and assistance, while Ahura Mazda and the other gods endowed him with royal glory and wisdom. Accordingly, kingship derived from a position independent of the gods and was considered sacred (Shomali, 2020: 157).

2.2. Overlap between Religion and Politics

In Iran-Shahri thought and in many of the diverse emphases found in Iranian nationalism, various linguistic, territorial, ethnic, and religious elements are present (Tabataba'inejad, 2014: 210). In this regard, the religious legitimacy of government constitutes a fundamental basis of governance in Iran-Shahri thought. Indeed, government may have been established for the implementation of religion. Therefore, religion is one of the king's extensions and must constitute the foundation of his kingship. "The king must remain faithful to his religion. This is because kingship and religion are twins," (Tabatabai, 1995: 20) "Born from the same womb, and these two should never be separated." (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 78). Accordingly, the ruler was advised to consult with religious scholars. This was because the king was regarded as having the right to rule over his subjects, since he attained this authority by virtue of divine grace and choice. This is what has been termed the theory of divine right to authority (Ashtiani et al., 2021: 125). The king must preserve religion because his crown and throne depend upon it (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 78).

2.3. Expansion of Justice-Centeredness

Justice in the Iran-Shahri context, which in turn became connected with the political philosophy of major Islamic thinkers such as *al-Farabi* and *Khwaja Nasir*

al-Din al-Tusi, as well as with the tradition of “*Andarz-nama*” literature, particularly that of *Nizam al-Mulk al-Tusi*, identifies kings and rulers as the most central element in establishing a good state through justice (Ghezelsofla et al., 2019: 139). Kingship was regarded as an institution that guaranteed the “Lasting Unity” and “Interests” of the people by defending their right to participate in decision-making, a conception referred to as Iran-Shahri. In fact, the concept of kingship transformed the people’s “Unstable Equilibrium” into a stable “Nation” through “Just Kingship.” (Tabatabaiejad, 2014: 210)

However, if disagreements among its members become so extensive that they no longer possess the virtue of equality, it cannot constitute an ideal constitutional or political state. An ideal state is defined as “A community of equals whose aim is the best and highest possible life. In this context, the highest good is happiness, and this entails the expenditure of energy and the complete exercise [of human capacities].” (Prasad, 2012: 52)

The importance of justice lies in its role in regulating relations among the constituent elements of society. Emphasis on a hierarchical order and social security is based on solidarity and the preservation of unity, solidarity that must revive the collective unconscious. In this context, kings are encouraged to uphold justice and morality (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 74). Therefore, stable power is based on the preservation of hierarchy or, more precisely, on justice. In other words, justice enables government to reach its ultimate end. Kingship is a gift from God, and the king must show gratitude to God by establishing justice. The exercise of such justice fulfills the people’s demands, which in turn consolidates the state. Conversely, with the dissolution of the social order, the state becomes corrupt, and kings fall (Ghezelsofla et al, 2019: 141-142). In this context, increasing social transformation and mobility across classes lead to unemployment, while unemployment results in the loss of industry, sedition, and incivility. When professions disappear, justice and security disappear as well (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 79). In other words, the role and importance of justice have been regarded as essential to the survival of government and, consequently, as a criterion for the implementation of domestic policy and a constraint on the external conduct of despotic rulers.

2.4. Avoidance of Despotism and Orientation toward Rationality

Within the order based on Iran-Shahri thought, everything derives from divine providence, while the king’s authority also derives from his absolute authority. No one, whether humble or noble, has the right to disobey the caliph, because his legitimacy derives from the proof of God. Nevertheless, legitimate power is not identical to force. Force has only natural limits, whereas legitimate power is

subject to formal legal constraints (McClelland, 1996: 8) and does not entail a tendency toward despotism. In this regard, Tabataba'i emphasizes the inherently pluralistic and rational characteristics of society and refers to this as the spirit of Iran-Shahri thought. This spirit was embodied and articulated in a form of governance known as imperial kingship. The king was regarded as the leader of diverse ethnic peoples inhabiting different territories and possessing different religions, languages, and customs. Accordingly, the imperial kingship constituted a state composed of different peoples. Tabataba'i argues that this form of statecraft is incompatible with despotism, which leads to political uniformity at the expense of pluralism. In fact, "Without such plurality, the imperial kingship cannot exist." (Boroujerdi et al., 2014: 3)

Furthermore, one of the ideals of Iran-Shahri thought was political and religious unity. In this context, during the Sasanian period, Iran-Shahri unity was disrupted by excessive taxation imposed on peasants and social classes that were deeply dissatisfied with their circumstances (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 78). Therefore, rationality within society, and particularly on the part of the king, was essential. Constitutional government possessed three principal elements. First, it was a rule directed toward the general or common interests of the people, in contrast to the rule of a faction or tyrant acting for the benefit of a ruler, one person, or a few individuals. Since it was lawful, government was administered on the basis of general regulations (Prasad, 2012: 52).

All that the king requires for good governance is two types of rational counsel. One strengthens his own authority, while the other legitimizes his rule in the eyes of his people. The former is more appropriate and effective for initiating the king's domination. In contrast, legitimacy-producing consultation generates greater consent among the people and more effectively stimulates their support for the king. This is because the power of the state derives from legitimacy, while legitimacy, in turn, is produced by power (Shomali, 2020: 159).

2.5. Military Capability and the Army in Iran-Shahri Thought

In Iran-Shahri political thought, the authority of the king was based not only on divine legitimacy and God glory, but also on military power and the existence of a strong army, which were regarded as among the principal pillars of the survival of kingship. In ancient texts, the ideal king was one who, in addition to administering justice, possessed the ability to defend the borders and preserve the cohesion of the empire (Rezaei- ad, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 125). The army, as an instrument of order, security, and the expansion of sovereignty, was regarded not merely as an operational institution but also as a symbol of imperial grandeur (Tabataba'i, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 73).

The idea of a powerful army reached its peak particularly during the Sasanian Empire, where the military, alongside religion and the king, constituted the fundamental triad of power (Mazdapour, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 48). Within this framework, military capability was not merely an instrument of warfare but also part of the mechanism through which kingship was legitimized. From the perspective of Iran-Shahri thought, a king without a powerful army was neither capable of protecting the borders nor considered worthy of God glory (Ashraf, 1973 AD/1353 SH: 210).

Table 1. Characteristics and Features of Iran-Shahri Political Thought in the Legitimation and Decline of Government

Conceptual Propositions	Legitimizing Conditions	Factors Contributing to the Decline of Government
The institution of kingship or <i>shahri-yari</i>	Justice-centeredness in society	Injustice by the king
Cosmic order and <i>God glory</i>	Good and people-oriented kingship	Bad kingship
Administration of justice	Proportionality and appropriateness in governance	Disorder in governance
Interweaving of religion and politics	Religious orientation in governance	Anti-religious policies by the king
Military capability and a powerful army	Maintenance of security	Failure to maintain security
Rationalism and absence of despotism	Emphasis on competence and political pluralism	Greed, class disintegration, and lack of pluralism

Source: Research findings

The foregoing discussion indicates that the concept of Iran-Shahri political thought possesses considerable potential for analyzing the processes through which a monarchical government acquires legitimacy and subsequently undergoes decline and collapse, particularly through the exercise of authority that can affect people as subjects within the social sphere. From this perspective, by drawing on the indicators and conceptual propositions of authority and subjecthood within Iran-Shahri political thought, as manifested in the nature of Mohammad Reza Shah's relations with society, the present article seeks to examine the legitimizing factors and the conditions underlying the decline of the First Pahlavi period.

3. Research Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and employs a historical-analytical approach. Its principal objective is to explain the relationship between the components of Iran-Shahri thought and the model of legitimacy of the Second Pahlavi government. Accordingly, conceptual-comparative analysis was employed to extract, interpret, and compare the relevant concepts. The research data were collected through library research and documentary analysis. The sources used include theoretical texts related to Iran-Shahri thought, historiographical works on the Second Pahlavi period, sociological studies of political legitimacy, and documents and analyses reflected in the article. In addition, the table of Iran-Shahri indicators and data related to the discourse and performance of the Pahlavi government, including imperial symbolism, foreign dependence, and cultural policies, was analyzed as secondary data.

4. Distinguishing Genuine Iran-Shahri Elements in the Discourse of the Second Pahlavi Period from Conceptual Similarities

An examination of the discourse and policies of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi reveals that not all components of Iran-Shahri thought were necessarily reflected in his programs and actions in a substantive and concrete manner. Some of these components were consciously and directly incorporated into royal policies. For example, the emphasis on Aryan propositions, the reconstruction of the Academy, and the promotion of the Persian language were all, in one way or another, aligned with Iran-Shahri elements and were manifested in practice.

By contrast, some features of Iran-Shahri thought are observable merely at the level of historical or analytical similarities rather than as deliberately planned or practically implemented policies. These similarities often involved references to myths, ancient narratives, or analytical interpretations of Iran's past, which were primarily symbolic or propagandistic in nature. Their purpose was to legitimize the monarchy and foster a sense of national identity rather than to reflect the historical or cultural realities of Iran-Shahri directly thought.

In this regard, the Pahlavi regime made extensive use of education as a state subsystem for legitimizing the political system. Education thus became an arena for pursuing cultural objectives in the process of modernization. An examination of the content of school textbooks provides insight into the nature of the cultural policies of the Second Pahlavi period.

Table 2. Frequency Percentages of Political-Ideological Themes in Textbooks under the Pahlavi Regime

Theme	Second Grade	Third Grade	Fourth Grade	Fifth Grade	Total	Percentage
Pre-Islamic Iranian myths and traditions	7	9	4	5	25	39
Praise of the Shah	0	8	3	0	11	18
Government propaganda (modernization efforts)	0	6	3	0	9	14
Patriotism	1	2	4	2	9	14
Benevolent ruler	0	2	3	1	6	9
Extreme patriotism	0	0	0	4	4	6
Total	8	27	17	12	64	100

Source: Ayvazi, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 263

Therefore, it can be argued that the discourse of the Second Pahlavi period was a combination of genuine Iran-Shahri elements and their conscious incorporation, on the one hand, and Iran-Shahri conceptual and symbolic representations, on the other, which were employed as political and ideological instruments. This distinction demonstrates that an analysis of the Pahlavi discourse requires careful attention to the boundary between what was genuinely implemented in practice and what was merely represented symbolically or historically.

5. Legitimizing Factors of the Second Pahlavi Period

Iran-Shahri thought is regarded as one of the factors contributing to the continuity of Iran's political and cultural life, embodying the ideas and patterns of statecraft associated with the Sasanian government. In the following discussion, an attempt is made to examine the influence of Iran-Shahri political thought in legitimizing the government of the Second Pahlavi period.

The Second Pahlavi period is considered a highly significant era in the formation of Iran's political-social identity discourse. During this period, an independent, centralized, and powerful government with a distinctive political

ideology emerged and sought, through the use of both soft and hard power, to transform society in accordance with its own agenda. It appears that an analysis of the governmental structure and the path it pursued toward legitimization depends on the factors that contributed to its formation.

If we accept that the political and social culture of society played a significant role in the establishment and development of the state structure (Naqibzadeh, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 74), it can necessarily be argued that this factor likewise influenced the Second Pahlavi state. In fact, Mohammad Reza Shah sought ways to acquire legitimacy and present the Pahlavi government as legitimate in order to legitimize and preserve his power. He was able to draw upon Iran-Shahri political thought in pursuit of this objective, as discussed below.

5.1. Emphasis on the Iranian Royal Tradition

In Iran, loyalty to the state resembled the relationship between ruler and subject within a religious monarchical system grounded in Zoroastrianism (USI Publications, 2012: 177). During this period, the government's entire propaganda apparatus and official press were mobilized to construct a charismatic image of Reza Shah and a deified conception of the Pahlavi monarchy, rooted in Iran-Shahri thought. In fact, the machinery of the Pahlavi government made considerable efforts to disseminate various myths of nationalism, particularly through the new medium of television. The major ceremonies of the period, including the coronation, the commemoration of 2,500 years of Iranian monarchy, and the fiftieth anniversary of Pahlavi rule, were essentially visual spectacles intended to impress ordinary people with the majesty and grandeur of the Shah (Ansari, 2017: 285). The purpose of the 2,500-year celebrations was to identify the Shah not only with Cyrus the Great but also to associate him with the great historical monuments and achievements of Iran's past (Ansari, 2017: 302). Mohammad Reza Shah went so far as to hold his coronation in 1350 by paying homage to his self-proclaimed ancient predecessor, Cyrus the Great, at the king's tomb in Pasargadae (Ramazani, 2004: 554).

Accordingly, it can be argued that the Second Pahlavi government sought to legitimize Mohammad Reza Shah through the revival of the Iranian royal tradition and Iran-Shahri thought. In this context, before the Shah could effectively identify himself with Cyrus, the Achaemenid king first had to be introduced and familiarized to the general public. Thus, during the Second Pahlavi period, Cyrus was described in the following terms: "From the beginning of our glorious history, our country has been renowned for peace, friendship, and humanity, and this can be clearly demonstrated by studying the methods and policies of the great kings, such as Cyrus the Great, whose efforts made it possible for us to

celebrate the 2,500th anniversary of the Iranian monarchy next year.” (Ansari, 2017: 303)

This was a situation centered on the institution of kingship as the principal axis of the Iranian state and society. In this regard, political elites regarded the White Revolution as a means of consolidating the Shah’s power and authority and essentially associated social and economic reforms with a monarchy in which the monarch reigned rather than governed (Ansari, 2017: 230-231). Accordingly, the Second Pahlavi government, by drawing on Iran-Shahri symbols and historical myths, particularly Mohammad Reza Shah’s identification with Cyrus the Great, and by employing the media and official rituals, sought to strengthen the legitimacy of the monarchy and establish kingship as the principal axis of political power and national identity.

5.2. Mohammad Reza Shah’s Support for Religiosity and Islamism

Throughout Iran’s history, which encompasses one of the world’s oldest centers of human habitation and civilization, religion and religious commitment have constituted an established and demonstrable reality. Accordingly, a reciprocal relationship existed between the political life of Iranians and the religious and sectarian beliefs of society. The two spheres of religion and government, both of which belonged to the public sphere of society, overlapped in many instances in fulfilling their respective material and spiritual interests. Governments were founded upon religious and sectarian foundations. At the same time, kings and rulers sought to strengthen the foundations of their political power by expressing interest in the prevailing beliefs of society and gaining the support of the religious establishment of their time (Zamani Mahjoub, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 43).

In this context, following the events of Shahrivar 1320 and the departure of Reza Shah, his young son, Mohammad Reza Shah, came to power. The young Shah changed his father’s approach, visited religious authorities, and established good relations with them. During this period, when greater freedoms were introduced in the country, people once again had an opportunity to revive their lost traditions. Ayatollah Borujerdi, who was responsible for the affairs of the Shi’a community, maintained good relations with the Shah and prohibited religious hardliners from intervening in politics. Consequently, relations between the government and the religious establishment remained favorable (Basirat Manesh, 1999 AD/1378 SH).

The Shah participated in interviews, religious ceremonies, festivals, and mourning observances, and presented himself as one who had received divine favor and was the object of God Almighty’s and the impeccable Imams’ (AS) attention and support (Center for Historical Documents, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 418).

It can therefore be argued that he sought to use religion and tradition as sources of legitimacy for the monarchy.

The Shah undertook measures that led religious forces to believe that Mohammad Reza Shah had abandoned his father's approach to combating religion. His first measure in relation to religious currents was the return of Ayatollah Qomi. He also visited Ayatollah Borujerdi while the latter was hospitalized and allowed the clergy and religious forces considerable freedom in carrying out religious affairs. These measures ushered the clergy into a new phase of activity and strengthened this social group, enabling the Shah, with the assistance of the clergy, to preserve Iran's unity in the face of foreign forces seeking to partition the country (Najafzadeh, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 8). Indeed, by late 1332, when the Shah had reasserted his royal power with the assistance of the United States, leading clerics had already expressed strong active or implicit support for the Iranian monarchy as an institution (Skocpol, 1982: 273).

In fact, by rebuilding positive relations with religious institutions and the Shi'i clergy, Mohammad Reza Shah used religion and religious traditions as a source of legitimacy for the monarchy. His measures, including restoring the role of Ayatollah Qomi and supporting religious activities, strengthened the clergy and elicited their implicit support, thereby contributing to the consolidation of the monarchy and the preservation of national unity in the face of foreign pressures.

5.3. Emphasis on Iranianism and Antiquarianism

Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's theories and policies aimed at reconstructing Iran's national identity were shaped particularly around Aryan propositions and the cultural heritage of ancient Iran (Bashiriye, 1383: 120). By drawing upon mythical and historical elements, the Shah sought to consolidate his personal and dynastic position within Iran's political culture. Among his symbolic initiatives was his desire to add the title "Aryamehr" (Sun of the Aryans) to the list of royal titles. This initiative continued Reza Shah's aspiration to establish a grand dynastic state (Abrahamian, 2008: 123).

The White Revolution, as a turning point, reflected Mohammad Reza Shah's effort to formulate a coherent ideological program that reconstructed modernity and dynastic nationalism in the form of "Pahlavism" (Ansari, 2017: 230). This program was designed not merely as a symbolic project, but also to consolidate the political position and legitimacy of the monarchy in relation to society and history. The Shah sought not only to be perceived as a progressive and benevolent monarch but also to present himself as the founder of a new and revolutionary order. This required linking monarchical power to the historical and

mythical teachings of ancient Iran (Ansari, 2017: 231).

One important dimension of these policies was the emphasis on consolidating loyalty to the Shah and allegiance to the government, which was also reflected in education and curricula. This demonstrated how the state, by associating itself with ancient history, sought to establish the foundations for its continuity and legitimacy (Zanjanieh et al., 2021 AD/1400 SH: 110).

On the other hand, the Shah's identity-building policy, based on the ideology of Iran's glorious ancient past, was accompanied by an exclusionary approach toward neighboring countries and non-Iranian cultures. This approach, sometimes referred to as "Neo-Achaemenid Aryan nationalism," highlighted the contrast between Iranians and Islam and presented an interpretation of history in which the Arab conquest was portrayed as a negative event responsible for cultural and political decline (Mereu, 2019: 774). On this basis, Mohammad Reza Shah's nationalism functioned as an instrument for legitimizing the state and advancing modernization, while simultaneously providing Iranians with a framework through which to define themselves in contrast to their Arab and Turkic neighbors and in alignment with Europeans (Martin, 2021).

Furthermore, the White Revolution was employed not only as an instrument of economic and social modernization but also as a means of national integration and consolidating the position of the monarchy within society. By offering economic promises to the peasantry while simultaneously putting pressure on landowners and traditional classes, the Shah was able to consolidate his support and legitimacy and manage ethnic and class tensions (Ansari, 2017: 232; Abrahamian, 1982: 435). The Shah's three-week visit to Azerbaijan in 1326 and the warm reception he received from the people demonstrated the direct role of the monarchy in fostering a sense of national unity, while this popularity, particularly following periods of crisis, was regarded as an indication of his social legitimacy (Ansari, 2017: 137). During the 1350s, coinciding with the rise in oil revenues, Mohammad Reza Shah focused on highlighting Iranian culture and identity through the revival of the Academy and the promotion of the Persian language. The purpose of these measures was to preserve the status of the Persian language and to study Iranian languages and dialects in order to enhance national awareness (Martin, 2021). Accordingly, it can be argued that Mohammad Reza Shah sought to strengthen the legitimacy of the monarchy and link modernization to a national-dynastic identity by reconstructing Iran's national identity on the basis of its ancient cultural and historical heritage, particularly Aryan and mythical concepts, and through programs such as the White Revolution, the promotion of loyalty to the Shah, national education, and the revival of the Academy. These policies simultaneously served as instruments for

consolidating political power and creating national unity by emphasizing Iranian culture and highlighting historical differences with neighboring countries.

5.4. Mohammad Reza Shah's Promotion of Justice

The Allied occupation of Iran in 1941 abruptly brought Reza Shah's rule to an end and inaugurated a new era characterized by a greater degree of pluralism and civil-society activity, empowering a range of political groups, including communists, liberals, and Islamists. The parliament was no longer merely a rubber stamp and now occupied a central position in Iranian politics. This political opening generated hopes that Iran might develop along democratic lines, with power transferred to parliament and state institutions entrusted to a broader range of social and political actors.

Following Reza Shah's abdication, the judiciary acquired greater independence, and its first major action was the trial of Reza Shah's loyalists in one of the longest trials in modern Iranian history. As noted earlier, under Reza Shah, the police were subject to military regulations that allowed them to bypass or undermine the judiciary at will. One of the first measures adopted by the new government, on September 28, 1941, less than a month after the abdication, was the passage of a law transferring jurisdiction over certain offenses committed by the police and other non-military government personnel (Enayat, 2013: 175). In fact, the occupation of Iran created an environment of pluralism and civil-society activity that strengthened various political groups and increased the role of parliament and judicial institutions. These changes reflected a relative transfer of power from the monarchy to parliament and greater judicial independence, thereby creating opportunities for democratic development and the assignment of responsibilities to a broader range of social actors.

5.5. Establishment of a Powerful Army during the Reign of Mohammad Reza Shah

Following the occupation of Iran during World War II and the abdication of Reza Shah, the new Shah attributed the army's defeat to inadequate mechanization. He believed that other armies had undergone transformations precisely because of such technological deficiencies (Ansari, 2017: 116). During the Second Pahlavi period, the army was regarded as a vital pillar of the monarchy (Ansari, 2017: 250). From the beginning of his reign, the armed forces constituted the principal pillar of Mohammad Reza Shah's government. Accordingly, the Shah was careful to cultivate the loyalty of the officer corps. He therefore provided generous salaries and various benefits, including subsidized housing, free education for their children, commissions and subsidized exchanges, favorable

pensions, and, in some cases, appointments as provincial governors, positions in government ministries, or employment with state-owned companies. The Shah also periodically reappointed officers in order to prevent the emergence of power blocs within the army. He was likewise required to approve all troop movements and military operations, thereby reinforcing his control and initiative among his commanders. This system of control served the Shah well under normal circumstances (Eisenstadt, 2011: 2).

During the Second Pahlavi period, the army was regarded as a vital pillar of the monarchy, and Mohammad Reza Shah consolidated his power and influence over the armed forces by strengthening officers' loyalty through extensive salaries and benefits and by maintaining close control over military movements. In addition to ensuring the army's support, this mechanism prevented the emergence of independent power blocs within the military institution and constituted a principal pillar of the monarchy's stability.

6. Analysis of the Factors Influencing the Decline of the Second Pahlavi Period

The return to Sasanian and Achaemenid paradigms was misguided. Its objective was to legitimize the Pahlavi government through authoritarian methods. Mohammad Reza Shah's grand objective of transforming Iran into a "Great Civilization" was shaped more by dynastic ambitions than by the pursuit of Iran's national interests. To achieve this objective, he sought to arm Iran to the teeth so that it could become one of the world's five major conventional military powers (Ramazani, 2004: 554). This section seeks to explain the factors contributing to the decline and eventual collapse of the Pahlavi regime in light of the conceptual propositions of Iran-Shahri political thought.

6.1. Neglect of Religion and Anti-Religious Policies

There had been no confrontation between the Shah and religious forces until the early 1960s. Despite his outward displays of religiosity, Mohammad Reza Shah was, in his personal, political, financial, and moral life, a highly indifferent and permissive individual who was deeply aligned with the anti-cultural, anti-religious, and secular policies of the West (Center for Historical Documents, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 420). In fact, the government's modernization policy had seriously challenged the position of traditional classes, including the clergy, and marked the beginning of striking tensions between religious forces and the Shah.

The most controversial aspect of his ideological outlook concerned his vision for the future. He began by advocating the development of a "Model" country, which by the early 1970s had evolved into the concept of a "Great Civilization."

This represented his vision of a new order that would successfully combine the traditional institution of kingship with “Modernity.” (Ansari, 2017: 250)

“Mohammad Reza was always dissatisfied with the fact that Islam was identified as the official religion in the Constitution, saying that this was contrary to human rights!... Mohammad Reza called the clergy the “Black Reaction.” He believed that the best way to confront the mullahs was to weaken Islam, which had been imposed upon the Iranian nation through the Arab conquest of Iran, and that as long as the people did not abandon religious fanaticism, we would not achieve progress and development!” (Ghazanfari, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 157)

Accordingly, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Shah used state power and modernization programs to attack the Shi‘i clergy. The top-down land reforms of the 1960s dispossessed many clerics as well as religious institutions and served to sever the clergy’s ties with the landed upper class. Educational, welfare, and legal reforms created modern, professional, and state-sponsored competitors for the Shi‘i clergy in all of their historically important social functions (Skocpol, 1982: 274).

Furthermore, under the provisions of the second phase of the land reforms, holders of *Waqf* properties were required to negotiate ninety-nine-year lease agreements with *Nasq* shareholders. In most cases, the annual rents paid by the *Nasq* shareholders were lower than those they had paid under the previous system. This reduced the income of the religious scholars from *Waqf* properties (Milani, 1988: 47).

In fact, the Shah’s social modernization program, through the use of state power and modernization policies, confronted the Shi‘i clergy. Land, educational, and legal reforms reduced the economic and social influence of the clergy. They restricted their traditional sources of income and historical power. At the same time, the Shah’s ideology pursued the weakening of religion and the reconstruction of a modern political order with the aim of advancing the “Great Civilization.”

6.2. Avoidance of Justice

Under Mohammad Reza Shah, the country’s legal system was based on the assumption that the government could not be wrong. Many historians and experts maintain that under the Pahlavi regime, the judiciary had become almost entirely integrated into the executive branch. Judicial decisions reflected the will of the government. Furthermore, with the expansion of military courts and special civilian courts, the jurisdiction of the judiciary was gradually restricted (irdc.ir, 2021).

Government interference in the judiciary progressed to the point that SAVAK,

in the name of national interests, undertook the arrest, interrogation, torture, imprisonment, and execution of individuals without effective oversight or accountability to any individual or institution. As a result, the credibility of the judiciary declined sharply, and the rule of law was effectively absent, because accepting the rule of law would have constrained the Shah's absolute power. The regime's appropriation of the judiciary had a negative impact on the population, to the extent that people became completely disillusioned with the country's judicial system. In an editorial dated 20 Dey 1340, the *Ettela'at* newspaper addressed this issue as follows: "The people have lost hope in justice, and this is the most deadly social danger. The members of the judiciary themselves, even the minister, deputy director-general, and senior-ranking judicial officials, all know that the people have become disillusioned. They regard justice as moderate, and they themselves know that the people are right. But why is the judiciary not reformed, and why are they unable to reform the judiciary?... This is because the judiciary has been placed under a spell, and no one has yet emerged to break it?" (irdc.ir, 2021)

The functioning of the judicial system under the Pahlavi regime turned judges, lawyers, and human-rights activists into one of the first groups to openly express their dissatisfaction with the regime in the years leading up to the Revolution (Kamali, 1997: 184). In May 1977, fifty-three jurists initiated public protest by sending an open letter to the royal palace. In their letter, they accused the government of interfering in the courts and announced the establishment of a special committee to preserve and protect the judiciary from the legislature (Abrahamian, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 619). The extent of injustice under the Second Pahlavi regime was such that in August 1977; sixty-four prominent jurists publicly gathered at a hotel in Tehran and issued a strongly worded statement. In the statement, they accused the government of violating the Constitution, demanded the immediate abolition of all courts inconsistent with the Constitution, and declared that because judges were entrusted with safeguarding the Constitution, they considered it their duty to assume responsibility for defending the independence of the judiciary (Abrahamian, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 620-621).

Therefore, during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, the integration of the judiciary into the executive branch and extensive government interference in judicial affairs weakened the independence of the justice system. At the same time, the rule of law was effectively set aside. This practice not only diminished the credibility of the judiciary but also provoked widespread dissatisfaction among jurists and human-rights activists, demonstrating that the absence of the rule of law was one of the key factors underlying the crisis of legitimacy and the emergence of social opposition in the period preceding the Revolution.

6.3. The Contradiction between Discourse (Deepening Nationalist Sentiments and Antiquarian Interests) and Practice (Importing the Achievements of Western Civilization)

The culmination of Mohammad Reza Shah's nationalism and antiquarian interests can be observed in the 2,500-year celebrations. These celebrations received extensive international media coverage and were attended by numerous heads of state, at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars, at a time when famine and hunger had spread throughout society. While the Shah increasingly dictated the political agenda domestically, many policies and ideological structures were increasingly influenced by developments abroad and by the Shah's desire to broaden his horizons. Consequently, even domestic events were engineered with foreign perceptions in mind; indeed, this aspect became an imperial priority. Television became an important medium in this regard. Thus, whereas the coronation was primarily an Iranian event, the celebration of 2,500 years of Iranian monarchy was essentially an international event (Ansari, 2017: 284).

Since 1332, when the CIA-backed coup removed the nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh and consolidated the Shah's supremacy, a prevailing perception held that he owed his throne to foreign powers, particularly the United States (Eisenstadt, 2011: 1). In 1342, when the United States made its ill-advised demand for a change in the existing status of the agreement concerning the presence of its forces, he did not defend Iran's sovereignty. Likewise, in 1352, when Nixon proposed sending Richard Helms, the former CIA director, as ambassador, the Shah did not object (Limbert, 2010: 532).

In 1342, within the framework of the White Revolution, the Shah launched a series of extensive reforms aimed at modernizing and Westernizing Iran with the support of the U.S. government (Sharma et al., 2014: 1). This resulted in rapid urbanization and the adoption of Western habits and customs by the ruling elite, which alienated traditional and religious elements within Iranian society (Eisenstadt, 2011: 2). In this context, both clerical leaders and activist religious scholars were morally angered by the spread of immorality, permissiveness, and foreign culture under the Pahlavi regime (Arjomand, 1986: 401). To the extent that young intellectuals in the 1970s turned toward Islam and presented it as a revolutionary ideology. A defining feature of this new ideology was hostility toward the West and an emphasis on the local economy and culture (Bashiriyeh, 1982: 70).

Furthermore, the Shah's modernization programs required a substantial presence of foreign personnel, including 9,000 American technicians and military advisers and 60,000 foreign workers and businessmen, most of whom were American. The widespread presence of these foreign workers, who often re-

ceived considerably higher wages than their Iranian counterparts, generated resentment and evoked nationalist and religious sensitivities (Eisenstadt, 2011: 2). In this process, he transformed Iran into one of the major purchasers of U.S. arms, a client state of the United States, and an American policeman in the Persian Gulf (Ramazani, 2004: 554). In this regard, Asadollah Alam, the Minister of the Imperial Court, provides an illustrative account of Mohammad Reza Shah's compliance. According to Alam, President Nixon apparently asked the Shah to provide financial assistance to the notorious Committee for the Re-election of the President during the 1972 presidential campaign, and the Shah considered himself obligated to make the payment (Limbert, 2010: 532). Thus, it can be argued that Mohammad Reza Shah was perceived as placing foreign interests before those of his own country. In this regard, many Iranians regarded his agreement with the Pentagon concerning the status of forces as a violation of Iran's national interests, as it effectively revived the hated foreign capitulatory privileges in Iran. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini called the agreement a "Document of Iran's Enslavement," while one of the most popular revolutionary slogans encapsulated the sentiment: "American Shah." (Ramazani, 2004: 554)

According to Amuzegar, the Shah's downfall resulted from the conflict between Western modernization and traditional, religious, economic, and social structures. The Shah's human-rights violations committed in the course of his modernization policies, generated popular resentment both toward the Shah's policies and toward modernization itself. Consequently, Iranians turned toward the alternative and negative conception of modernization advanced by Khomeini's camp. On the other hand, because the Shah pursued Westernization recklessly, the reaction was naturally violent (Amuzegar, 1991: 37).

To the extent that the 2,500-year celebrations and Mohammad Reza Shah's modernization programs, while emphasizing Iran's ancient identity, simultaneously relied heavily on the United States and Western-oriented elites, they distanced society from local traditions and values. The presence of foreign advisers and workers, the adoption of Western culture, and modernization policies, together with human-rights violations, aroused nationalist and religious sensitivities and created the conditions for Iranians to turn toward an Islamic revolutionary ideology and express widespread opposition to the monarchy and Westernization.

6.4. Disregard for the Law and Authoritarian Rule

From the perspective of Iran-Shahri thought, and particularly the notion of a divine right to authority, the foundations of despotism are reinforced (Ashtiani et al., 2021: 125). According to this theory, it is God who chooses the Shah, not the

people, and their votes cannot interfere with the Shah's exercise of power. God has also endowed him with the arts of kingship; therefore, he does not need to acquire knowledge or learn the art of governance (Sonn, 1996: 125). This may explain why, despite the Pahlavi regime's efforts to implement the Constitution properly, it refrained from adhering to the Constitution once it had consolidated its power (Esmaeili, 2019: 121).

The worst-case scenario for an Iran-Shahri society is the disintegration of social classes and the disappearance of professions. If the classes disintegrate, chastity, modesty, and integrity, the moral foundations of society, are destroyed (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 79). In this context, Mohammad Reza Shah focused primarily on socioeconomic modernization while neglecting political development. This, in turn, led to the erosion of institutions and severed the relationship between the state and the people (Abrahamian, 1982: 438). Under such circumstances, students and graduates from the lower-middle and middle strata, particularly those studying applied sciences and engineering, found themselves excluded from the upper echelons of the Westernized social order and from senior government positions (Arjomand, 1986: 401). According to Jerrold Green, political dissatisfaction generated an increasingly polarized political environment. At the same time, large numbers of Iranians who had previously remained politically passive developed anti-regime sentiments and adopted revolutionary forms of behavior (Green, 1982: 115).

The absence of political pluralism, combined with the Shah's growing reliance on personally handling domestic political affairs, resulted in the emergence of a form of political stability centered on the Shah's actions. Domestic politics throughout most of this period, particularly until the late 1970s, revolved around the commands of a patrimonial Shah, surrounded by politicians who competed with one another for his greater favor and recognition (Ansari, 2017: 284). The Shah personally made most economic and political decisions without being accountable to anyone (Amjad, 2001: 167). In addition, after rebuilding an army that had been dismantled as a result of foreign invasion, he established a political police force. He expanded the bureaucracy in order to control all the channels of Iranian society and establish autocratic rule (Abrahamian, 1982: 437).

In fact, Iran's authoritarian regime did not permit the implementation of a democratic process, even though it formally remained a constitutional monarchy. In practice, it functioned more as a dictatorial monarchy (Hooglund, 1981: 113). Following the 1332 coup, the Shah harshly persecuted his opponents and restricted political freedoms. As a result of the repression associated with the "Police State," opponents were forced to operate underground and consequently became more radicalized (Salehi, 1988: 10). Moreover, in 1354, the Shah ad-

opted a one-party system and consequently established the Rastakhiz (Resurrection) Party virtually overnight. The Shah used the Rastakhiz Party as an instrument for implementing his policies and establishing a one-party political system loyal to him. Party members enjoyed numerous opportunities, while opponents of the party were regarded as traitors (Milani, 1988: 124).

This was despite the fact that in 1340, in "Mission for My Country," the Shah had written: "If I were a dictator rather than a constitutional monarch, I might perhaps be tempted to establish a single, all-encompassing party, like the party Hitler established." Nevertheless, the democratic and constitutional façade, as well as the commitment to the Constitution, was ultimately completely abandoned with the establishment of the one-party system in 1354 (Foran, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 467).

Thus, the impact of despotism on the Iranian Revolution was primarily manifested in creating the conditions for popular uprising (Haghighat, 2000: 259). In some of its fundamental characteristics, the Revolution did not conform to the conventional norms of Western revolutions, because the state was not merely an ordinary dictatorship; rather, it was an absolute and arbitrary regime that lacked political legitimacy and a broad social base altogether (Katouzian, 2009: 20). Politically, it is not sufficient to say that violence and authority are opposites. Where one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence emerges when authority is threatened, but allowing violence to follow its own course ultimately results in the disappearance of authority (Arendt, 1970: 56). In this regard, the establishment of the Rastakhiz Party had two profound, and perhaps one could say disastrous, consequences for the regime. It intensified state control over the salaried middle class, the urban working class, and rural agricultural cooperatives. The state's reach extended further into these segments of the population. More importantly, the state now threatened to enter spheres from which the traditional middle class, particularly the bazaar merchants and the clerical establishment, had previously kept it excluded (Abrahamian, 2008: 151). All social relations characterized by subjugation or the enslavement of freedom of thought are not only incompatible with the seriousness and significance of authority but also undermine fundamental human rights. The imposition of absolute obedience and submission constitutes a violation of the freedom and dignity of others and is certainly characteristic of despotic relations rather than authority.

6.5. The Dysfunction of Mohammad Reza Shah's Army

On the eve of the Revolution, "Iran's senior military leaders could not decide whether to continue supporting the government headed by Bakhtiar or to support the Islamic opposition. While millions of people participated in massive

demonstrations in Tehran and throughout the country, the army experienced its first major act of revolt against the political system: on December 11, 1978, army conscripts attacked the Lavisan barracks in Tehran, killing more than one person and wounding dozens of officers and numerous others. This incident inspired revolts and insurgent actions elsewhere.” (Eisenstadt, 2011: 3-4)

Students and technicians, supported by the Feda’iyan and the Mojahedin, confronted the Imperial Guard at the main air force base near Jaleh Square. However, the chiefs of staff declared neutrality and confined their soldiers to their barracks. Of the three pillars that the Pahlavis had constructed to reinforce their government, the army had become immobilized, the bureaucracy had joined the Revolution, and court support had become a source of profound embarrassment. The voice of the people was more powerful than the Pahlavi monarchy (Abrahamian, 2008: 162). Accordingly, in the sequence of events leading to the Islamic Revolution, the army ultimately exhausted, weakened, and paralyzed the Pahlavi regime (Skocpol, 1982: 272). Amid signs of the disintegration of the army and the opposition’s looting of government arms, the council ordered all military personnel to return to their bases. The army’s declaration of neutrality effectively handed control of the country to Khomeini, after which Shapour Bakhtiar resigned, formally marking the end of the Shah’s regime (Eisenstadt, 2011: 4). During the Islamic Revolution, the armed forces came under intense pressure in response to the growing strength of the movement. At critical moments of the Revolution, divisions emerged along class lines within the armed forces, causing them to lose their cohesion. In this context, lower-ranking members of the armed forces attempted to gauge the attitudes of the masses in light of their commitment and firm determination to transform the existing order.

7. Critical Analysis: The Instrumental Use of Iran-Shahri Thought under the Second Pahlavi and the Reasons for the Failure of Legitimation

Based on the foregoing discussion, the failure of the Pahlavi political system to establish the ideal of the Good as the basis of domination reveals the absence of a symbolic sphere and creates divisions within the social sphere. In addition to these divisions, the king-centered form of government drives the subject toward efforts to effect change and overcome loss within the symbolic structure. Revolution, therefore, constitutes the most magnificent and compelling political spectacle through which an attempt is made to symbolize the real world and overcome disorder within the symbolic order. During this brief moment following the collapse of the old order and preceding the rise of the new order to

power, a gap can be discerned within the symbolic structure, and the presence of the political can be felt. Such an interpretation brings ideas of revolution closer to the political sphere. For example, the confrontation between the subject and authority in the Iranian Islamic Revolution, together with the fantasy of a return to the self or the emergence of an antiquarian discourse resulting from the disruption in the process of aligning Iranian identity with others bears traces of this phenomenon. The fantasy of returning to the self-emerged as a response to the Western-oriented and antiquarian symbolic structure of the Pahlavi regime, within which the subject had become alienated from itself. Subsequently, Iranian society's desire to align its identity with political Islam moved toward a return to the self (Sarhadi et al., 2021 AD/1400 SH: 66).

According to Amuzegar, Iranians have always been prepared to accept order and authority pragmatically. Iranians fear power when necessary and may even respect it, but deep within themselves they possess strong impulses toward reconsideration and reassessment. Accordingly, their artistic and mystical expressions have served to bridge the gap between their spiritual heritage and the materialism and modern rationalism of the West. Owing to the power and attractiveness of their culture, they possess a unique capacity to transform defeat into victory and to compel foreign invaders to adopt their customs, values, and way of life (Amuzegar, 1991: 100).

In this regard, one of the key points in examining the relationship between Iran-Shahri thought and the policies of the Second Pahlavi period is the distinction between the "Symbolic and Instrumental Use" and the "Institutional Realization" of these components. Mohammad Reza Shah selectively and propagandistically employed many Iran-Shahri symbols and rituals in order to reproduce the legitimacy of the monarchy; however, the contradiction between discourse and practice prevented this symbolic legitimacy from developing into sustainable legitimacy.

First, the legitimacy of the Pahlavi regime was largely "Performative." The 2,500-year celebrations, the coronation at Pasargadae, and the conferral of the title "Aryamehr" were all symbolic representations of the grandeur of the Iranian monarchy that remained largely at the level of propaganda (Ansari, 2017: 284-285, 302). These rituals presented an image of an authoritative Shah in the short term; however, at the social level, the contrast between the luxury and grandeur of the court and people's livelihood problems and economic inequality transformed symbolic legitimacy into its opposite (Ramazani, 2004: 554).

Second, there was an obvious contradiction between rhetoric and practice. In the White Revolution, the Shah spoke of justice and welfare, but independent political and judicial institutions were weakened, and justice was reduced to

the level of rhetoric (Kamali, 1997: 184; Skocpol, 1982: 273-274). As a result, society, particularly the emerging middle class, experienced a gap between the government's claims and social realities.

Third, dependence on foreign powers undermined the Shah's nationalist legitimacy. While the Shah claimed continuity with national grandeur by invoking Cyrus and Iran-Shahri heritage, the presence of foreign advisers and extensive ties with the United States and Britain undermined this claim (Limbert, 2010: 532; Eisenstadt, 2011: 2). This contradiction hollowed out national-historical legitimacy from within.

Fourth, the Shah's use of Iran-Shahri symbols generated divergent messages for different social constituencies. State-dependent elites viewed them as symbols of national power. In contrast, the clergy and the bazaar largely interpreted them as signaling the marginalization of Islamic traditions, and the lower classes perceived them as reflecting indifference to their everyday problems (Bayat, 1987: 77; Arjomand, 1986: 401). Thus, the Pahlavi Iran-Shahri discourse did not produce a homogeneous basis of legitimacy at the social level.

Fifth, instead of establishing participatory and justice-oriented institutions, the regime relied on instruments of repression. SAVAK and the army played prominent roles in controlling society, but this excessive reliance on coercion eroded the monarchy's soft legitimacy (Abrahamian, 1982: 435; Salehi, 1988: 10). The experience of the Revolution demonstrated that symbolic legitimacy without sustainable institution-building could not withstand social and political crises (Skocpol, 1982: 272-274).

Ultimately, components such as justice and pluralism are inherently institutional and enduring dimensions of Iran-Shahri thought. In contrast, the Second Pahlavi regime employed them only at the level of slogans and propaganda. This structural gap between "Symbol" and "Institution" was a principal reason for the failure of the Second Pahlavi's Iran-Shahri project to generate legitimacy (Mansourzadeh et al., 2021: 74; Shomali, 2020: 159).

Accordingly, it becomes clear that Iran-Shahri thought during the Second Pahlavi period was present primarily at the symbolic and propagandistic level rather than at the institutional and practical level. Although the Pahlavi regime's use of these elements generated symbolic legitimacy in the short term, its distance from the social realities of Iranian society ultimately contributed to a crisis of legitimacy and the decline of the monarchy.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that the relationship between Iran-Shahri political thought and the legitimacy of the Second Pahlavi regime was complex

and multilayered, combining substantive, symbolic, and instrumental elements. The findings indicate that a significant portion of the cultural, symbolic, and ideological policies of the Second Pahlavi government drew upon Iran-Shahri components; however, this appropriation largely remained at the symbolic and propagandistic level and did not progress to sustainable and practical institutionalization. This gap between “Symbol” and “Institution” ultimately constituted one of the key factors in the decline of the political legitimacy of the Second Pahlavi regime.

The evidence demonstrates that, in its efforts to consolidate its legitimacy, the Second Pahlavi regime employed such elements as king-centeredness, Iranianism, God glory, the promotion of the Persian language, and the revival of pre-Islamic symbols. These elements were rooted in Iran-Shahri thought and were represented within the official ideology of the monarchy. This approach contributed to strengthening “Symbolic Legitimacy” and consolidating the monarchy’s identity structure in the short term. Nevertheless, as noted above, the substantive foundations of Iran-Shahri thought rest upon justice, cosmic order, the interrelationship between religion and politics, rationalism, avoidance of despotism, and sustainable institution-building. During the Second Pahlavi period, these elements were articulated primarily at the discursive level, while in practice they came into conflict with imitative modernization, the concentration of power, foreign dependence, and political repression. The table presenting the components of Iran-Shahri thought likewise demonstrates that the neglect of each of these components directly contributes to governmental decline.

On the other hand, the documentary analysis conducted in this study indicates that the Pahlavi regime’s excessive reliance on SAVAK and the army, together with its neglect of participatory institutions and social justice, severely weakened the government’s soft legitimacy. Moreover, the cultural and educational policies of the Pahlavi regime demonstrate that, rather than engaging in participatory institution-building, the Second Pahlavi government focused on antiquarianism, royal propaganda, glorification of the Shah, and the myths of ancient Iran. This indicates the predominance of “Symbolic Iran-Shahri Thought” over “Institutional Iran-Shahri Thought.”

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that the substantive elements of Iran-Shahri thought, justice, the interrelationship between religion and politics, rationalism, pluralism, and institution-building, were not realized during the Second Pahlavi period, whereas its symbolic elements, king-centeredness, God glory, antiquarianism, and ritual legitimation, were employed as instruments of monarchical propaganda. This “Duality between symbol and institution” meant that, rather than strengthening legitimacy, Iran-Shahri thought contributed to a

crisis of legitimacy and ultimately to the collapse of the monarchy. Accordingly, it can be argued that instead of constructing a nation-state based on the enduring principles of Iran-Shahri thought, the Second Pahlavi regime primarily employed this tradition as an ideological instrument of legitimation. This selective and propagandistic appropriation, when combined with the failure to align the political structure with the social values of Iranian society and with the growing rupture between state and society, ultimately not only failed to create sustainable legitimacy but also contributed to the intensification of the legitimacy crisis and the collapse of the regime.

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Contemporary Researches on Islamic Revolution



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

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

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. Theoretical Framework

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Research Method

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

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

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

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

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

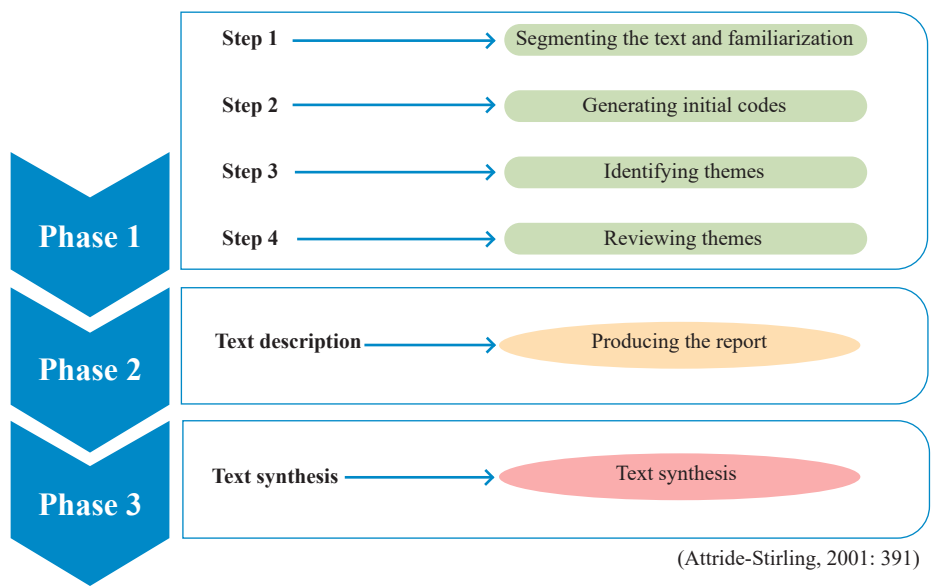
In the present study, avoiding quantitative and statistical analysis, we examine themes related to the public sphere in the constitutions of two distinct periods and employ an integrated model based on the following two approaches.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Habermas's Thought

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Designed by the author

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Analysis of the Findings

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

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

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

A) Equal and Free Public Participation

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

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

B) Communicative Rationality as the Foundation of Legitimacy

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

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

C) Social Oversight and Transparency of Power

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

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

D) Institutional Independence of the Public Sphere

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

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

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

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

E) Intermediary Institutions and Dialogical Infrastructures

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ethical Considerations

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

Compliance with Research Ethics

The authors have adhered to ethical principles in conducting and publishing this scientific research, and this has been confirmed by all authors.

Data Availability Statement

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

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Contemporary Researches on Islamic Revolution



Sound as Politics: Aesthetics, Cassette Tapes, and the Redistribution of the Sensible in the Islamic Revolution of Iran

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Scientific Research Article history: Received: 2025-12-04 Received in revised form: 2025-12-28 Accepted : 2025-12-28 Available online: 2026-10-24 Keywords: Islamic Revolution, The Sensible, Rancière, Cassette Tape, Police Order.	Objective: Drawing on Jacques Rancière's theoretical framework, this study examines the role of the cassette tape in the Islamic Revolution of Iran as an aesthetic-political object. The central research question is: 'How did sound and the cassette tape, within the context of the Islamic Revolution, redistribute the sensible by disrupting the police order governing the distribution of sound and speech, thereby facilitating the emergence of political subjectivity and the formation of a new configuration of politics?' This question is situated within a broader conceptual necessity: understanding the Islamic Revolution cannot be adequately explained merely by reference to classical theories of revolution; rather, the ontological layer of sensory, auditory, and perceptual transformations must also be examined. This dimension has received comparatively limited attention in existing scholarship. Methodology: Adopting an analytical-theoretical approach and drawing on the foundational concepts of Jacques Rancière's thought, including the redistribution of the sensible, the police order, and politics, this study analyzes the position of cassette-tape media in the transformations associated with the Islamic Revolution. Findings: The cassette tape functioned as an apparatus for the redistribution of the sensible: "A phenomenon capable of shifting the boundary between legitimate and inaudible voices and enabling political action by bodies and subjects whom the Pahlavi police order had relegated to marginal positions." It enabled these subjects to move from the status of silent bodies to that of subjects endowed with logos. The findings indicate that this transition constituted the political moment in the Rancièrian sense: a moment in which the police order governing the distribution of sound was disrupted and equal participation in the political field became possible. Unheard discourses became legitimate political speech. This new discourse carried a form of aesthetics of revolutionary speech that, through a different language, constructed a new order of hearing and understanding and brought the lived experience of suffering, resistance, and faith into the public sphere. Conclusion: An examination of the role of cassette tapes demonstrates that this medium generated a political moment in the Rancièrian sense: a moment in which the police order governing the distribution of sound was disrupted and, through the redistribution of the sensible, transformed the possibilities for political agency. This perceptual and auditory transformation played a key role in the formation of a new configuration of politics during the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

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Introduction

Sound, in its ontological and phenomenological dimensions, extends beyond a purely physical phenomenon to serve as a simultaneous manifestation of presence and distance. Each sonic event opens time and space as concrete and lived domains for the subject, shaping perceptions of reality (Ihde, 2007: 185). This experiential quality of sound underpins its significance in social and political contexts. In the political sphere, sound fulfills essential roles: it legitimizes authority, mobilizes society, and organizes collective experience. Its power lies in the ability to unite individuals, reproduce social order, and transform the relationship between individuals and collectives during critical historical moments. Sound not only transmits messages but also produces a shared, tangible, and affective experience that shapes collective thought and emotion (Way, 2019: 475).

Under revolutionary conditions, sound surpasses its function as a communication tool and becomes a medium for consolidating collective identity and shaping historical experience. This influence is not limited to physical presence; by permeating both public and private spaces, sound reproduces political experience across multiple layers of society. As a political mediator, sound is not simply a carrier of content but also generates collective presence and participation, enabling individuals to share a common experience even without physical co-presence (Attali, 1985: 150).

The advent of the cassette tape introduced a technological rupture in the sonic domain. It separated sound from the singular moment of its production, transforming it into an object that could be stored, transmitted, and reproduced. This innovation liberated sound from linear temporality, rendering it an active presence. The cassette's political significance resided in this rupture: "Activities previously dependent on physical proximity, such as sermons, speeches, and protests, could now be reproduced in thousands of copies without the speaker's presence." This development entailed not only message transmission but also the reproduction of collective experience, thereby reinforcing networks of solidarity, anger, hope, and shared identity (LaBelle, 2010: 145).

In contemporary Iranian history, the impact of this sonic rupture on the redistribution of audibility and the opening of new political horizons became especially pronounced during the years preceding the Islamic Revolution. The cassette tape functioned not only as a technology but also as a mechanism for redistributing political power. It emerged as a crucial medium for transmitting messages and facilitating political communication between the populace and the revolutionary leader, particularly during his exile. In this context, sound during the Islamic Revolution represented a concrete and ontological political act that challenged established power structures. The significance of this phenomenon

is underscored by an American journalist's remark that the Shah's gravestone should read: "He forgot the cassette tape." (Farqati, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 64) Hamid Algar similarly identified the cassette as the technological symbol of the Iranian Revolution (Algar, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 135). Due to its central role, European journalists referred to Imam Khomeini's movement as the "Cassette Revolution." (Forati, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 99) In this context, Hemelweit asserts:

"The most striking and innovative use of electronic media for political messaging and communication to date was Imam Khomeini's use of audio recordings in orchestrating the 1979 Iranian Revolution." (Himmelweit, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 18)

Ultimately, during the Islamic Revolution of Iran, sound fundamentally altered perceptions of the political sphere and created new opportunities for participation and resistance.

From this perspective, the study of the cassette tape extends beyond technological history to encompass a revolutionary moment that disrupted the prevailing sensory order and enabled the emergence of a new political arena. Interpreting the cassette tape phenomenon during the Islamic Revolution through Jacques Rancière's theoretical lens, this article addresses the following question: 'How did sound and the cassette tape, within the context of the Islamic Revolution, redistribute the sensible by rupturing the police order governing sound and speech, thereby facilitating the emergence of political subjectivity and a new configuration of politics?'

In analyzing the event of the Islamic Revolution, attention should not be confined solely to economic causes or social structures; rather, the Revolution must be understood as an aesthetic rupture and a fundamental reconfiguration in the distribution of the sensible. This study demonstrates how a sonic medium, the cassette tape, through political agency, became an instrument for fundamentally transforming the aesthetics of politics in Iran and, consequently, redefining the relationship among sound, technology, the sensible, and politics.

Within the context of the Islamic Revolution, the cassette tape functioned precisely as an aesthetic-political technology that challenged the configuration of the sensible established by the Pahlavi regime. Through its capacity to reproduce and disseminate sound in the absence and secrecy of the speaker, this technology liberated the possibility of being heard from the state's media monopoly. It redistributed it to those sectors of society that had been rendered unheard and invisible.

A Rancièrian reading gives this study particular methodological and theoretical significance and addresses precisely the gap that traditional analyses have been unable to fill. The purpose of adopting this theoretical framework is to

move beyond purely content-oriented analyses and examine phenomenologically how the sensory structure of Iranian society was reconfigured on the eve of the Revolution. Rancière's theory elevates the study of the cassette tape from the level of a mere instrument for transmitting messages to the domains of political philosophy, aesthetics, and the configuration of the sensible. It explains how a material instrument could challenge the perceptual foundations of power, because Rancière defines politics as a redistribution or reconfiguration of the sensible.

Ultimately, this study is of vital significance for contemporary political sociology because it not only analyzes a historical event but also elucidates the importance of the perceptual foundations of the political subject in diverse political processes and within the context of contemporary media.

1. Theoretical Foundations: Rancière and the Redefinition of Politics within the Aesthetic Sphere

To understand the role of sound and auditory media in political transformations, it is necessary to turn to theories that do not regard politics merely as a field of institutional action and power relations, but also as a domain of perception and sensory possibilities. In this regard, the thought of Jacques Rancière occupies a unique position. Through his redefinition of the relationship between politics and aesthetics, Rancière introduces a fundamental transformation in this field. In his view, politics is transformed from a concept centered exclusively on power into a process that reorganizes perception, subjectivity, and the possibility for the emergence of voices that have been excluded from the dominant order (Caiazza, 2022: 86). In other words, for Rancière, politics does not occur solely within formal sites of power; it also manifests itself within the field of society's sensory experience, and any transformation in these domains has the potential to alter power relations.

Rancière has centered his intellectual project on rethinking the relationship among politics, aesthetics, and human perceptual experience. This approach constitutes an important point of departure in the transformation of contemporary political philosophy and political sociology, as it demonstrates that political changes emerge not only at the level of formal institutions and structures but also at the level of society's sensory and perceptual experience, where the boundaries of seeing, hearing, and speaking are redefined. It is for this reason that the question of *logos*, that is, who is capable of speaking, constitutes a central axis of the concept of politics in his thought (Janicka, 2020: 123).

If, as Rancière himself explicitly states in "Ten Theses on Politics," his concern throughout his political and historical inquiries is to draw attention to the

aesthetic dimension of political experience (Rancière, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 21). If politics is inherently and inseparably connected to aesthetics, this relationship can be understood through the key concept of the distribution of the sensible. Politics is inherently aesthetic and begins at the point where it starts framing what exists and what can be seen, while simultaneously engaging in a distribution and division concerning a particular form of perception, one that appears to have been structured, rendered intelligible, and made visible (Tajik & Siavashpour, 2000 AD/1399 SH: 42).

Within this approach, politics emerges as an interruption of the dominant perceptual order. This order, which Rancière calls the distribution of the sensible, consists of a set of invisible rules that determine what is audible and visible and who has the right to speak. In other words, the sensible encompasses everything that society recognizes as capable of being seen, heard, spoken, and felt, and it establishes the boundary between legitimate subjects and subjects without a share. The sensible is not a natural given but rather a form of organization of collective experience, an order that prespecifies the limits of what can be seen, heard, and said. In subsequent interpretations, this concept has been explained as the horizon of possible perceptibility (Deranty, 2010) and as the sensory economy of power (Rockhill, 2014).

In this context, Rancière places politics in opposition to the police order. He understands politics not as the activity of institutions and state power, or what he calls the police order, but, as noted above, as an act of dissensus and a reconfiguration of the sensory frameworks that define society (Davis, 2010: 81-83). The police order constitutes the primary framework that determines temporal and spatial divisions and each individual's or group's share of the common. It encompasses the distribution of roles and positions. Within this order, some voices are heard as speech and discourse, whereas others are heard merely as noise or sound. The police is responsible for distributing the sensible (Rancière, 2004: 8).

For Rancière, politics is precisely the act that disrupts this police order. At its core, politics is always an act that produces dissensus within the distribution of the sensible, because it is only through this rupture that those who were previously regarded merely as producing noise become speaking subjects and challenge the police order of the visible and invisible (Rancière, 2015 AD/1394 SH:60). Politics emerges when those who have no share enter the common sensory field and make themselves visible and audible. Accordingly, from Rancière's perspective, politics is not an exercise of power or an attempt to acquire it; rather, above all, it means disrupting the established social order of a society, carried out by groups, classes, or subjects who are not recognized within the existing order.

If the distribution of the sensible constitutes the hidden geometry of society, a geometry that makes participation in politics, art, and public discourse possible and draws the boundaries between appearance and disappearance, meaning and meaninglessness, and speech and silence, then the redistribution of the sensible is precisely the moment when the police order undergoes a rupture. The boundaries of collective experience are reorganized anew (Rancière, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 59). In this way, the horizon of what is considered possible, visible, or sayable is transformed.

Consequently, the redistribution of the sensible is not merely an aesthetic concept but also a way of understanding politics as a radical act. This act challenges structures of exclusion and silence by creating new modes of perception and relationality and opens new possibilities for collective presence and action. Žižek argues that Rancière's approach constitutes a postmodern framework for the politics of resistance, one saturated with aesthetic phenomena (Žižek, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 472).

In this regard, it should be emphasized that aesthetics, for Rancière, is not a domain separate from politics; rather, it is itself one of the mechanisms of politics, because aesthetics, like politics, is concerned with organizing the senses and shaping the possibilities of perception and collective participation. Aesthetics, contrary to the conventional understanding of art and beauty, is a system that organizes sensory and perceptual experience of the world. It is the regime, through which sensory experiences are organized, and the boundary between what can be articulated and what remains silent is established.

Accordingly, aesthetics in Rancière's thought can be regarded as the ground upon which politics in its genuine sense emerges: "When a voice, a mode of perception, or an excluded subject disrupts the existing sensory, ideological order and creates the possibility of a new experience of reality." (Rancière, 1992: 63) Within this framework, any medium or technology capable of transforming the boundaries of hearing, speech, and perception can function as a political agent in the Rancièrian sense and open up a political possibility.

2. The Cassette Tape: The Mechanics of Rupture and the Reproduction of a New Auditory Experience in Iran

Discussing the cassette tape in relation to the mechanics of rupture and the reproduction of a new auditory experience is grounded in the fact that the emergence of the cassette tape in Iran was not merely a technological transformation in the field of sound reproduction. Rather, it represented the introduction of a new form of the mechanics of rupture into the sphere of Iranian auditory experience. This mechanism possessed a socio-cultural character that created new

possibilities for the lived political world of Iranians.

By separating sound from the scene of its production and distributing it across dispersed spaces of everyday life, the cassette made possible a new form of listening, a form of listening that was no longer constrained by official time and space and therefore possessed the capacity to produce a new relationship between the listening subject and the social world (Sterne, 2003: 274).

This experiential transformation constituted the reproduction of a new auditory experience: "The emergence of a form of listening in which listening was not a consumptive act but an aesthetic-political form of participation." The mechanics of rupture became operative precisely at this point: "The cassette transferred the experience of listening from the official scene of address into the invisible and micro-level spaces of the followers' life-world." This transfer was not merely a relocation of sound but a rupture in the aesthetics of the existing order, because sound was no longer subject to the official rules governing the distribution of messages and could, in small rooms, marketplaces, automobiles, and informal gatherings, generate a rhizomatic network of listening.

Within this framework, the mechanics of rupture refer to the material and aesthetic processes through which the cassette shifted the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate voices and between audible and excluded speech, thereby removing the production of sound from the monopoly of official powers. In pre-revolutionary Iran, the cassette transcended its status as a technical object and became an agent of disruption in the established order governing the circulation of sound. By providing the capacity for home recording, inexpensive reproduction, and invisible transmission, this medium produced a rupture in the official auditory regime. This rupture resulted not merely in a change of content but in a transformation of the way sound itself was experienced (Manuel, 1993: 22).

Unlike print media such as leaflets and clandestine pamphlets, which primarily confronted power at the level of meaning, the cassette intervened in auditory apparatuses. It transformed the conditions of possibility for being heard. Its agency therefore lay in rearranging the relations among sound, body, and space, such that sound circulated outside institutional channels and within repeatable auditory situations. Accordingly, examining the cassette tape in relation to rupture and auditory reproduction makes it possible to understand its role in reconfiguring the sensible and shaping political subjects, a role that, in the context of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, constitutes one of the most significant examples of the redefinition of the politics of sound in contemporary history.

2.1. The Police Order and Audible Sound during the Pahlavi Era

In the contemporary history of Iran, the Pahlavi monarchy gradually established an order that can be described as a police order of sound. This arrangement constituted a system whose ultimate objective was to architect and controls the domain of perception, an order that was based not merely on political surveillance but also engineered the sphere of the sensible in all its dimensions, from the media to collective memory. Within such a mechanism, the neutralization of oppositional voices functioned not as a tactical measure but as an aesthetic-security project: "A project aimed at redefining what could be heard, what was permitted to resonate, and what had to disappear into enforced silence."

Particularly after the 28 Mordad coups, the coup government led by Zahedi, with the support of military and security forces, was tasked with suppressing every voice and every possibility of being heard at its inception. This was not merely a political act but also an aesthetic act, that is, the removal of sound from the domain of the sensible. When a journalist was arrested, his voice was eliminated not only in the present but also in the future, because the memory of society was being erased.

Within the imperial police order, sound as a macro-level phenomenon was organized through national radio, state television, and official speeches. It was a voice that flowed from the center to the periphery, from the top downward, and from a single political body toward subordinate collective bodies (Mbembe, 2019: 24).

Within this order, some voices were defined as audible and others as inaudible; some as sayable and others as unsayable. Under the Pahlavi order, official sound was disseminated exclusively through the National Iranian Radio and Television. This institution was not merely a media organization but the direct expression of the Shah's body. The Shah's voice was the official voice and the only audible voice in the public sphere. Radio and television constituted the apparatus for reproducing the power of the Pahlavi ideology of archaic nationalism, defining the place, time, and very nature of what could be heard even before a voice was produced.

In Rancièrian terms, this order assigns bodies to predetermined places and attributes specific activities to each of them (Rancière, 2010: 17). The Shah's body was the body of the speaker; the people's bodies were the bodies of passive listeners. With the establishment of SAVAK in 1343, this mechanism entered a more complex phase (Shahedi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 48), a phase that can be described as the engineering of the voiceless.

SAVAK functioned as a surveillance-aesthetic apparatus, placing not only actual voices but also potential voices within its field of visibility. The control of

dissident activities inside Iran was accompanied by a network monitoring newspapers, associations, student groups, and intellectual circles. Yet its mission did not end there. SAVAK extended the auditory boundaries of Iran beyond the country's borders. The monitoring of the political activities of Iranians abroad, particularly students and activists, demonstrated the emergence of a transnational sonic order, an order in which even voices produced in Europe or the United States were classified in advance as unauthorized.

This may be described as the division of the world and the aesthetics of the sensible during the Second Pahlavi era. In this process, SAVAK's Third Directorate played a central role (ibid: 523). This directorate, which was responsible for controlling revolutionary and political activities, effectively created an auditory-security classification system: "An apparatus that determined which voices were dangerous, which were insignificant, and which were tolerable. This classification was not based on the intrinsic nature of speech but on its relationship to the structure of power, a relationship rooted in a deeper logic than repression: The logic of the distribution of the sensible."

Another key mechanism of the Pahlavi police order was exile. In addition to detention and imprisonment, there was a consistent policy for extinguishing the flames of political struggle: exile. Exile constitutes a form of geographical censorship that renders a voice inaudible not by eliminating its content but by removing the speaker's body from the shared space (Sznajder & Roniger, 2009: 11). When a cleric or journalist was exiled to a deprived city or to another country, his voice was removed from here and displaced to there.

Within the police order of the sensible, this "There" constituted a heterotopia (Mendel, 2011: 160), a space in which the voice existed but remained invisible and inaudible. In Rancièrian terms, exile constituted a spatial division of the sensible.

Another of the most complex layers of the police order of sound involved not the silencing of voices but the production of substitute or artificial voices. By establishing two ostensibly opposing parties, the New Iran Party and the People's Party (and, later, even the single-party Rastakhiz system), the Shah created a form of artificial voice whose function was to perform the appearance of opposition. The People's Party was assigned a dual mission: on the one hand, to present a critical image of the government and, on the other, to attract and neutralize genuine opponents.

This constituted a form of reproductive censorship, a form of censorship that did not merely eliminate but substituted. This substitute voice functioned as a mediator that prevented the emergence of a genuine opposition and replaced it with a controlled framework. Within this context, in Ranciè's terms, the peo-

ple did not enter politics as liberated spectators but only at the symbolic level (Rancière, 2004: 167). Their voices had already been placed within a closed framework whose purpose was to naturalize the police order without disrupting the sensory distribution of power. This arrangement created an order in which authorized voices could be heard, but not as voices from below; rather, they functioned as regulated echoes of power.

2.2. The Cassette Tape, the Network of Sound Circulation, the Expansion of the Horizon of the Sensible, and the Reproduction of Aesthetic-Political Experience

Through its capacity for reproduction and dissemination across different spaces, the cassette tape made possible the creation of an extensive network of speech and sound. This network disrupted the traditional boundaries of audibility and expanded the horizon of the sensible. In this way, revolutionary speech transcended the level of local speech and created a multilayered, networked space of sonic presence that placed the listener in interaction with the political world and constructed this possibility across multiple levels of society.

This network stood in complete opposition to the centralized and vertical network of state control. The cassette tape transferred the auditory experience from centralized broadcasting to rhizomatic reproduction. This dispersal amounted to the simultaneous creation of thousands of political centers in spaces that the police order had defined as nonpolitical and private.

The cassette tape thus succeeded in disrupting the dominant aesthetic-political order of the Pahlavi era.

Although cassette tapes were also available to other opposition groups, their political agency did not derive merely from the accessibility of the medium; rather, it depended on the way the voice was situated within existing social networks, the speaker's symbolic capital, and its capacity for collective recognition. This symbolic capital, that is, the speaker's religious and social credibility, enabled the voice, within the context of the Islamic Revolution, to function not merely as a carrier of a message but as a source of collective appeal and mobilization. Thus, the rupture that emerged was not the result of media monopoly, but rather of the simultaneity of the medium, the voice, and the social contexts through which it was accepted and echoed. This technology gave voices, music, and political statements that had previously been invisible or unheard and excluded from the official sensible an opportunity for extensive dissemination and reproduction and, ultimately, for generating transformations in the cultural and political spheres of society (Simon, 2022: 45).

From this perspective, the cassette tape can be regarded as a medium in

which politics and aesthetics operated simultaneously: “Politics through breaking the monopoly over sound and disrupting the existing order of the sensible, and aesthetics through creating new modes of listening, reception, and transmission.” In this way, the cassette created conditions under which discourses that had previously been excluded from the public sphere could once again emerge. In other words, the cassette transformed exclusion into the possibility of appearance, and appearance into the possibility of repetition. It was this repetition that consolidated the rupture and transformed it into a relatively stable condition within the auditory sphere. Here, the medium functioned as a mechanism for producing an independent auditory memory. The cassette tape liberated sound from this overarching narrative, and this event constituted not merely a technological change but a rupture in the distribution of the sensible. The cassette did precisely this: it opened a space for the voices of clerics, revolutionaries, and the masses within an order that regarded their voices as insignificant. The mosque, as a place of worship; the home, as a private space; and the bazaar, as a site of exchange, were transformed through the sound of cassette tapes into spaces for the reproduction and organization of political discourse and for the shifting of the boundaries of the sensible.

3. Cassette Tapes and the Redistribution of the Sensible in the Revolutionary Moment

This section analyzes and elucidates the ontological depth of the process through which cassette tapes, through the aesthetics of revolutionary discourse, redefined the boundaries of space, time, and the political body in the revolutionary moment and effectively brought about a redistribution of the sensible. In this way, the aesthetics of revolutionary discourse and the circulation of sound through cassette tapes played a strategic role in the redistribution of the sensory space while also providing a basis for a new experience of collective presence and a new configuration of politics, in the Rancièrian sense, within the public sphere.

3.1. The Aesthetics of Revolutionary Discourse on Cassette Tapes

The aesthetics of revolutionary discourse on cassette tapes constituted the construction of a new auditory order. This new discourse created an alternative sensory horizon in which the voice of resistance and the lived experience of the oppressed appeared in the public sphere as legitimate and audible voices. It traversed the boundary between the private and public spheres. It generated a new perceptual horizon for political action at both the micro-level of the life-world and the macro-level of the public sphere.

Cassette tapes carried narratives that, rather than relying on official analy-

ses, emphasized the lived experience of suffering and oppression, including imprisonment, torture, poverty, and injustice. These narratives, often infused with deeply religious or epic tones, encoded legitimate grief, sorrow, and anger and transformed them into a shared collective affect. The emphasis on narratives of victimhood and martyrdom in these tapes connected individual experiences of oppression to a broader political and theological conception. This transformed the oppressed individual from a passive victim into a moral agent whose voice possessed undeniable political legitimacy. For example, the widespread circulation of cassette tapes containing Imam Khomeini's speeches and the narratives of political prisoners elevated the voices of the oppressed beyond the level of mere noise. Through the meticulous reproduction of memories of imprisonment, torture, and victimization in the form of epic and religious narratives, these voices were transformed into a coherent and legitimate discursive order that was heard in homes, mosques, and bazaars and acquired political and social legitimacy. Whereas, within the order of police discourse, all of these voices were regarded as inaudible, cassette tapes transformed these voices, at an ontological level, into an unavoidable form of truth.

The police order sharply separated the domains of religion and politics. By restricting religious activities, censoring religious discourse, regulating religious ceremonies, determining officially sanctioned preachers, controlling networks of religious propagation and print media, employing court-affiliated clerics, and re-writing the content of school textbooks on the basis of the ideology of Pahlavism, the Pahlavi regime sought to give this separation an operational and structural form. The aesthetics of discourse on cassette tapes, however, altered this separation. In this format, religious discourse was no longer confined to the pulpit or to officially sanctioned rituals; rather, it resonated as a form of political discourse in streets, homes, shops, and micro-level social networks. In doing so, it effected a redistribution of the sensible in which religious concepts became capable of functioning as political agents.

Revolutionary discourse on cassette tapes deliberately and consciously distanced itself from the language of official literature and the bureaucratic structures of dominant discourse. This avoidance was not merely a stylistic choice; it constituted an aesthetic-political means of declaring non-belonging to the prevailing police order. The aesthetics of revolutionary discourse did not define the world according to the police logic of Pahlavism; rather, it represented the world through an ontological binary founded upon good and evil (Zickmund, 2003: 31). The oppressed masses and authentic Islam were perceived as the forces of good. At the same time, the ruling regime and its foreign supporters were represented through the notions of the Great Satan and arrogant domination. Terms such as

tyranny, the “Yazid of the age,” and the infidels were employed directly to refer to the ruling power and its agents (Abdolkarimi, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 253).

Through its choice of traditional and religious vocabulary, revolutionary discourse introduced a new aesthetics into the sphere of the sensible. This linguistic rupture lay at the heart of the redistribution of the sensible through cassette tapes, because it demonstrated that those who had previously been unheard were now, through a different language, demanding their right to appear within the public sphere. Terms such as independence, freedom, and justice were redefined through their direct association with Islam, divine government, and the struggle against arrogant domination (Azarmi, 2025 AD/1404 SH: 23). This generated an epistemic-aesthetic rupture in the listener, who could no longer understand the world according to the dictates of the police order.

Accordingly, the aesthetics of revolutionary discourse in the form of cassette tapes succeeded in redistributing the sensible in Iran; that is, it removed sound and the right to political speech from monopoly and enabled a greater number of people, in different places and through diverse modes of expression, to speak about politics. Through repeated references to Shi‘i myths and political culture, revolutionary discourse connected the political present, that is, the struggle against the Shah, to sacred time, namely the event of Karbala (Eshqi, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 154). This created a new perceptual horizon for action in which present suffering was understood not as meaningless but as possessing transcendent and historical significance.

Speeches emphasizing revolutionary interpretations of religion, political Islam, and the necessity of Islamic government, which were distributed through cassette tapes, constituted the ideological and substantive core of the Islamic Revolution. Above all, this content served to disrupt the secular discursive order of the Pahlavi state (Madani, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 207) and redefine the relationship between religion and politics. These voices created a new sensory configuration in which politics became a sacred and religious matter (Fischer, 1980: 136), while the separation of religion from politics came to be regarded as a deviation. This type of discourse challenged the dominant regime of meaning by rereading religious concepts within the horizon of political action and positioned the sacred as a source of legitimacy for resistance and for the redefinition of social power.

In the final analysis, an examination of the content of cassette tapes demonstrates that this medium carried a discursive order in which two layers of meaning operated in an interwoven manner and, taken together, contributed to the reconstruction of revolutionary subjectivity and collective mobilization. The critique of the Pahlavi power structure was articulated in a rhetorical, affective, and evocative form and, drawing on concepts such as justice, resistance to oppres-

sion, and the rejection of political dependency, portrayed the Pahlavi system as an illegitimate order incompatible with human dignity. This mode of expression engaged the listener not only through a critical understanding but also through a sense of moral participation in the process of protest. At the second level, cassette discourse redefined the religious–political identity of the people.

Within this redefinition, religion was no longer merely an individual or ritual sphere; rather, it became a framework for understanding the role of the Muslim individual in the public sphere, the manner in which power should be confronted, and the desirable model of political organization. Through this discourse, the idea of Islamic government was presented as a legitimate, ethical, and emancipatory alternative, and the audience came to perceive itself not merely as a witness to oppression but as the bearer of a historical–religious identity that called upon it to construct a different order.

For people whose traditional understanding of religion had largely confined it to the *Mihrāb* and ritual practices, this discourse produced a fundamental transformation of identity: “From a passive and domesticated Muslim into a historical subject and a builder of society.” At the same time, this discursive aesthetics, functioning as a systematic theoretical framework, gave the revolutionary struggle a structural objective rather than reducing it to a momentary protest. By drawing on trans-historical and ethical elements, revolutionary discourse enabled the emergence of a new configuration of politics and, through symbolic representations such as the connection with Karbala, endowed this new configuration of politics with a trans-historical and ethical dimension. This act expanded the horizon of the sensible to such an extent that it was no longer possible, within the police order, to reduce political opponents to rioters or disorderly elements.

3.2. The Cassette Tape and the New Configuration of Politics on the Eve of the Revolution

Rancière locates the distinctive character of politics in moments of rupture that disrupt the police order of the state, moments in which the sensible order and the prevailing distribution of sound and visibility are experienced not as stable arrangements but as temporary and mutable scenes, and in which politics emerges at the intersection of the auditory and the sensory, in the form of dispersed yet equal collectivities. In such a scene, politics is no longer the product of institutional will or a centralized program; rather, it is an event that takes shape in the interval between sound and listener, between lived experience and moral belief, and between the historical past and the social present. By breaking with official space and time, the cassette tape created these intervals. It extended the field of struggle beyond class and institutional boundaries into the realm of the sensible

and collective morality. It was here that each listener became not merely an audience member but an agent and participant in the emergence of a new politics, transforming the order of power in the moment of collective experience.

Accordingly, the cassette tape was not merely a medium for transmitting messages but a philosophical technology of the emergence of politics (Hirschkind, 2006: 53), an instrument for redistributing the sensible, and a mechanism that enabled the formation of equal subjects and communities within the revolutionary moment. When the voice reproduced on cassette tapes materialized in the coordinated chants of millions of people in the streets, the prevailing rule governing the distribution of sound and visibility was fundamentally dismantled. This was the new configuration of politics in which the redistribution of the sensible is recognized as a fundamental condition for any form of social and political transformation.

Accordingly, in the revolutionary moment, politics was no longer defined as an instrument or objective of institutions and governments; rather, it was an event that took shape through sound and listening, while collective experience was simultaneously redistributed.

By providing this dispersed and borderless experience, the cassette tape demonstrated that politics is manifested not in power itself but in the human encounter with oppression, participation in justice, and the recreation of collective sensibility. Ultimately, this medium provided the setting for the emergence of new subjects, the redefinition of radical collectivities, and the formation of a politics that rested not on structure but on lived experience and ethical sensibility. Politics became a sphere in which every utterance, every narrative, and every repetition of sound constituted a challenge to the existing sensible order. From a Rancièrian perspective, these moments represent precisely the situation in which politics, as an event, takes shape at the intersection of ethics, sensibility, and collectivity; political subjects are born not through institutional will but through individual and collective encounters with discourse and sound.

Historical examples of this process are concrete and illuminating. Cassette recordings of the speeches of Imam Khomeini, Ali Shariati, and Martyr Morteza Motahhari circulated fluidly and diffusely yet on a wide scale, from Najaf to Tehran and from *Hosseiniyehs* to small neighborhood homes. Through listening to and reinterpreting these discourses, audiences found themselves within a new ethical-political horizon and extended the field of struggle beyond official and organizational constraints. This experience demonstrates that when revolutionary discourse is combined with an audio technology such as the cassette tape, it can generate a new configuration of politics, the emergence of equal collectivities, and a redistribution of the sensible on an unprecedented scale, transforming the

revolutionary moment, in a philosophical-historical sense, into an experienced, ethical, and collective event.

Thus, sound in the Iranian Revolution constituted an act of creating a new reality: a reality in which voices that had previously been unheard were not only made visible and audible but themselves became the foundation upon which a new political field was established.

4. Sound, Cassette Tapes, and the Emergence of Political Subjectivity in the Islamic Revolution

By becoming engaged in political action, the demos, rather than being a pre-determined subject emerges as a political subject through an action that generates dissensus (Rancière, 2010: 27). Accordingly, those who are uncoun- ted within the police order emerge as political subjects once they participate in dissensual action (Yousefikhah et al., 2023 AD/1402 SH: 210). Within Rancière's theoretical framework, political subjectivity is not a fixed essence but an event that takes shape in the gap between the established order and newly emerging possibilities of being heard. It is an event that manifests itself through subtle yet fundamental shifts in the sphere of the sensible. This subjectivity emerges when what had been defined, within the police logic governing the distribution of roles, places, and voices, as inaudible or deprived of a share in *logos* suddenly acquires the possibility of appearing and presents itself as the bearer of a political voice.

In the context of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, what appeared within the sensible as an alternative voice constituted an event that transformed the boundaries of audibility and generated new forms of political subjectivity. Political subjectivity, within this framework, is the event of the formation of an emergent "We," a "We" founded not on established social identities, whether class, ethnicity, or gender, but on the shared experience of participating in a sensory redistribution. This identity emerges through a transformation in the perceptual configuration of the social world, whereby silent bodies, dispersed voices, and marginal lived experiences become connected within a collective and participatory network, and their presence within the auditory and perceptual sphere of society becomes consolidated.

From this perspective, political subjectivity is continuously in the process of becoming; it is fluid and dependent upon moments of rupture rather than being a stable possession belonging to a particular group. Its emergence should therefore be understood as the intersection of suppressed sensory energies and new possibilities for the circulation of meaning, an intersection that, in the context of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, acquired the possibility of embodiment through sound and cassette tapes (Sefat, 2023: 67). Thus, political subjectivity, in this reading, is not the product of an external institution but emerges from the experience of

being heard and from reorganizing the shared sensory world. This experience can fundamentally transform the boundaries of participation, agency, and collective self-awareness.

Accordingly, within the context of the Islamic Revolution, the cassette tape functioned as a tool for producing a radical political subjectivity. This apparatus belonged neither to the upper classes nor to the monopoly of official organs of power. With its mechanical and reproducible structure, the cassette entered the field of the reproduction of subjectivity and enabled a new sequence of possibilities for being heard. In cassette form, sound broke with the police system governing the distribution of speech and silence. What was supposed to remain silent began to circulate and became a vehicle for constructing the political subject. The agent who recorded their voice on a cassette tape and the listeners who secretly reproduced it both moved beyond a condition of mere passivity and became active political subjects. The act of transmission and reproduction itself constituted a form of protest and a disruption of the order of spatial and auditory segregation.

Within Iran's revolutionary environment, suppressed voices, including those of the clergy and religious authorities, intellectuals, and students, through their reproduction on cassette tapes, moved into the position of intervening subjects. They were not merely heard; rather, being heard itself became a political act that transformed the system of meaning in the relationship between speaker and listener. Previously voiceless subjects experienced themselves as bearers of political truth. In other words, the act of listening to and relistening to recorded speeches generated a form of political homogenization among listeners: individuals who perhaps had no direct social connection with one another became, at the level of the sensible, an auditory community organized around a shared experience. This auditory community constituted precisely the form of subjectivity that the police order failed to recognize, because it introduced new divisions into the field of perception.

This process was able to define the identity of an aware Muslim subject as a new political aesthetic in opposition to the politically ignorant subject within the Pahlavi police order. Through cassette tapes, subjects transmitted words and political messages, shifted public opinion in their favor, and contributed to creating the conditions for the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1994: 24). From this perspective, the Islamic Revolution can be understood as a field in which sound destabilized the boundaries of the sensible and constructed the emergence of the subject. The voice recorded on cassette tape was the voice of an absent subjectivity that, through technology, imposed an effective presence at the very heart of the prevailing order.

This voice was no longer merely a sound; it had become speech or discourse that laid claim to truth, justice, and the redistribution of power. Political subjec-

tivity, within this framework, constituted the very act of declaring the presence of those who had previously been classified as bodies lacking the legitimacy to speak. Thus, through the cassette, sound became a subjective event, an event in which ordinary individuals, those who had no share in *logos* within the police logic, experienced themselves not merely as audiences but as participants in political action. The new subject that emerged in this way was the product of a form of sensory redistribution.

Thus, rather than functioning as a passive medium, the cassette tape became a threshold for the formation of a new political subjectivity, a subjectivity that appeared not through bodily presence in the streets but through auditory participation in the political field. Ultimately, by connecting the prohibited religious voice with active bodies in the streets, the cassette tape, at the revolutionary moment, brought to completion a form of subjectivity that had broken down the boundary between the private sphere, the space of clandestine listening, and the public sphere, the space of demonstrations. This new subjectivity constituted an aesthetic-political rupture that called for a redefinition of the entire map of the sensible within society.

Conclusion

Through sound and cassette tapes, what occurred in the Islamic Revolution of Iran went beyond a political transformation or a transfer of power. Here, sound emerged as an ontological event that disrupted the prevailing order of the sensible, opened a new horizon of perception, presence, and political participation, and became an active element in the redistribution of the sensible and the construction of a new political subjectivity.

Within Jacques Rancière's theoretical framework, politics occurs when what is regarded within the police logic as invisible, inaudible, or deprived of a share in *logos* acquires the possibility of appearing and transforms the sensory configuration of the social world. The cassette tape was a technological object capable of reconstructing the boundaries of listening, speaking, gathering, and acting, bringing into the political field voices that had no place within the dominant discursive order. The cassette tape was not merely a medium but an aesthetic-political technology that, by breaking with official time and space, liberated sound from the monopoly of power and redistributed it through a rhizomatic network of homes, mosques, bazaars, and automobiles. This redistribution transformed unheard sound into speech, silence into testimony, and passivity into subjectivity. This discourse, through its religious-political language, its connection between the sacred past and the political present, and its combination of Shi'i worldview with concepts such as justice, the rejection of domination, and resistance, opened

a new horizon of collective perception.

Accordingly, religious discourse, which the police order had confined to officially sanctioned rituals, now appeared as a discourse capable of shaping politics. Within this horizon, politics took shape not in the form of an institution or official structure but through the shared experience of listening, repetition, and participation. This experience broke down the boundary between the private and public spheres and generated new subjects who had previously had no place within the police order.

Thus, the Islamic Revolution can be understood as a moment of fundamental reconfiguration of the sensible, a moment in which sound, technology, and politics converged not only to overthrow a government but also to transform the ways of living, listening, and being in the world.

In this account, the cassette tape is no longer merely a tool; it presents itself as a historical actor that, with each rotation, once again shifts the boundaries between the possible and the impossible, reminding us that politics continues to be born in listening ears, in the voice that is reproduced, and in collectivities that refuse to remain silent. The simple acts of listening, re-recording, or transmitting a cassette themselves constituted forms of participation in politics as an event, forms of participation that transformed the sensible and disrupted the auditory boundaries of the police order. From this perspective, the cassette was not merely a carrier of sound but also a carrier of a kind of political action that, through the mechanism of listening, organized bodies and minds within a shared context.

The emergence of political subjectivity likewise originated precisely here. Within a Rancièrian horizon, the political subject is not defined in advance; it appears at the moment when suppressed voices begin to speak and disrupt the sensible order. The cassette tape made such a moment possible. The voices of clerics, intellectuals, students, political prisoners, and other marginalized groups, through their reproduction on cassette tapes, became voices of truth and involved listeners in an ethical–political experience. The auditory community generated by these cassettes constituted the formation of a political “We,” a “We” formed not according to class or established social relations but on the basis of participation in a perceptual and ethical redistribution. Consequently, the Islamic Revolution can be regarded as a historical example of how a simple and inexpensive medium can transform the configuration of the sensible and, through this sensory displacement, generate a new political subject, equal collectivities, and a new configuration of politics.

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Transformation of the Concept of Security in Constructivist Theory: From Negative to Positive and Sustainable Security (A Case Study of the Islamic Revolution of Iran)

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Scientific Research	Objective: This study seeks to develop an analytical framework to explain the threefold transformation of security, negative, positive, and sustainable, within constructivist theory. The central research question concerns how the progression from negative to positive and ultimately to sustainable security can be theoretically reconstructed as a continuum. Sustainable security is conceptualized as a third stage that accounts for the long-term continuity of security in revolutionary and non-Western contexts. The article further aims to demonstrate the achievement of sustainable security through normative institutionalization. The Islamic Revolution of Iran serves as a case study to validate this model.
Article history: Received: 2025-12-06 Received in revised form: 2026-02-25 Accepted : 2026-04-11 Available online: 2026-10-24	Research Method: This qualitative and analytical study is based on an analysis of the works of constructivist theorists as well as historical and political documents related to developments in Iran following the Islamic Revolution.
Keywords: Sustainable Security, Negative Security, Positive Security, Constructivism, Islamic Revolution of Iran.	Findings: The findings demonstrate that negative security is based on survival, threat deterrence, and the redefinition of the enemy. Positive security centers on social empowerment, trust, and the reconstruction of state-society relations. Sustainable security is realized when security norms are internalized within collective identity and reproduced through inter-subjective institutionalization. Analysis of post-revolutionary developments reveals a transition from reactive security to institutionalized and multilayered security.
	Conclusion: Sustainable security is not simply an additive combination of negative and positive security; instead, it represents a distinct quality arising from the normative internalization of security. The stage-based formulation advanced in this study contributes to the theoretical development of constructivist approaches in security studies. It offers a novel framework for analyzing the transformation of security in revolutionary and non-Western contexts. These findings may also serve as a foundation for comparative studies in other countries.

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Introduction

The intellectual shifts following the end of the Cold War and the intensification of globalization prompted international relations scholarship to move beyond purely material and state-centric approaches, placing greater emphasis on the influence of social structures, norms, and collective identities in shaping international politics. Within this context, constructivism, by foregrounding concepts such as culture, identity, and inter-subjectivity, enabled new approaches to reconceptualizing security at the international-system level (Reus-Smit, 2021 AD/1400 SH).

Consequently, security, like other political concepts, became a central focus of constructivist theorizing in international relations studies with scholars such as Alexander Wendt, Peter Katzenstein, Michael Barnett, and Emanuel Adler, are based on the assumption that the fundamental structures of international relations emerge from social structures and that changes in thinking about international relations can contribute to transformations in the global security environment. In other words, changes in actors' inter-subjective understandings of the structures of international relations lead to the redefinition of threats and interests and, consequently, to transformations in security patterns. By moving away from materialist and realist perspectives, this approach gives greater prominence to subjectivity and social interaction in explaining security-related actions. Whereas realists generally understand security within the framework of military threats posed by states, and liberals broaden its scope to include structural threats and non-state actors, constructivism, rather than defining "Threat" as a fixed category, emphasizes the social process through which something becomes constituted as a threat. This perspective enables cultural and identity-based categories to acquire new significance in the understanding of security, an aspect that had been overlooked in earlier theories (Onuf, 1998: 132-133). From the constructivist perspective, identity, norms, and culture not only define actors but also shape the behavioral and value frameworks of states and the international system (Farrell, 2002).

The central question of this study is how, within the framework of constructivist theory, the transformation of the concept of security from the negative stage to the positive stage and ultimately to sustainable security can be reconstructed as a continuum within the theory itself. In this study, negative, positive, and sustainable security is conceptualized as three successive stages in the historical and social transformation of the concept and practice of security in a revolutionary society such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. These stages are defined as follows:

- 1) Negative security: A focus on survival, threat deterrence, and the epistemology of fear;
- 2) Positive security: A focus on empowerment, social trust, and justice;

- 3) Sustainable security: The stable and long-term integration of both dimensions within the context of collective identity and the institutionalization of norms.

The principal objective of the study is to reconstruct this tripartite model within constructivist theory logically and to demonstrate the internal connections among its components on the basis of the concepts of identity, culture, and norms. In fact, the “Transformation of the concept of security” in this study does not refer to a comparative examination of constructivism and other theories of international relations; rather, it refers to an intra-theoretical reconstruction of the transformation of security within the conceptual framework of constructivism.

In summary, this article aims to demonstrate the analytical transition from negative to positive and ultimately to sustainable security within the logic of constructivism. The case study of the Islamic Revolution of Iran is utilized exclusively as an empirical test of the coherence of this analytical model. Thus, the study’s primary orientation is theoretical, emphasizing the development of a conceptual framework for security within constructivism rather than the simple application of theory to a historical case.

The structure of the article is as follows. First, the literature and the existing research gap are reviewed. The qualitative research method and analytical approach are then introduced. Subsequently, the theoretical foundations of the research are outlined, with particular attention to the principles and major perspectives of constructivism. The third section analyzes the three dimensions of security, negative, positive, and sustainable, while the fourth section presents findings from the analysis of these dimensions in the context of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. The article concludes by summarizing the overall findings and highlighting the theoretical and practical implications of constructivism for understanding the transformation of the concept of security.

1. Research Background

A systematic review of the theoretical literature indicates that, within the constructivist framework, security is regarded as a social phenomenon shaped by norms, values, and collective identities. Numerous studies in this field have examined the theoretical dimensions of security from a constructivist perspective.

For example, Abbasi Ashlaghi and Farrokhi (2009 AD/1388 SH) have proposed an analytical framework for security in international relations based on constructivism, while Mousavifar and Forati (2023 AD/1402 SH) have analyzed social crises arising from generational divides using a constructivist approach. In international scholarship, Newman (2001 AD), through the introduction of the concept of human security, has emphasized the individual as the referent object

of security. Karacasulu and Ozgurün (2007 AD) have examined the contribution of constructivism to the transformation of security studies, emphasizing the role of identity and norms. Tsai (2009 AD) has analyzed the emergence of the concept of human security from a constructivist perspective and has regarded it as dependent on collective awareness and identity. Aria (2025 AD) has demonstrated that security is not an objective reality but rather a social phenomenon dependent on normative legitimacy.

In the field of studies related to post-revolutionary Iran, numerous studies have also addressed specific dimensions of security. For example, Eghbali et al. (2016 AD/1395 SH), focusing on the Persian Gulf region, examined the roles of Iran and the United States in shaping regional security structures. Ghasemi (2018 AD/1397 SH), in an article entitled "The Geopolitics of the Axis of Resistance and the National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran Based on the Discourse of the Islamic Revolution," demonstrates how the discourse of the Islamic Revolution has contributed to strengthening the Axis of Resistance against global hegemony. Allahyari et al. (2021 AD/1400 SH), drawing on Mitzen's theory of ontological security, have explained the identity conflict between Western culture and the culture of the Islamic Revolution. Similarly, Havasi and Nemati (2024 AD/1403 SH), in their study, have identified the ethnic crises of the first decade of the Revolution as a factor contributing to the weakening of national security.

Overall, a review of these studies indicates that although previous research has addressed various dimensions of security, most studies have been fragmented and one-dimensional, with each focusing exclusively on a particular aspect of security, whether military, cultural, or social.

Consequently, relatively few studies have attempted to examine the transformation of security across three successive levels, from negative security to positive security and ultimately to sustainable security, within the theoretical framework of constructivism. Most previous studies have been limited to explaining threats and the deterrent dimensions of security (negative security) or certain social and identity-related dimensions (positive security). In contrast, the third stage, namely, the transition to sustainable security, which incorporates both the deterrent and empowering dimensions of security within a historical and social context, has received comparatively little attention.

Accordingly, the principal gap in previous research lies in the absence of a comprehensive framework for explaining the security continuum from its negative and positive stages to its ultimate sustainable form. The innovation of the present study therefore lies in the fact that, drawing on constructivist theory, it not only theoretically reconstructs and analyzes the tripartite conception of security but also employs the experience of the Islamic Revolution of Iran as a case study

to test, validate, and enrich this analytical framework. In this way, rather than applying a theory to a historical event, the study seeks to demonstrate the utility and development of the theory for explaining security dynamics in an empirical context. Accordingly, the novelty of the study does not lie in comparing constructivism with other theories, but in proposing a three-stage framework internal to constructivism itself and empirically testing it in a non-Western context.

2. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a theoretical–analytical orientation. Its primary objective is to explain the transformation of the concept of security through a three-stage model, negative security, positive security, and sustainable security, within the theoretical framework of constructivism and to assess its applicability through a case study of the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

Data were collected through documentary research and involved a systematic examination of constructivist theoretical texts, the works of scholars in this field, and historical and political documents related to the Islamic Revolution of Iran. In this study, qualitative research refers to a focus on interpreting meanings, concepts, and social constructs within their historical and discursive context. Accordingly, conceptual analysis is formulated on the basis of qualitative interpretive approaches in the social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017), while the case study is designed with reference to the explanatory case-study model (Yin, 2014). The theoretical level of analysis is the international system; however, the case study is examined at the state-society level as part of the inter-subjective structure of the international system. The case study of the Islamic Revolution of Iran is not treated as a shift in the level of analysis but rather as an empirical example at the same theoretical level, through which the reproduction of norms, identities, and security patterns within a revolutionary society is analyzed. In other words, although the case study is examined at the domestic level, the analysis focuses on inter-subjective structures that, within constructivist logic, are regarded as part of the structure of the international system.

The data-analysis method is based on conceptual analysis and interpretive case-study analysis. In this study, conceptual analysis refers to the logical and intra-theoretical reconstruction of the concepts of negative, positive, and sustainable security within the constructivist framework. In this context, the first two stages, negative security and positive security, have been extracted and re-constructed through a critical rereading of the security literature and the works of theorists such as Bill McSweeney, Rita Floyd, and Paul Roe, each of whom emphasizes an aspect of liberation from material threats and, subsequently, the redefinition of security in identity-based and normative terms.

By contrast, the third stage, termed “Sustainable Security,” represents a theoretical extension and formulation proposed by the authors of the present study. It has been developed on the basis of constructivist logic and the linkage among identity, norms, and the inter-subjective reproduction of security, and seeks to explain the transition from a reactive condition of security to a condition in which security is internalized and reproduced.

The case study of the Islamic Revolution of Iran is subsequently employed to test the coherence and applicability of this conceptual model. Accordingly, the “Stages of security transformation” (negative, positive, and sustainable) belong to the theoretical level of the model and should not be conflated with the “Stages of research implementation.” Therefore, the research process is organized into three methodological steps:

- 1) Deriving a conceptual framework for the transformation of security from constructivist literature and critical security studies;
- 2) Reconstructing the three-stage theoretical model of security at the conceptual level;
- 3) Applying the model to the case study of the Islamic Revolution of Iran through the analysis of official and historical documents.

This distinction demonstrates that the stages of the research concern the research process itself. In contrast, the threefold conception of security is formulated as an independent theoretical model at the analytical level. Since the present study is based on documentary and library research, it does not involve human subjects and therefore does not raise ethical considerations related to human participants. Nevertheless, the principles of academic integrity and accurate citation have been observed.

3. Theoretical Framework: Constructivist Theory

Constructivism, as a theory of international relations, represents a fundamental shift away from traditional paradigms that emphasize material capabilities and state-centric models, such as realism and liberalism, toward a framework that recognizes the role of ideas, norms, identities, and social constructs in shaping international interactions. Developed by scholars such as Alexander Wendt, this approach provides analytical tools for examining how such social constructs influence the behavior of international actors and the development of global norms. At the core of constructivism is the proposition that international relations are not governed solely by static material balances of power but are dynamically shaped by inter-subjective social realities. These realities include shared beliefs, collective identities, and cultural contexts that guide the behavior of states and their foreign-policy decisions. According to Wendt, the structures of human asso-

ciation are fundamentally determined by shared ideas rather than material forces (Pratisti et al., 2020: 65).

This proposition underscores constructivism's emphasis on the role of identity and culture in international relations and stands in contrast to traditional theories that emphasize the predominance of hard power (Agius, 2025). Indeed, one of the most important contributions of constructivism is its emphasis on the role of norms in shaping state behavior. Norms function as shared understandings that guide actions and influence relations among actors.

Finnemore and Sikkink even distinguish between "Constitutive Norms," which determine what actors are and what they are capable of doing, and "Regulative Norms," which constrain actions once an identity has been established (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001).

Constructivism also reconceptualizes states' interests and identities as fluid rather than fixed. The interaction between domestic political perspectives and international pressures demonstrates how identities can be constructed, transformed, and even challenged (İpek, 2013). For example, the constructivist approach has proven highly effective in analyzing how collective identities shape diplomatic alliances and conflicts, as illustrated by Turkey's support for Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This case demonstrates that Turkey's actions were influenced not only by strategic interests but also by shared cultural identities and historical ties with Azerbaijan (Khairunisa, 2022).

The role of non-state actors is another fundamental dimension emphasized by constructivism. This approach expands the analysis of international relations beyond states to include non-governmental organizations, transnational networks, and international institutions that promote norms and values (Weber, 2013: 516-543). This broader perspective clarifies how non-state actors can influence state behavior and reshape the policy-making landscape by promoting particular ideas and norms.

Furthermore, constructivism emphasizes a more comprehensive understanding of agency within the international system. In contrast to perspectives that view states as passive recipients of international norms, constructivism argues that states actively participate in the construction and reconstruction of social realities and norms. By taking into account the dynamics of identity and contextual influences on state behavior, this approach adds complexity to traditional theories of international relations and demonstrates that states can reconstruct their identities through interaction within international institutions and contribute to the development of global norms (Jackson, 2024: 37-48).

The distinction between "What is" and "What ought to be" is highlighted as one of the central issues in constructivist analysis. Constructivism recognizes the

normative dimensions that influence political action and encourages researchers to consider not only the current state of the international system but also what can or ought to exist. This critical reflection has important implications for understanding global issues such as human rights, environmental governance, and conflict resolution, encouraging researchers to examine how norms evolve and how they can be promoted or challenged in different contexts (Madubuko, 2024: 115-156).

It is noteworthy that constructivism has also faced challenges and criticisms, particularly regarding its empirical applications and the explanation of its foundational principles. Critics argue that the approach often assumes that norms lead to compliance while overlooking the power dynamics involved in the implementation of those norms. In addition, some scholars have pointed out that the Eurocentric assumptions of constructivism may marginalize non-Western perspectives and offer a limited conception of normativity that overlooks local adaptations (Wang-Kaeding, 2015).

In response to these criticisms, constructivist theorists have revisited their approaches and emphasized the importance of reflexivity and contextualization in their analyses. Consequently, constructivism has emerged in international relations as a theoretical framework that emphasizes the centrality of social constructs such as norms, identities, and cultures in shaping the behavior of states and non-state actors.

Accordingly, constructivism provides a theoretical basis for reconceptualizing security not as the “Absence of Threat,” but as a “Dynamic and Social Construct” produced through the interaction of identity, culture, and inter-subjective structures. In light of these theoretical foundations, the present study seeks to reconstruct the threefold conception of security, negative, positive, and sustainable, within the constructivist framework and to demonstrate how this theoretical model can enrich our understanding of security at both the domestic and international levels.

4. Results

4.1. Negative Security

In this study, security is analyzed not merely as a material condition, but as an interpretive and socially constructed category. Nevertheless, negative security is generally associated with the concept of “Traditional Security” in international relations (Wolfers, 1952). Negative security is grounded in an “Epistemology of Fear,” an approach that focuses on identifying threats and resorting to violence, ultimately shaping the ways in which security is understood and practiced. This epistemology, through the attempt to comprehend and objectify death, makes

it possible to identify threats and enemies (Huysmans, 1998). In fact, this constitutes security as survival (McSweeney, 2009). Within negative security, the “Knowledge of Death” becomes a universal concept through which efforts to overcome or postpone death acquire meaning. The identification of dangers and enemies, which emerge through the materialization of death, provides a basis for legitimizing and justifying the use of force. By focusing on violence, this approach restricts the recognition and acknowledgment of diverse actors, since the monopoly on violence remains in the hands of the state in order to prevent its proliferation. Such a negative and decontextualized conception of security came to dominate the discourse of the twentieth century, particularly during the Cold War (Gjørv, 2012: 839-840).

This negative conception of security maintains its dominance through a particular logic according to which the state is responsible for providing security to other actors. This concept is known as “Trickle-down Security,” whereby the values and interests of society concerning security are incorporated within the framework of the globalized state (Gjørv & Rottem, 2004). In this context, the concept of human security has emerged and has also received attention from constructivist scholars. As McSweeney points out, advocates of the narrow conception of human security focus on “Freedom from Fear” as a guiding principle and, in practice, operate largely within the framework of negative security, a concept rooted in fear, danger, and death. Peter Burgess likewise argues that “Human security is often defined negatively in terms of threats, risks, or violations of rights, rather than in its positive sense.” (Burgess et al., 2007: 68)

This conception of human security is evident in state-centered approaches, such as the doctrine and documents concerning the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Within this approach, the individual is regarded as a passive actor, while the state is viewed as an active actor that employs instruments such as military intervention to ensure human security. This does not mean that state intervention is always negative; in some circumstances, such intervention is necessary. Therefore, negative security should not be regarded as synonymous with traditional security. These perspectives are also present in critical security studies, such as the Copenhagen School, as well as in human security studies. For this reason, human security cannot be directly equated with positive security (Gjørv, 2012: 840-841).

Negative security does not fully enhance our understanding of security and insecurity across different contexts in which the use of force may have little role to play in providing security. In such contexts, humanitarian assistance, social activities (such as environmental, gender, identity-related, and other forms of action), or economic incentives may play a more effective role. Because of the dominance of the state within negative security, any potential security actor outside

the state is largely overlooked. This neglect limits our understanding of security perspectives and the processes through which security is produced by non-dominant actors, particularly non-state actors. In this regard, negative security can be understood as “Security from Threat,” while positive security can be understood as “Security as Empowerment.” This distinction between positive and negative security parallels Isaiah Berlin’s distinction between negative and positive liberty, that is, “Freedom From” and “Freedom to.” (Cherniss & Hardy: 2010)

Overall, negative security is generally associated with “Traditional Security,” which is defined on the basis of assumptions concerning the state and global security issues and relies on security instruments such as the military. This type of security refers to the absence of direct threats and dangers to individuals’ lives and freedom. Negative security focuses on preventing violence, war, and armed conflict and, in essence, entails maintaining peace and preventing the occurrence of violence and conflict. From this perspective, security is defined as an absence condition, in which no threats exist and individuals are protected from physical harm and external threats.

However, within the constructivist framework, a threat is not regarded as merely material or objective; rather, it is the product of actors’ perceptions and inter-subjective constructions. Accordingly, in this article, negative security is understood not merely as the physical absence of a threat, but as the absence of a “Legitimately and meaningfully perceived threat” within the normative and discursive structures of a political community. In other words, within this framework, negative security operates at the level of collective perceptions and understandings of threats, and the absence of a threat is realized when actors do not represent a particular phenomenon as a threat. In this sense, negative security approaches the inter-subjective level of analysis, where, in Alexander Wendt’s view, a threat derives not from the material nature of power itself, but from its social meaning.

4.2. Positive Security

In the previous section, we discussed negative security. However, not only is there an intuitive logic suggesting that security extends beyond what is embodied in the negative security approach, but there is also a growing body of literature addressing other dimensions of security (Gjørsv, 2012: 842). For example, some definitions of security emphasize peace of mind and empowerment rather than fear. The term “Security” derives from the Latin *securitas*, meaning freedom from anxiety or worry. Cicero understood it as the absence of anxiety, which is essential for the realization of a fulfilled life (P. H. Liotta & Owen, 2006: 87). Security is associated with a sense of safety and stability, particularly in the form

of routines and expectations, in the sense that we can rely on certain things in the future and develop our capacities accordingly. Thus, there is a parallel discussion to that of negative security in which security and its processes are considered a desirable “Good” not only for the state but also for various units, including individuals (Gjørsv, 2012: 842). This becomes increasingly evident, particularly when we observe that the latest security instrument, the military, demonstrates that negative security alone is incapable of reflecting actual needs. Depending on the context, practices, and values, increased insecurity may result more from neglecting the role of other actors than from recognizing their contribution to security dynamics.

Positive security extends beyond fear and the use of force. According to McSweeney, positive security is grounded in an empowering epistemology and creates secure spaces that strengthen capacities and capabilities. This type of security emphasizes the production of security and the preservation of fundamental and just values. Its primary foundation is trust. McSweeney points to the relationship between ontological security and trust, emphasizing that trust is a relationship formed through everyday routines. Such trust can range from parent-child relationships to collective trust within society. Everyday security is built upon trust in good governance, respect for the rule of law, cooperation, and an open society. Nils Bubandt likewise emphasizes the importance of social ties in creating and maintaining security (Gjørsv, 2012: 843).

McSweeney believes that positive security focuses on human needs and understands security as a comfortable and desirable condition. He states: “This human conception of security, manifested in the primary and fundamental relationship between human beings and the world around them, has profound implications for our understanding of international security and security policy.” (McSweeney, 2009: 15)

McSweeney bases his analysis on ontological security, or concern for everyday and human needs. In other words, routines and the reduction of chaos provide ontological security for individuals and communities and consequently generate positive security. In this respect, McSweeney’s concept of positive security is similar to human security.

Paul Roe likewise argues that positive security should not be restricted solely to individual needs but should also extend to states. He further emphasizes that the determination of positive security needs should be based on the values of justice. Roe also maintains that ontological security alone is insufficient, because routines can be shaped by relations with enemies and threats, which lead to negative security, as well as by relations with friends, which create supportive relationships (Roe, 2008).

Rita Floyd distinguishes between the “Highly Negative” conception of security advanced by Ole Wæver and the Copenhagen School, which focuses on securitization processes, and the “Highly Positive” conception of security developed by Ken Booth, Richard Wyn Jones, and the Welsh School, which views security as emancipation. Based on an assessment of the outcomes of an action relative to alternative options, Floyd calculates the “Value” of those outcomes and consequently examines their effects on security (Floyd, 2007: 337-338).

The efforts of Roe and McSweeney demonstrate that a multi-actor approach is appropriate for positive security, although each has focused on a particular level, individuals or states. Floyd continues to emphasize the state level, while the potential relationship between these levels has not yet been fully explored. Roe explicitly establishes a connection between the two levels, arguing that the “Promotion of human and minority rights” by states inevitably intertwines the security interests of both levels, namely states and individuals. However, he views this as a one-way process in which the state occupies a passive supportive position. Overall, these scholars have contributed to the development of the concept of positive security and argue that positive security should be shaped on the basis of human needs and the values of justice. They also maintain that positive security should extend to states and other institutions and that relationships and routines among different actors can contribute to the creation of positive security (Roe, 2008: 793).

Research on positive security addresses the questions of how, for whom, and through which institutions security is produced, while clearly identifying the values and contexts underlying security practices. An empowering epistemology broadens the scope of security practices beyond violent methods and brings non-state actors into the field, while also demonstrating the diversity of security practices. Positive security bears considerable similarity to the literature on human security, in which individuals and communities are recognized as primary security actors. These actors seek security not only to avoid threats but also to strengthen their own capacities. In this process, security practices are often separated from the violent methods employed by states, which are based on the use of force. Many of these practices are nonviolent and include humanitarian, developmental, economic, educational, environmental, and social-network initiatives (Hough, 2008). Even when states are unable to provide security, individuals and communities often resort to nonviolent means of securing themselves by drawing upon the resources available to them.

In this respect, negative security is generally associated with force, whereas positive security is often based on nonviolent methods. Understanding both positive and negative security requires a three-stage process:

- 1) Identifying the actors and their capacities to produce security;
- 2) Examining the epistemology underlying security practices; and
- 3) Analyzing the values associated with these practices.

The first stage emphasizes identifying the various capacities of actors to produce security, while the second involves analyzing the epistemological assumptions underlying security practices. Finally, the third stage concerns determining the appropriate conception of justice, with the aim of defining justice in a manner that strengthens empowerment across a broad range of actors and moves toward a principle of democracy and empowerment (Gjørsv, 2012: 845).

Thus, positive security can be understood as the creation of conditions in which individuals are not only protected from threats but are also capable of realizing their potential and living a life of quality. This type of security focuses on meeting human needs, social justice, human rights, and sustainable development, while creating conditions that enable individuals to participate actively in society, exercise their rights, and enjoy equal opportunities. Within this framework, security is defined not merely as the absence of threats but as an active and empowering condition in which individuals experience well-being and security.

4.3. Sustainable Security

Sustainable security refers to the simultaneous realization of negative and positive security in a manner that is continuously maintained over time. In fact, sustainable security is a condition in which patterns of negative and positive security have become institutionalized at the level of inter-subjective structures and are sustained over time through normative reproduction.

This comprehensive and multidimensional approach addresses the root causes of conflicts and crises and seeks sustainable solutions to resolve them. Sustainable security emphasizes the importance of international cooperation, economic development, social justice, and environmental protection and is regarded as a dynamic and long-term process requiring the active participation of all stakeholders. This approach redefines security in today's globalized world, where traditional threats are no longer the sole focus of security and where well-being, development, and the protection of civilians also receive significant attention. Although military capabilities are essential for states, diplomacy and development can provide more cost-effective options for preventing crises and managing common challenges more effectively.

Sustainable security also addresses emerging global threats such as terrorism, poverty, climate change, energy insecurity, and food insecurity. It emphasizes the need for an integrated approach to foreign policy and national security. This new approach introduces the concepts of collective and human security and

focuses on balancing the three principal instruments of foreign policy, defense, diplomacy, and development (CAP, 2009).

Sustainable security clearly reveals the profound and reciprocal relationship between development and security. The absence of development constitutes one of the principal causes of instability and insecurity in different societies and makes comprehensive and global approaches to addressing security challenges imperative. Accordingly, sustainable security emphasizes the need to focus simultaneously on the security of states and the security of people. This approach goes beyond traditional perspectives by paying particular attention to human security. This concept has emerged from interdisciplinary analyses in the fields of international relations, economics, development, and conflict. It specifically addresses fundamental individual freedoms grounded in human needs and psychological security.

Within this framework, the distinction between national security and human security is clear; however, despite being conceptually distinct, the two are fully compatible and can be aligned with one another. National security primarily focuses on protecting states and their capacity to confront external threats. In contrast, human security emphasizes individual security and examines existing challenges from the perspective of individuals and communities. These two levels of security are simultaneously interconnected, such that national security cannot be sustainably achieved without attention to human security. The primary objective of human security extends beyond state boundaries and directly addresses the management of threats that endanger human life and dignity domestically, externally, and at the transnational level.

Similarly, sustainable security requires an integrated approach that actively addresses a range of issues, including poverty, climate change, and social and political challenges, while seeking comprehensive and lasting solutions to ensure security for all (Smith, 2008). Sustainable security entails strengthening states' capacities to confront non-traditional, transnational, and regional security threats, as well as enhancing cooperation among multiple stakeholders. In practice, it provides a framework for the participation of non-state actors, such as the private sector, civil society organizations, the international community, and local communities. Sustainable security encompasses various domains, including climate security, food security, and economic security, among others (RSIS, 2024). Overall, sustainable security refers to the simultaneous and continuous realization of negative and positive security. In addition to traditional threats, it takes into account emerging global challenges such as poverty, climate change, and terrorism. This comprehensive approach emphasizes economic development, social justice, and international cooperation and seeks to create conditions in which

security can be sustainably ensured for individuals and communities. Sustainable security focuses on the reciprocal relationship between security and development and requires the active participation of all stakeholders.

5. Analysis

To empirically test the three-stage theoretical framework of the transformation of security in constructivism, it is necessary to examine a case study that can reveal the relationship between identity-based, cultural, and normative concepts and actual security processes. Accordingly, the Islamic Revolution of Iran has been selected as a prominent example of the transformation of security within a non-Western context. It represents a phenomenon in which security was elevated from the level of survival and threat to the level of meaning, identity, and social sustainability. The following analysis focuses on the three stages of negative, positive, and sustainable security. It examines the transformation of the understanding and realization of security in the experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this section, the experience of the Islamic Revolution of Iran is used as a case study to test the three-stage sequence of security transformation. This sequence does not imply that each stage completely replaces the preceding one; rather, each subsequent stage is built upon the previous stage, incorporates it, and develops it further.

5.1. The Islamic Revolution of Iran: The Manifestation of Negative Security in the Discourse of Survival and Resistance

At the stage of negative security, the Islamic Revolution of Iran can be understood as a direct response to a set of political, cultural, and security threats that had profoundly affected the individual and collective life of Iranian society during the Pahlavi era. This understanding of security is directly connected to what is known in international relations theories as “Traditional Security,” in which security is defined in terms of survival and focuses on identifying and repelling threats through the use of force (Wolfers, 1952; Huysmans, 1998; McSweeney, 2009). In other words, negative security draws upon an epistemology of fear, in which death and threat are assumed to be objective and identifiable phenomena, thereby legitimizing the use of force to eliminate them (Huysmans, 1998). From this perspective, the state is the primary security provider and possesses a monopoly over the use of force, while other actors are regarded as passive (Gjorv, 2012: 839-840). In pre-revolutionary Iran, the Pahlavi regime functioned as the principal source of threat and insecurity. Relying on the support of foreign powers, particularly the United States and certain Western governments, the regime had established extensive political and economic dependencies that seriously threatened national independence (Darabi, 2003 AD/1382 SH). Domestically, institutions such as

SAVAK functioned not merely as intelligence agencies but also as instruments of widespread repression that undermined citizens' personal and political security through the arrest, torture, execution, and elimination of political opponents (Shahedi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 631-670).

From the perspective of negative security, this situation represented a clear instance of "Security as Survival," in which Iranian society perceived itself as being under constant threat of political, cultural, and even physical death. In addition, by weakening cultural and religious values and norms, promoting a Western lifestyle, and restricting the role of religion in the public sphere, the Pahlavi regime generated a form of identity insecurity that threatened the cultural and social security of the population (Najafzadeh et al., 2016 AD/1395 SH).

Accordingly, the Islamic Revolution was a response to circumstances in which security in its negative sense, that is, freedom from threat and coercion, had become a vital necessity. From a constructivist perspective, therefore, the Iranian people's response to this situation was not merely a material or political reaction; rather, it was shaped by a set of meaning-giving and identity-forming norms. Concepts such as "Martyrdom," "Independence," and the "Islamic Ummah" became normative mechanisms for the reproduction of security within the revolutionary discourse (Ahmadpour, 2024 AD/1403 SH).

These concepts generated a form of "Normative Security" by fostering a sense of belonging, collective commitment, and legitimacy for resistance against threats. In doing so, they moved security beyond the level of mere survival and connected it to the levels of meaning and identity. In other words, the Islamic Revolution demonstrated that security derives not only from the material power of the state but also from the internalization of values and norms that mobilize collective action toward the preservation of national and religious identity.

Following the victory of the Revolution, as emphasized by the concept of negative security, the focus on repelling threats and safeguarding survival remained prominent. The confrontation with the Nojeh coup attempt (Sepehr, 2010 AD/1389 SH), the struggle against domestic armed groups such as the Mojahedin-e Khalq (Nazari et al., 2024 AD/1403 SH), and efforts to contain separatist movements in border regions were clear examples of the continuation of negative security during the early years of the Islamic Republic.

The culmination of this approach emerged during the imposed Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988 AD/1359-1367 SH). During this period, security was defined almost entirely in terms of survival and the repulsion of the enemy, while the defense of the borders and the existence of the political system became the primary objectives (Amou et al., 2023 AD/1402 SH). Indeed, as McSweeney reminds us, negative security is fundamentally concerned with "Knowing and Postponing Death,"

(McSweeney, 2009) and in the Iranian experience, this meaning was manifested in resistance and perseverance in the face of foreign aggression.

Another important characteristic of negative security in the context of the Islamic Revolution was mass mobilization and the active participation of the people. Millions of people became involved on the battlefronts and in various spheres of defense, demonstrating that within the revolutionary discourse, negative security was not confined to the state but became a collective project for the preservation of survival (Motaharnia, 1997 AD/1376 SH).

This development is consistent with existing critiques of the negative-security literature, which emphasize that a state-centered conception of security renders non-state actors passive (Gjørsv, 2012: 840-841). In Iran, however, a different experience of negative security emerged: the people themselves entered the arena as active agents of negative security and the concept of “Trickle-down Security” (Gjørsv & Rottem, 2004) was, in a sense, redefined in a manner whereby people were not passive recipients but direct security actors.

It can therefore be concluded that negative security played a central role in the Islamic Revolution of Iran both during the Pahlavi era, as a response to political, cultural, and security threats, and in the post-revolutionary years, as a means of defending against internal and external threats, particularly the imposed war. This experience constitutes a clear illustration of what theorists of negative security describe in terms of the focus on survival, the repulsion of threats, and the legitimization of the use of force (Wolfers, 1952; Huysmans, 1998; Gjørsv, 2012). Thus, the experience of negative security in the Islamic Revolution of Iran is not merely an expression of “Security as Survival”; it also demonstrates that even material phenomena such as war and threat can be reinterpreted within a social and normative framework. This experience showed that negative security can transcend the state level and become a collective, popular project, a development that laid the groundwork for the transition from a discourse of survival toward empowering security grounded in social trust, the concept known in the theoretical literature as “Positive Security.”

5.2. The Islamic Revolution of Iran and the Transition to Positive Security: From Physical Survival to Social Flourishing

With the victory of the Islamic Revolution, positive security emerged as one of the fundamental pillars of politics and society in the new Iran. Unlike negative security, which focuses primarily on eliminating threats and ensuring physical survival, positive security emphasizes creating conditions for growth, well-being, human dignity, and social empowerment. At the theoretical level, positive security represents what recent security literature has described as a transition from an

epistemology of fear to an empowering epistemology (Gjørsv, 2012: 842).

This perspective views security not merely as the absence of threats, but as the presence of trust, stability, and opportunities for the realization of human capabilities. Similarly, McSweeney conceptualizes positive security in terms of creating safe spaces, strengthening capabilities, and establishing social and ontological trust (McSweeney, 2009: 15). This theoretical transformation found a clear manifestation in the experience of the Islamic Revolution. The Revolution's central slogans, such as "Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic," referred not merely to liberation from external and internal threats, but also conveyed a deeper aspiration to provide an environment conducive to the individual and collective flourishing of the people.

The referendum on the Islamic Republic held in April 1979 and the numerous elections conducted in subsequent years indicated that the people had moved from a passive position, as conceptualized within negative security, to the position of active security agents (Nemati et al., 2022 AD/1401 SH). This broad participation reflects precisely what the literature on positive security emphasizes: security is produced not merely "For the People," but "By the People" through their active participation (Roe, 2008: 793).

From a constructivist perspective, positive security in the Islamic Republic was, in fact, the product of a transformation in collective identity and norms. The revolutionary discourse redefined security not merely as the preservation of survival, but as the manifestation of religious, justice-oriented, and people-centered values. Within this framework, "Mutual trust between the state and the nation," "Social Responsibility," and "Public Service" functioned as security-producing norms and constituted the theoretical foundations of positive security. In the social and economic spheres as well, numerous manifestations of positive security can be identified in the Islamic Revolution. The institution of Construction Jihad established with the aim of developing rural areas and alleviating deprivation, represents a clear example of creating positive security through development and social justice. By drawing upon popular capacities, this institution developed infrastructure that itself became part of the ontological security of rural populations, as it brought greater stability and predictability to their everyday lives (Deputy Directorate for Planning and Programming, 2001 AD/1379 SH).

Similarly, the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, through its support for vulnerable groups, represented a clear manifestation of attention to human security, a form of security grounded not in coercion, but in meeting basic needs, justice, and human dignity (Ghanbari et al., 2016 AD/1395 SH: 142-144). Along the same lines, the "Basij" popular mobilization was not merely a military force; it also functioned as a socio-cultural institution that realized the empowerment

dimension of security through activities ranging from literacy programs to development projects (Moradzadeh, 2009 AD/1388 SH).

In light of theories of positive security, what occurred in the Islamic Revolution can be understood as a transition from security as the “Absence of Threat” to security as the “Possibility of Flourishing.” Social trust, which McSweeney identifies as a central element of positive security, was manifested in the discourse and emerging structures of the Islamic Republic. This trust assured people that their participation and efforts toward social justice and development were recognized and valued. This corresponds to what Rita Floyd identifies in her discussion of positive and negative security as the distinction between security based on fear (negative) and security based on emancipation and justice (positive) (Floyd, 2007: 337-338).

Overall, the Islamic Revolution, by moving beyond the framework of negative security, elevated positive security to a national and social level. During this period, security no longer meant merely defense against an enemy; rather, it meant ensuring conditions for active popular participation, development, social justice, and human dignity. This experience demonstrates how a political-social transformation can constitute a practical manifestation of theories of positive security and establish a connection between theoretical debates and realities on the ground. At the same time, the Islamic Revolution’s experience, by establishing normative foundations of justice, trust, and participation, paved the way for the transition to the third stage, namely sustainable security, a stage in which security is sustained through development, culture, and social institutions.

5.3. The Islamic Revolution of Iran and the Transition toward Sustainable Security

The combination of negative and positive security within the concept of “Sustainable Security” can be clearly observed in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Within the framework of constructivist theory, sustainable security is not merely a continuation of hard security; rather, it is the result of the internalization of norms, the institutionalization of social trust, and the integration of the material and ideational dimensions of security (Buzan & Hansen, 2009: 35; Wendt, 1999: 278).

In other words, sustainable security emerges when a society is able to establish a balance between repelling hard threats (the negative-security stage) and creating sustainable foundations for development, justice, and collective identity (the positive-security stage) (Gjorv, 2012: 843). In the experience of the Islamic Republic, this form of security, as the third stage of security transformation, represented a conscious effort to institutionalize the combination of survival and well-being within a religious–national identity.

From a constructivist perspective, these efforts were not merely institutional

in nature; they reflected the emergence of a form of “Collective Security Identity” in which security was defined not in opposition to the other, but through the continuity of revolutionary values and cultural independence. In this regard, the establishment of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Basij popular mobilization played a dual role. On the one hand, they served as defensive and deterrent instruments against military threats and international terrorism; on the other hand, over time they developed into socio-cultural and constructive institutions that played roles in relief efforts, the reconstruction of war-affected areas, literacy programs, and social participation (Ahmadi Sepehr Kheyberi, 2000 AD/1399 SH; Moradzadeh, 2009 AD/1388 SH).

Meanwhile, local institutions such as the Islamic city and village councils and popular social organizations, particularly after the 1990s, contributed to the emergence of a form of endogenous and normative security by strengthening social participation and increasing political legitimacy (Bazi & Hedayati, 2017 AD/1396 SH), a form of security that emerged from trust and social participation rather than from state control alone (Roe, 2008: 793). This process can be understood as a constructivist step toward institutionalizing collective values and redefining the state-society relationship within a normative framework.

Sustainable security in the Islamic Republic was not confined to the political or military sphere but also expanded into the scientific, economic, and cultural domains. One important dimension of this security was technological and scientific independence, which was pursued during the decades following the Revolution. Investment in defense industries, medicine, nuclear technologies, and nanotechnology represents an example of this approach, because technological capacity and scientific self-reliance create a layer of structural security that enhances resilience against external pressures (Miremadi, 2016: 98).

These advances contributed to the development of a form of ontological trust within Iranian society, that is, confidence in the continuity of social order and the capacity for survival without external dependence. Within the same framework, attention to social justice and balanced development also constituted an integral component of sustainable security. Institutions such as the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation and the Mostazafin Foundation not only served welfare functions but also, at the normative level, contributed to the reproduction of the system’s social meaning and legitimacy (Ghanbari et al., 2016 AD/1395 SH).

This model, as Floyd argues, elevates security from the level of fear and threat to that of emancipation, justice, and flourishing (Floyd, 2007). Nevertheless, the full realization of sustainable security in the Islamic Republic of Iran has been accompanied by challenges, including economic sanctions, geopolitical pressures, and other difficulties (Ghorbani Sepehr & Ebrahimi, 2023 AD/1402 SH). These

challenges demonstrate that sustainable security, in its constructivist sense, is a dynamic and continually reconstructed process rather than a fixed condition. Overall, sustainable security in the Islamic Republic of Iran represents the integration of hard and soft security. On the one hand, it relies on defensive capabilities, deterrence, and the preservation of national independence; on the other hand, through the expansion of social justice, institutional trust, scientific development, and cultural participation, it has achieved a degree of social and ideational sustainability.

This hybrid model demonstrates that, within the constructivist framework, sustainable security is not merely a product of material power; rather, it rests upon the normative, identity-based, and cultural foundations of society. Thus, security in the Islamic Republic has progressed from the level of survival and threat prevention to the level of the reproduction of meaning, identity, and norms, a concept that can be understood within constructivism as the ultimate stage of security transformation, namely “Sustainable Security.”

Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of reconstructing and explaining the three-stage transformation of the concept of security, from negative to positive and subsequently to sustainable security, within the theoretical framework of constructivism. The study sought to demonstrate how key constructivist concepts, namely identity, culture, and norms, establish the internal connection among these stages and reconceptualize security not as a static and material phenomenon, but as a dynamic and social process. The Islamic Revolution of Iran was employed as a case study not as the primary subject of the research, but as an instrument for validating the theoretical framework, thereby demonstrating the coherence of the three-stage model within a real historical-social context.

The findings of this study demonstrate that, within the constructivist framework, the transformation of the concept and practice of security can be reconstructed as three successive stages, not merely as three parallel levels: the stage of negative security (survival and resistance), the stage of positive security (trust and empowerment), and the stage of sustainable security (the long-term integration of identity, culture, and deterrence). At the stage of negative security, the Islamic Revolution, as a response to the threats posed by the Pahlavi regime and external pressures, redefined security from a normative perspective and demonstrated that even phenomena such as war and mass mobilization are rooted in social constructs such as “Martyrdom” and “Independence.” The transition to positive security, through institutions such as Jihad-e Sazandegi and the Basij popular mobilization, elevated security from the absence of threats to the possibility of

flourishing and social justice and institutionalized mutual state-nation trust as a key norm. Ultimately, sustainable security in the Islamic Republic, through the integration of defensive capabilities with cultural and scientific development, transformed security into a long-term, identity-oriented project. This integration not only answers the research question, namely, how security transforms within constructivism, but also fulfills the broader objective of the study: to provide a theoretical framework that moves beyond a Western-centric understanding of security and enriches it through a non-Western example such as Iran.

Compared with previous studies of security, the findings of this research offer several distinctive contributions. First, unlike classical approaches, such as realist or institutionalist theories, which define security primarily in terms of the state and survival, this study demonstrates that, within the constructivist framework, security is a social and multidimensional phenomenon that emerges through the interaction of people, the state, and culture. Second, at the theoretical level, the findings support the views of constructivists such as Wendt and McSweeney, who emphasize the social character of security and the role of norms in its production. At the same time, however, the article goes beyond these approaches by introducing the elements of “Endogenous Transformation” and “Collective Security Identity” into the theory. It demonstrates that security can be reproduced not only through interaction among states, but also within a society through the institutionalization of shared values. Accordingly, the contribution of this study to the security literature lies in presenting a three-stage empirical model for explaining the dynamics of security in revolutionary and post-revolutionary societies. Third, at the practical level, the findings of this research may also be useful to policymakers in the fields of national, cultural, and social security. A constructivist understanding of security, particularly under conditions of external pressure and economic sanctions, can contribute to a reconsideration of security policies by shifting the focus from purely hard-power defense toward strengthening social trust, distributive justice, and popular participation, elements that constitute the foundations of sustainable security.

Nevertheless, the present study has certain limitations. Its focus on the Islamic Revolution as a case study limits the extent to which the three-stage model can be fully generalized to other countries. Furthermore, empirical examination of quantitative indicators in the areas of human security, social justice, and institutional trust could complement this theoretical framework in future research. Future studies are therefore encouraged to test the three-stage model of security transformation in other cultural and civilizational contexts, such as Latin American societies, the Arab world, or East Asia, in order to clarify the comparative capacity of constructivist theory to explain indigenous patterns of security.

Moreover, an interdisciplinary approach drawing on political science, sociology, and cultural studies could be employed to examine the influence of discourses and media on the reproduction of security norms. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that security, in its constructivist sense, is a dynamic, social, and meaning-based process rather than merely a condition characterized by the absence of threats. The Islamic Revolution of Iran, by transforming security into a collective and normative project from the very first stage (negative security), demonstrated that security can be redefined on the basis of identity, trust, and justice. This finding not only opens a new horizon for theorizing about security but also demonstrates that security becomes sustainable when it is institutionalized both in the minds of people and within the institutions of society.

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Compliance with Research Ethics Principles

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Data Availability Statement

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Contemporary Researches on Islamic Revolution



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

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

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

study has thus far been conducted in this area;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. Literature Review

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

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

1.1. Comparative Studies

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

1.2. Independent Studies

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

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

2. Conceptual Foundations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.1. Human Freedom

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.2. Caliphate

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.4. The Obligation of the Ruler to Consult the People

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Critique of Martyr Sadr's View

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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Contemporary Researches on Islamic Revolution



Neighborhood Policy in Times of Crisis: A Constructivist Analysis of Armenia's and the Republic of Azerbaijan's Positions toward Iran during the Wars of 2025 and 2026

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Scientific Research	Objective: Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan, as significant northern neighbors of Iran, have consistently played a central role in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), largely due to their ongoing and historical disputes. The Iranian government's approach toward these states has been a point of contention among Iranian elites and policymakers. Consequently, assessing which of these two countries demonstrates greater reliability, especially during periods of crisis, remains a critical issue in IRI foreign policy. The military conflicts of 2025 and 2026, including Israeli and United States attacks on Iranian territory, present a valuable context for this assessment. Utilizing constructivist theory to identify the characteristics of a "Good Neighbor," this article conducts a comparative analysis of Yerevan's and Baku's responses to the 2025 and 2026 attacks, with particular attention to official statements, elite perspectives, and public opinion in both countries.
Article history: Received: 2026-07-10 Received in revised form: 2026-27-27 Accepted : 2026-07-31 Available online: 2026-10-24	Research Method: In this comparative study, data were collected from library resources and online sources. A mixed quantitative–qualitative content analysis method was employed to analyze the data.
Keywords: Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Wars of 2025 and 2026, Armenia, Republic of Azerbaijan, Good Neighbor.	Findings: Analysis through a constructivist framework and empirical data from the two wars demonstrates that Armenia's positions align more closely with the constructivist understanding of a "Good Neighbor." This alignment is evident in Armenia's respect for the norm of non-use of force, prioritization of regional stability, and conceptualization of security as a shared interest. The constructivist perspective suggests that the notion of a good neighbor develops through extended processes of identity formation and socialization.
	Conclusion: This study demonstrates that Yerevan's policy of good neighborliness during the two wars was shaped by Armenia's identity and perceptions of its southern neighbor. By contrast, given its strategic identity as both a partner of Israel and a neighbor of Iran, the Republic of Azerbaijan exhibited dual behavior that resulted in a policy of cautious balancing. This policy was characterized by considerable ambiguity and equivocation. The difference between the two countries cannot be explained solely in terms of material considerations. Rather, the two governments' differing understandings of "Neighborliness," "Security," "Interests," "Friendship," and "Enmity," all of which operate in a meaningful relationship with "Identity," played a fundamental role.

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Introduction

A transformed future for international relations is approaching at an accelerating pace. Its principal characteristic is the emergence of fundamental changes in the structure of the international system. These conditions call for new priorities in the formulation of countries' foreign policies.

The reality is that the rapid transformations currently taking place across the world, together with the shortening of the time required for the future international system's structure to stabilize, have led many governments to move away from simple-linear models and toward complex-nonlinear approaches. In formulating new foreign policy frameworks, they are consequently giving greater priority than before to quantum perspectives.¹

This emerging era is one in which neighboring and contiguous countries have assumed greater importance than in the past. All available evidence and indications suggest that the global system's unipolar-multipolar structure is moving toward a multipolar, multi-centered configuration, around which the future international system will revolve (Haghgoo, 2025 AD/1404 SH: 167). Although the emergence and consolidation of this new structure remain some distance away, there is broad agreement that neighboring countries and regional orders will become more prominent in the new global order than they have been previously.

In an era whose most salient characteristic is the "Dispersion of Power," countries such as Iran, which has numerous neighbors, possess unprecedented opportunities to play an effective role at the regional and global levels. Realizing these opportunities, however, depends on whether a country's foreign policy can capitalize on the prevailing conditions by making appropriate choices regarding its preferences and priorities.

The significance of this issue becomes even clearer when we consider that, over approximately the past 200 years, substantial portions of Iran's territories have been separated from its political domain. This has gradually raised the question of how, following such territorial separation, these lands, now bearing an Iranian historical identity and situated within separate political units, should co-exist in the future while remaining within different political frameworks (Javadi

1. According to this perspective, contemporary society differs fundamentally from the simpler societies of the past, and considerable uncertainty shapes the processes governing present-day communities. From this standpoint, those who formulate and make decisions are required to take account of the multiple characteristics of a quantumized world, including the fragmented identities of individuals, groups, and societies. In today's quantum world, society resembles a living and complex organism in which relationships, probabilities, interactions, and moment-to-moment conditions shape outcomes.

Arjamandi et al., 2014 AD/1393 SH: 37; Ashraf, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 140).

The experience of the wars imposed on Iran by Israel and the United States, the 2025 Twelve-Day War and the 2026 Ramadan War, appears to have brought this objective closer to realization, with these conflicts serving as a pivotal point in the region's future transformations. In this context, understanding the positions and actions of Iran's neighboring countries at the two critical junctures of the 2025 and 2026 wars is of considerable importance.

There is no doubt that, among Iran's neighboring countries, Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan occupy a particularly significant position for various reasons, including their ongoing and historical disputes with one another. These disputes have consistently constituted an important issue in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Recent developments in the Caucasus, particularly in relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, have also intensified the ambiguity surrounding Iran's foreign policy and created reciprocal opportunities and threats. Unless these circumstances are addressed intelligently, they will not benefit Iran (Ajili et al., 2024 AD/1403 SH: 1).

The importance of this issue is further underscored by the fact that Iranian elites and politicians have never maintained a uniform position on how the IRI should respond to these disputes; disagreements have periodically emerged in this regard. Despite these differences, which are often expressed within the context of political rivalries, the official policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, even following the formation of Masoud Pezeshkian's administration, has remained focused on "Active Balancing" between Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Although some indications suggest that this policy has become more active than before, supporters of the current administration maintain that the approach neither entails full alignment with Baku nor distancing Iran from Yerevan. Rather, they describe it as an effort to reduce tensions with the Republic of Azerbaijan, preserve strategic relations with Armenia, and prevent geopolitical changes in the South Caucasus. Conversely, certain political currents and even security institutions remain concerned about Baku's strategic relationship with Israel and its implications for Iran's national security.

Given the importance of this issue to the foreign policy of the IRI, the central research question of this article concerns which of the two countries, Armenia or the Republic of Azerbaijan, demonstrated greater good-neighborly conduct toward Iran during the two critical episodes of Israeli and United States military aggression against Iran in 2025 and 2026, referred to in Iranian official circles as the Twelve-Day War and the Ramadan War, respectively.

Answering this question could play an important role in shaping Iran's future foreign policy toward these two countries. To address it, the article first reviews

the background to the debate. Then it draws on constructivist insights to conduct a comparative assessment of the two countries' records during the aforementioned periods, examining their positions at three levels: official, elite, and public.

The data for this article were collected through library research and Internet-based sources. Subsequently, using a comparative method and drawing on the tenets of constructivism, the study comparatively examines the positions of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan toward the wars imposed on Iran in 2025 and 2026. The data were analyzed using a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach, drawing on both inductive and deductive approaches. It should be noted that, depending on the subject matter, comparative methods and content analysis were employed in this study. In examining data concerning the positions of the two aforementioned countries toward the two wars of 2025 and 2026, a quantitative-qualitative content analysis method was used. It should also be explained that the collection and analysis of Internet-based data were conducted both manually and digitally, with the assistance of software and artificial intelligence tools. To minimize errors and the common bugs associated with AI tools, each examination was conducted at least three times.

1. Literature Review

Before examining the main issue addressed in this article, it is necessary to review the most recent sources related to the subject. This review was organized around interconnected themes, including "The positions of Iran's neighboring countries toward the wars of 2025 and 2026 against Iran, the place of the conflicts between Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, constructivism and good-neighborliness in the foreign policies of states," and related topics.

Several recent studies are relevant to the issue addressed in this article, although they differ significantly from the present study. For example, in the article "The Necessity of Redefining Iran's Regional Priorities in the Future International System from a Constructivist Perspective (With a Focus on the Twelve-Day War)," Javad Haghgoo (2025 AD/1404 SH) employs constructivist literature to examine the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, his primary focus is on the need to redefine the scope of Iran's regional boundaries in light of the experience of the Twelve-Day War. Sinaei et al. (2024 AD/1403 SH), in their article "Iran and the Active Neighborhood Strategy: Fractal Patterning in Region-Oriented Foreign Policy," make no direct reference to the two recent wars. Instead, they examine Iran's active neighborhood foreign policy as a multi-neighbor state within the systemic structure of the international system and recommend the use of strategic and intelligent diplomacy in Iran's foreign policy, intelligent

synergy, and attention to institutional practices for structuring an active and coalition-building neighborhood policy. The article "A Theoretical Representation of the Foreign Policy Outlook of Masoud Pezeshkian," by Ahmadinejad et al. (2024 AD/1403 SH), likewise formulates the discursive-system outlook of Masoud Pezeshkian's foreign policy. Esmaeili and Haghnas (2023 AD/2023 AD/1402 SH SH), in their article "Coalition-Building by the Islamic Republic of Iran Based on Neighborhood Policy, with an Emphasis on the Axis of Resistance," focus primarily on the compatibility of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy with the provisions of the Constitution over the years and essentially do not refer either to the two recent wars or to constructivism. The article "Presenting a Strategic Model of Neighborhood Policy for the Islamic Republic of Iran," by Barzegar and Azghandi (2023 AD/2023 AD/1402 SH SH), likewise seeks to provide a strategic model for neighborhood policy. Abbas Araghchi (2022 AD/2022 AD/1401 SH SH), in his article "Good-Neighborliness Policy: Approaches and Requirements for the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran," examines practical requirements concerning neighborhood relations from the perspective of a diplomat and seeks to offer strategies for strengthening Iran's good-neighborliness policy.

The articles "Cultural Iran and Civilizational Convergence in Central Asia and the Caucasus," by Rashidi et al. (2022 AD/1401 SH); "Para-diplomatic Regionalism with an Emphasis on Cultural Iran," by Saei (2020 AD/1399 SH); "The Soft-Power Capacities of the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Cultural Iran Region," by Haghgoo (2019 AD/1398 SH); "Iran's Civilizational Sphere, Globalization, and the Future of the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in This Region," by Javadi Arjmand, Haghgoo, and Azimzadeh (2014 AD/1393 SH); "The Theory of Persian Civilization or Cultural Iran," by Mohammadi (2013 AD/1392 SH); and "Explaining Iran's Indigenist and Regionalist Approach to Cultural Iran in the Process of Globalization," by Ahmadi (2012 AD/1391 SH), likewise provide recommendations concerning the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, focusing primarily on Iran's civilizational sphere and the concept of Cultural Iran. Essentially, however, they do not focus either on the recent wars or on explaining the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran from the perspective of the concept of neighborhood and the constructivist approach. The article "Constructivism, Identity, Language, and the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran," by Mottaghi and Kazemi (2007 AD/1386 SH), although it draws on a constructivist approach, focuses primarily on theoretical analysis. Accordingly, the review conducted in this study demonstrates that, because the aforementioned works have not addressed issues such as "Employing the Constructivist Theoretical Approach to Understand Neighborhood Policy" and "Ex-

amining the Positions of the Aforementioned Countries during the Twelve-Day War and the Ramadan War,” the present article offers an innovative contribution and introduces a new line of inquiry.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned works have been used as sources where relevant to the discussions developed in this article.

2. Concepts

Among the concepts employed in this article, the two expressions “The Wars of 2025 and 2026 against Iran” and “Good Neighbor” require precise clarification. The following brief discussion therefore seeks to explain the definitions and criteria adopted by the author for these terms.

2.1. The Wars of 2025 and 2026 against Iran

In 2025 and 2026, the Islamic Republic of Iran was subjected to attacks by Israel and the United States on two separate occasions. The first war, commonly referred to as the Twelve-Day War, began on 13 June 2025 (23 Khordad 2025 AD/1404 SH in the Solar Hijri calendar) with an Israeli air attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities, military bases, and residential areas. Israel declared that the objectives of the war were to destroy Iran’s nuclear and missile programs, alter the country’s political structure, and reduce regional threats. More than one thousand people, including a number of senior military commanders and nuclear scientists, were killed in these attacks. The attacks were carried out according to prior Israeli planning and with U.S. support. On the tenth day of the war, the U.S. military directly entered the conflict by bombing Iranian nuclear facilities. In response, Iran launched hundreds of missiles and drones at targets in the occupied territories as part of Operation True Promise 3. The war continued from 13 June to 22 June 2025 (IRNA, 16 Khordad 2025 AD/1404 SH; Nour News, 14 Khordad 2025 AD/1404 SH; Euronews, June 15, 2025; The Times of Israel, 2025).

Several months after the Twelve-Day War, on 28 February 2026 (9 Esfand 2025 AD/1404 SH in the Solar Hijri calendar/10 Ramadan 1447 in the Islamic lunar calendar), another attack against Iran was launched by the United States and Israel. The aggression by the two countries began with attacks on several locations in Iran, including the Leader’s compound. During this war, numerous senior Iranian officials, including the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, were killed. The attacks, which prompted an Iranian response in the form of Operation True Promise 4, continued for 39 days, and a temporary ceasefire was established on 8 April 2026 (19 Farvardin 1405). In the official Iranian discourse, this conflict is referred to as the “Ramadan War.” (Wikipedia, 2026 Iran War)

2.2. Good Neighbor

Although various definitions can be offered for the concept of a “Good Neighbor” as one of the principal theoretical concepts of this article, in the present study a good neighbor refers to a neighboring country that behaves more responsibly toward its neighbor during various crises, such as war, provides assistance to its neighbor, and regards its neighbor’s security as part of its own security. It should be noted that there is no single, independent perspective on this important theoretical concept within the field of international relations; however, constructivists have addressed it more extensively than proponents of other theoretical approaches. From the perspective of constructivists such as Alexander Wendt, a good neighbor is not merely a product of interests; identity, trust, and norms are also important. According to this perspective, if two countries regard each other as friends, share a common identity, and have developed historical trust, they will behave more responsibly toward one another even during crises such as war. As will be explained in the theoretical framework below, in *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999), Wendt identifies three cultures or patterns of interaction among states under three approaches: Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian. From Wendt’s perspective, a bad neighbor belongs to the Hobbesian culture and exploits a neighbor’s crisis to increase its own power. An ordinary neighbor operates according to the Lockean culture: “It respects the rules but does not engage in deep cooperation.” A good neighbor, by contrast, belongs to the Kantian culture: “In times of adversity, such as war, it assists its neighbor and regards its neighbor’s security as part of its own.” Of course, the precise conceptualization of this notion in the present study is not based solely on Wendt’s views; we have also drawn on the perspectives of Nicholas Onuf, Peter Katzenstein, and Martha Finnemore.

3. Theoretical Framework: Constructivism as an Approach to Explaining the Concept of a “Good Neighbor”

Although constructivism does not offer an independent theory of “Neighborhood,” among the major theories of international relations it has the greatest potential for explaining the concept of a “Good Neighbor.” Unlike realism, which largely regards neighboring states as sources of threat, constructivism maintains that the nature of relations among neighbors is a product of identity, norms, perceptions, and social interactions, rather than merely geography or the distribution of power (Wendt, 1992). This approach should be regarded as one of the most widely used theoretical perspectives in contemporary international relations.

However, a full understanding of it cannot be achieved without an understanding of its philosophical foundations.

As a philosophy, constructivism reflects particular tendencies and conceptions

concerning ontological, epistemological, and anthropological questions, and the combination of these conceptions provides a particular understanding of the world (von Glasersfeld: 7-8; Delanty, 1997: 8).

The constructivist doctrine can be traced from both meta-theoretical and theoretical perspectives. Given the period in which this approach emerged, the simultaneous engagement of theorists such as Alexander Wendt and Nicholas Onuf in these two domains appears to have been, above all, a consequence of the extensive criticisms directed at the mainstream theoretical approaches in international relations (Haghgoo, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 36). Unlike influential approaches such as Kenneth Waltz's perspective, constructivists have shifted the focus of debate from epistemology to ontology (Wind, 1997: 225). In Wendt's words, what matters more is what exists, rather than how we can know it (Wendt, 2000: 170). It is precisely for this reason that, as some scholars have noted, the constitutive role of ideational factors has acquired a unique position in constructivist thought (Risse, 2000: 5), while material elements, which were often given disproportionate attention in international relations theory, have given way to non-material elements such as ideas, meanings, and related constructs.

Constructivists are, of course, distinguished from certain radical approaches, such as radical post-structuralism, by their acceptance of and attention to material elements. In other words, constructivists emphasize both the material and ideational dimensions of social life (Haghgoo, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 37). It is on the basis of this dual perspective that Wendt, the best-known theorist of this approach, who has at times been accused by critics of scientism, maintains that a world exists independently of the minds and languages of individual observers, and that scientific theories, even if this world is not directly observable, generally refer to it (Wendt, 2005 AD/1384 SH).

Although Wendt distinguishes between "Natural Kinds" and "Social Kinds" despite the criticisms directed against him, he considers social kinds to be more dependent on the beliefs of actors (Wendt, 1999: 372). Wendt argues that actors act on the basis of meanings constructed through interaction (Wendt, 1992: 391). In other words, from this perspective, meanings do not exist inherently within being or reality; rather, they are secondary constructions. Wendt emphasizes the need for a cultural perspective in understanding social phenomena such as neighborhood and argues that emphasizing the cultural dimension of structure can open up new possibilities for change (Wendt, 2000). In this sense, shared cognitive structures provide the context within which material resources operate and confer upon those resources the meanings necessary for human action (Wendt, 1995).

In a related vein, Nicholas Onuf argues that constructivism cannot affirm knowledge of the world independently of discourse (Onuf, 1989). For Onuf, too,

attention to material elements is an accepted premise. Nevertheless, he maintains that it is rules that transform material factors into resources (Onuf, 2002: 133). The issue of actors' identities can be regarded as the most important subject of constructivist scholarship. This issue assumes particular significance in relation to the concept of neighborhood. From a constructivist perspective, identity should be regarded as a relational category embedded in a social context. In Wendt's formulation, actors acquire identities through participation in collective meanings, and these identities, as characteristics of international actors, generate their motivational and behavioral dispositions (Wendt, 1999: 229). In other words, it is these diverse and changing identities that shape the interests and behaviors of actors (Haghgoo, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 38).

With regard to the concept of neighborhood, this approach moves beyond purely objective and material criteria, which generally emphasize geography and material inter-dependence. Instead, it focuses on ideas and cognitive constructs, discourse and the power of language, culture, and, more broadly, non-material and ideational structures. Within this theory, the concept of neighborhood can be examined in connection with issues such as anarchy. Wendt argues that international anarchy does not, in itself, compel states to engage in hostility and competition. Wendt's famous proposition that "Anarchy is what states make of it" directly addresses this point. His argument is that if two neighboring countries develop relations based on trust, cooperation, and shared norms over the course of many years; they can maintain non-hostile relations even in the absence of a world government. Thus, neighborhood is not merely a geographical condition; it is a social relationship (Wendt, 1992).

From Wendt's perspective, states do not enter the international system with predetermined identities; rather, their identities and interests are formed through the process of interaction with other states. If neighboring states consistently engage in positive interactions, economic cooperation, political dialogue, and cooperation in crisis management, they will gradually define one another not as "Enemies," but as "Partners" or "Friends." Consequently, even in times of war or natural disasters, their behavior will be influenced by this social identity rather than solely by material calculations. In this connection, Wendt identifies three cultures of anarchy in international politics. First, the Hobbesian cultures, in which states regard one another as enemies; relations are characterized by distrust and threats, and the possibility of war is ever-present. Second, the Lockean cultures, in which states are rivals but recognize one another's existence and maintain rules for regulating competition. Third, the Kantian cultures, in which states regard one another as friends, resolve disputes peacefully, and support one another in the face of threats. If this framework is applied to relations among neighboring

states, it can be argued that a bad neighbor belongs to the Hobbesian culture and exploits a neighbor's crisis to increase its own power. An ordinary neighbor operates according to the Lockean culture: "It respects the rules but does not engage in deep cooperation." A good neighbor belongs to the Kantian culture: "It assists its neighbor in times of war, earthquakes, floods, or humanitarian crises and regards its neighbor's security as part of its own security." (Wendt, 1999)

In addition to Wendt, the perspectives of other constructivists, such as Nicholas Onuf, Peter Katzenstein, and Martha Finnemore, concerning the concept of neighborhood also warrant attention. Onuf demonstrates that rules and social practices constitute the reality of international politics; therefore, relations among neighboring states are likewise products of shared rules and norms (Onuf, 1989). In his works on the culture of national security, Katzenstein argues that culture, identity, and shared values play fundamental roles in shaping the security behavior of states, an argument that can also be applied to the analysis of relations among neighboring states (Katzenstein, 1996). Finnemore likewise demonstrates that international norms influence the definition of states' interests. Consequently, actions such as humanitarian assistance or providing aid to a neighboring state can be regarded as part of a state's identity and interests rather than merely as instrumental choices. Unlike realist approaches, which explain state behavior solely in terms of cost-benefit calculations, Martha Finnemore argues that states often act according to the "Logic of Appropriateness"; that is, they ask: 'What should a responsible and legitimate state do under such circumstances?' (Finnemore, 1996)

Accordingly, states' behavior toward their neighbors is not merely a product of material interests. Still, it is also influenced by norms regarded as legitimate within the international community, including respect for sovereignty, opposition to the use of force, solidarity in times of crisis, and responsibility for regional stability. From a constructivist perspective, a good neighbor is not a natural or geographical fact but a social construct. A country is considered a good neighbor when, through sustained interactions, confidence-building, adherence to shared norms, and the formation of non-hostile identities, it establishes a relationship that, even under conditions of crisis, leads to cooperation, mutual support, and joint crisis management rather than exploitation of its neighbor's vulnerability. Within this framework, war merely constitutes a test of pre-existing identities and norms; it is not, in itself, a factor that independently determines states' behavior.

4. Examination of the Positions of Iran's Two Northern Neighbors toward the Wars Imposed on Iran in 2025 and 2026

Understanding how states respond to their neighbors, particularly at critical junc-

tures such as war, is by no means straightforward, and naturally requires consideration of numerous components and variables. This is particularly challenging in relation to events such as the two Twelve-Day Wars and the Ramadan War, which occurred only relatively recently. Nevertheless, drawing on the capacities of modern research tools, this section of the article seeks to provide a relatively comprehensive examination of the responses of Armenia and Azerbaijan to the two aforementioned wars, with simultaneous emphasis on three dimensions: “Official Statements,” “The views of academic elites and think tanks,” and “Public Opinion.” It should be explained that these three dimensions were selected simultaneously in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the overall positions of the two countries toward the wars of 2025 and 2026. Clearly, focusing solely on the official statements of the governments concerned or solely on public opinion in these two countries, or solely on the perspectives of their elites could not, by itself, adequately represent the positions of these countries toward the two wars. For this reason, a combination of the three dimensions was taken into consideration, and their overall convergence was treated as indicative of the positions of the two countries. It should be emphasized that, in formulating states’ foreign-policy relations, simultaneous attention to different levels of analysis, including the three levels identified above, is essential.

4.1. Examination of Armenia’s Position at the Official, Elite, and Public Levels

Armenia was one of the few neighbors of Iran to explicitly and unequivocally condemn Israel’s attack. The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that “The unilateral attack against Iran poses a threat to regional peace and must be stopped immediately.” (Mirror-Spectator; OC Media; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia) Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan also emphasized the need to prevent the war from spreading (BESA Center; OC Media; Office of the Prime Minister of Armenia). The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs officially stated: “We condemn this action and call for the immediate cessation of hostilities.” (Armenian Radio; Armenpress)

This position was also adopted during the second war in 2026.

During the second war, because the United States was officially the initiator of the aggression against Iran, some observers expected Armenia, in light of considerations relating to the position of the United States as a hegemonic power within the structure of the international system, to adopt a different position from that taken during the first war. Nevertheless, Armenia adopted a similar position. The Armenian government condemned the attacks and called for the immediate cessation of military operations. At the same time, Armenia’s National Security

Council convened an extraordinary session to examine the security of the southern border, transit routes, and the possibility of an influx of refugees.

This condemnation was not limited to the official positions of the Armenian government. An analysis of the media and social-media networks active in the country also clearly indicates that, for various material and ideational reasons, public opinion in Armenia, as well as a significant segment of the Armenian intellectual and elite community, strongly condemned the aggression and expressed solidarity with Iranian society (Reddit data and social-media platforms active in Armenia; APRI Institute). In this regard, and merely as one example, the Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia (APRI) has argued that Iran's stability constitutes a vital interest for Armenia's security. The institute's experts have advanced various arguments in support of this claim and have even stated that the 2026 war posed greater risks to Armenia than the 2025 war (APRI Institute). Furthermore, an examination of the content of several Armenian websites, such as CivilNet and EVN Report, during the two wars provides sufficiently credible evidence that the official, elite, and public discourse in the country concerning Iran can, to a considerable extent, be situated within the framework of a good-neighborliness policy toward Iran.

4.2. Examination of the Positions of the Republic of Azerbaijan at the Official, Elite, and Public Levels

Due to the severe restrictions on the media in Azerbaijan, examining this issue proved more challenging than in the case of Armenia. Nevertheless, at least according to the official statements issued by the presidency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, it is clear that, unlike Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan did not condemn the Israeli attacks in 2025 and did not express support for Iran. Based on the wording of these statements, Baku merely called on the parties to exercise restraint and engage in dialogue. Notably, the same position was reiterated during the second war (MFA of Azerbaijan; President of Azerbaijan). Initially, the Republic of Azerbaijan emphasized restraint by the parties and sought to ensure that its relations with Israel would not be adversely affected. It should be noted, however, that following the reported strikes by drones in the Nakhchivan region, which Baku attributed to Iran, while Tehran denied responsibility, the position of the Republic of Azerbaijan toward Iran became more critical. The country's Security Council even convened a meeting (APRI Institute). One notable aspect of Azerbaijan's conduct was that, according to research reports, Baku had reportedly asked Israel through diplomatic channels not to target Iranian areas with predominantly ethnic Azerbaijani populations, particularly Tabriz (OC Media; BESA Center).

Although reliable survey data concerning public opinion in Azerbaijan during the two wars are limited, available analyses indicate that part of Azerbaijani society supported the government's position because of the country's strategic relationship with Israel. At the same time, another segment, particularly religious groups, viewed the attack on Iran critically (BESA Center). Among the country's elites, there was likewise no strong consensus. Researchers close to the government, who have considerably greater opportunities to express their views within Azerbaijan's closed political system, adopted positions broadly consistent with the official Baku line, emphasizing three principles: "Maintaining the strategic alliance with Israel," "Preventing the war from spreading to the Caucasus," and "Maintaining minimal relations with Iran in order to prevent instability along the border." (BESA Center)

It should not be overlooked, however, that Azerbaijani elites with religious orientations naturally held different perspectives. Nevertheless, because their views conflicted with the government's official position, they generally had limited opportunities to express them openly. This issue has also been noted by some Western think tanks, such as the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich (CSS, ETH Zurich). It is important, however, to distinguish between explicit support for the Islamic Republic of Iran and condemnation of the U.S. and Israeli attacks against Iran.

Among Azerbaijani religious elites living outside the Republic of Azerbaijan, particularly Shi'a clerics residing in Qom, Najaf, Turkey, and certain European countries, some clerics associated with the Qom seminary, emphasizing the "Necessity of supporting the Axis of Resistance" and "Shi'a Solidarity," defended the positions of the Islamic Republic in its confrontation with Israel and expressed the strongest degree of support for Iran. Most of these individuals do not currently reside in Azerbaijan. In this context, members and supporters of the Muslim Unity Movement of Azerbaijan are particularly well known as the most important Shi'a movement critical of the Azerbaijani government. Although a significant number of members of this movement have engaged in media activities outside Azerbaijan (in Turkey, Iran, and Europe) following domestic repression, it should be noted that these individuals are predominantly Azerbaijani clerics living abroad and do not necessarily represent the dominant current among religious elites within the Republic of Azerbaijan.

As noted above, unlike the Republic of Azerbaijan, which during the 2025 and 2026 attacks primarily emphasized restraint and diplomacy, Armenia, in official statements by its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, condemned the military attacks against Iran as actions threatening regional peace and stability (MFA Armenia, 2025 & 2026; OC Media, 2025 & 2026). This position was also reflected in anal-

yses by Armenian think tanks, with APRI and EVN Report describing Iran's stability as a vital interest for Armenia's security (APRI, 2026; EVN Report, 2026). To conclude this section and facilitate the analysis of the central issue of this article through the lens of constructivist theory, the positions of the two countries toward the wars of 2025 and 2026 are presented comparatively in the following table.

Table 1. Positions of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan toward Iran during the Wars of 2025 and 2026

Indicator	Armenia	Republic of Azerbaijan	Comparative Assessment
Official Positions	Explicit condemnation of military attacks against Iran; emphasis on respect for Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity; call for the immediate cessation of the war	Call for restraint and diplomacy; avoidance of directly condemning the United States and Israel; efforts to maintain a balance between relations with Iran and Israel	Armenia showed greater alignment with Iran's position, while Azerbaijan adopted a more ambiguous position
Academic Elite Perspective	Most analyses regarded Iran's stability as vital to Armenia's security and assessed the attacks as a threat to regional security	Government-aligned elites emphasized balance and national interests; some religious elites outside the country supported Iran, but this was not the dominant view	Armenia was more aligned with Iran; Azerbaijan was more pluralistic and balance-oriented
Public Opinion	Widespread concern about the consequences of weakening Iran for regional security, the economy, and regional corridors; greater sympathy toward Iran in the media and public sphere	Public opinion was fragmented; some segments were influenced by the partnership with Israel, while others, particularly religious groups, were critical of the attacks on Iran	A more sympathetic orientation toward Iran was observable in Armenia, whereas no clear consensus existed in Azerbaijan
Overall Outcome	In both wars, at the official and elite levels, Armenia's positions were generally closer to those of the Islamic Republic of Iran and emphasized opposition to the use of force and the preservation of regional stability	The Republic of Azerbaijan sought to balance its strategic relationship with Israel against the need to preserve relations with Iran; consequently, it avoided adopting explicit positions in support of Iran	In the two crises examined, Armenia demonstrated greater overall alignment with Iran's positions, whereas the Republic of Azerbaijan pursued a balancing approach

Source: Author

5. Discussion and Analysis: The Neighborhood Policies of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan toward Iran during the Wars of 2025 and 2026 from the Perspective of Constructivist Theory

As noted in the theoretical discussion, from the perspective of the principal constructivist thinkers, particularly Wendt, Onuf, Katzenstein, and Finnemore, greater support can be interpreted as an empirical indicator of the existence of a shared identity, shared perceptions, and the internalization of neighborhood norms. From the perspective of these scholars, states' behavior in times of crisis is not merely the product of material calculations or the balance of power; rather, it largely reflects social identities, internalized norms, mutual perceptions, and shared mean-

ings that have developed through historical processes of interaction among states. Through his well-known proposition concerning the logic of anarchy in the international system, that "Anarchy is what states make of it," (Wendt, 1992) Wendt emphasizes that hostility, competition, or friendship among states is not an inherent characteristic of the international system, but rather a consequence of states' perceptions of the "Other." Accordingly, the quality of relations among neighboring states depends less on geographical proximity than on the types of identities and shared meanings that have developed between them. In Onuf's perspective, whose work is closely associated with the influential role of rules, norms, and recurrent practices in constructing social reality, a "Good Neighbor" is not merely a state located alongside another state's geographical borders; rather, it is a state that, in practice, reproduces the rules of good-neighborliness, including respect for sovereignty, opposition to the use of force, refraining from exploiting a neighbor's vulnerabilities, and cooperation in crisis management.

Katzenstein, for his part, demonstrates that security cultures and regional identities shape states' perceptions of their national interests. From this perspective, interests are not predetermined; rather, they emerge from identity and political culture. If a state regards the security of its neighbor as part of its own security, it will behave differently in times of crisis from a state that regards its neighbor merely as an external actor or geopolitical rival. Martha Finnemore, likewise, unlike realist approaches that explain states' behavior solely in terms of cost-benefit calculations, argues that states often act according to a "Logic of Appropriateness"; that is, they ask: 'What should a responsible and legitimate state do under such circumstances?' (Finnemore, 1996)

Accordingly, states' behavior toward their neighbors is not merely a product of material interests. Still, it is also influenced by norms regarded as legitimate within the international community, including respect for sovereignty, opposition to the use of force, solidarity in times of crisis, and responsibility for regional stability. Finnemore's perspective provides an important complement to the analysis of the behavior of Iran's neighbors in this study. From her perspective, it can be argued that Armenia aligned its behavior with accepted norms of good-neighborliness and regional responsibility to a greater extent than the Republic of Azerbaijan. The condemnation of military attacks, emphasis on Iran's territorial integrity, warnings concerning the humanitarian and security consequences of the war, and emphasis on diplomatic solutions all indicate that, within the official discourse, as well as among a significant segment of Armenian elites and the public, there was a normative conception of the role of a "Responsible Neighbor." Within Finnemore's framework, this behavior can be regarded as an indication of the internalization of international norms

and an attempt to act as a responsible member of the regional community. By contrast, the behavior of the Republic of Azerbaijan can be analyzed more appropriately as a combination of norms and strategic calculations. Although Baku expressed concern about the expansion of the war and emphasized the need for dialogue, it refrained from explicitly condemning the attacks because of considerations arising from its strategic relationship with Israel. From Finnemore's perspective, this situation indicates that neighborhood norms competed in the decision-making process with norms and commitments arising from other identity and security networks, such as the strategic partnership with Israel and close ties with Turkey.

As noted above, one of the key concepts in constructivism is "Collective Identity." In his well-known article "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," (1994) Wendt explains that collective identity can be said to exist when states define each other's security and welfare not merely as instrumental interests, but as part of their own interests. Accordingly, under conditions of war and crisis, political support, humanitarian assistance, preservation of communication routes, opposition to harm against civilians, and efforts to mitigate the effects of a crisis on a neighboring state are not merely tactical measures; they can constitute empirical indicators of the existence of a collective identity and a sense of a shared "We." From this perspective, the concept of a "Good Neighbor" in international relations can be defined beyond legal good-neighborliness. A good neighbor is a state that, in times of crisis, regards its neighbor's security as inseparable from its own security, does not exploit its neighbor's vulnerability for its own benefit, participates in reproducing norms of cooperation, and demonstrates a sense of mutual responsibility through both discourse and practice.

Therefore, states' behavior during crises can be regarded as one of the most important indicators for assessing the depth of shared identity among neighboring states. Drawing on this theoretical framework, the behavior of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan during the wars of 2025 and 2026 can be interpreted beyond the simple question of political support or non-support. The findings of this study indicate that, during both crises, Armenia defined Iran's stability as part of its own stability and security. The condemnation of the attacks, emphasis on preserving Iran's territorial integrity, warnings regarding the consequences of instability in Iran for the South Caucasus, and continuation of political communications all indicate that, within the official discourse and among a significant segment of Armenian elites and the public, there existed a shared perception of the security destinies of the two countries. From a constructivist perspective, this behavior can be regarded as an indication of the internalization of neighborhood norms and the formation of a form of relational identity, an identity in which the neighbor

is not merely an adjacent political unit, but is regarded as part of “Our” security and social environment.

By contrast, the behavior of the Republic of Azerbaijan during the same period indicates that, although Iran’s stability was important to Baku, this importance was interpreted primarily in terms of its geopolitical, economic, and security consequences rather than through the lens of a shared identity. The Azerbaijani government, while emphasizing the need to prevent the war from spreading, refrained from directly condemning the attacks and sought to balance its strategic relationship with Israel against the necessity of maintaining relations with Iran. Within a constructivist framework, such behavior is more indicative of a competitive-balancing identity, that is, a relationship in which interaction exists, but the “Other” has not yet become part of the “We.”

Based on the evidence examined in this study, it can be argued that during the two wars of 2025 and 2026, Armenia exhibited more indications of a relational identity and shared perception with Iran than the Republic of Azerbaijan. This finding does not imply the existence of a “Complete collective identity” or a “Security Community” between Iran and Armenia. Rather, it indicates that, during these two crises, neighborhood norms were more deeply internalized in Tehran-Yerevan relations than in Tehran-Baku relations. By contrast, the approach of the Republic of Azerbaijan was more strongly based on balancing calculations, the preservation of strategic flexibility, and the simultaneous management of relations with Iran and Israel. It should be noted that, from the perspective of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, this finding carries an important implication. If constructivism is adopted as the analytical basis, neighborhood policy should not be formulated solely on the basis of material variables such as trade, military capabilities, or geopolitical considerations. Rather, the degree of shared identity, mutual trust, internalized norms, and the quality of mutual perceptions should also be incorporated into foreign-policy calculations. In other words, when assessing which neighbor is more likely, under conditions of crisis, to cooperate, provide support, or refrain from opportunistic behavior, material indicators alone are insufficient. It is also necessary to ask which neighbor, in practice, defines itself as part of the “We” with Iran and which neighbor continues to perceive Iran primarily as the “Other.”

From the perspective of this study, Armenia’s behavior in the two wars under examination provides greater evidence that it defines Iran as part of the “In-group” and as sharing a common security environment. In contrast, the behavior of the Republic of Azerbaijan more closely reflects a conception of Iran as an important neighbor, but one that remains separate from its own security and political identity. This difference can be explained not merely at the level of political posi-

tions, but also at the level of identity and mutual perceptions. It is precisely at this point that constructivism offers greater explanatory power than realist theories for understanding the concept of the “Good Neighbor” in international relations.

Conclusion

As discussed above, combining the perspectives of four well-known constructivist thinkers, Wendt, Onuf, Finnemore, and Katzenstein, made it possible to provide a more comprehensive definition of the concept of the “Good Neighbor.” From this perspective, a good neighbor is not merely a country that shares geographical proximity with another state or maintains extensive economic exchanges with it.

Rather, it is a state that, at the identity level, regards its neighbor’s security and stability as part of its own security and stability (Wendt); at the normative level, has internalized the norms of good-neighborliness, respect for sovereignty, opposition to the use of force, and cooperation during crises, and acts accordingly (Onuf and Finnemore); and, at the cultural and security levels, regards its neighbor as part of its own security community and regional identity while preventing the emergence of mutually reinforcing threat perceptions (Katzenstein).

In light of this integrated framework, it was argued that, in the two crises examined, Armenia demonstrated greater evidence than the Republic of Azerbaijan of a relational identity, internalized norms of good-neighborliness, and a sense of shared responsibility for Iran’s security. In other words, what brought Armenia’s positions closer to those of Iran during these two wars was not merely a temporary political convergence, but rather a greater overlap in security perceptions, shared norms, and an understanding of Iran’s stability as part of its own stability and security. A final point is that, from the perspective of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the findings of this article have an important theoretical implication. If analysis is based solely on realism, the focus will primarily be on the balance of power, military capabilities, or economic interests. Constructivism, however, demonstrates that the long-term sustainability of neighborhood relations depends above all on the quality of shared identities, the level of trust, the internalization of norms of cooperation, and the extent to which a “Shared Sense of We” develops among neighboring societies and states. Therefore, one of the strategic objectives of Iran’s neighborhood policy should be to strengthen shared identities, expand social and cultural interactions, and institutionalize norms of regional cooperation and solidarity. Under conditions of crisis, these normative and identity-based resources can influence the behavior of neighboring states to an extent comparable to material resources, or even to a greater extent.

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