

# **From Border to Border**

*Comprehensive research study on identity and ethnicity in Iran*

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## **A word to the readers**

This is summary of a comprehensive research on peace-based identity and ethnicity, conducted in thirteen Iranian provinces based on an anthropological view, the full version of which will be available in the form of a book for those interested. An interest in the study of identity and ethnicity has always existed and intensified in me by my own Kurdish background. Many of the ethnic attitudes, anecdotes, hearsay and war time memoirs form part of my lived, childhood experiences. I have lived and grown up in a region not far from the towns near Iraqi borders and a short distance from the Turkish border. For this reason I may have attained a clearer understanding of identity and ethnicity. Another reason for my interest in identity and ethnicity is the history of my own studies in other countries and mostly in Iran and its rural and deprived societies. These studies kept me in direct contact with the ethnicities that live in low-income and underdeveloped regions, an encounter and connection which in the end led to the recognition of different dimensions and angles of ethnicities. The third reason for studying and researching identity and ethnicity is the necessity for distinguishing these ethnicities from one another, as well as the weaknesses and shortcomings that have existed in center oriented policies for a long time leading to an unfair distribution of wealth and power in different and important regions outside the center. Another important reason is the role and importance of peace in the geography and history of Iran, especially at this critical juncture, inspiring me to conduct a peace-oriented study on identity and ethnicity. Studies for this research were mainly conducted on the elite of these ethnic groups and less on the common people. They first attempt to answer questions about what the understanding of these people is of ethnicities and themselves and how they use it as a basis to create a sense of otherness with other identities, and where they see themselves in the political and economic structure of the Iranian society today and what their opinion is about convergence, political cooperation, mother tongue and the concept of center and the surrounding ethnicities?

The phenomenon of ethnicity and the formation of identities and subcultures within national identities have become increasingly important in the contemporary world, and factors such as territorial divisions based on national government, inequalities, deprivations, ideologies and colonization play an important role in the formation of ethnic groups within societies. Many globalization experts around the world counted a number of factors that would weaken ethnic tendencies among today's educated youth after the years of World War II. They included the continuation of macro-plans and structural uniformity at an international level, globalization, the growth of urbanization and education, ease of access to different environments, and the world of media which is shrinking the concept of time and space. But the process of autonomy in the former Soviet republics and the UK colonies, and the continued pursuit of ethnic identity in the heart of Europe and other countries, and dozens of other cases indicate the survival of

ethnic tendencies in the new world in spite of all views. Such cases show that the pursuit of ethnic identity should not be considered specific to the Third World and underdeveloped countries.

Ethnicity is of high importance in Iran as a country with high ethnic diversity, compared to other countries. There have been ethnic tendencies among Iranian ethnic groups with varying strength and weakness. It should be noted that before the establishment of a modern state in Iran, the distinction between government and ethnic groups was not easy because ethnic groups and their heads were present in the governmental structure and the Iranian government was interdependent with those ethnic groups, and together they formed a single system called the Iranian identity. The government relied on these ethnic groups to mobilize armies, collect taxes and duties, and secure borders, and the ethnic groups shared in and benefited from the governmental power, and if the balance between the two was upset; this was restored. This situation occurred in some marginal parts of Iran, especially in the last century and in the historical periods such as the Constitutional Revolution, World War I and II, expulsion of Reza Shah, the coming to power of the second Pahlavi and at the time of the Islamic Revolution's victory. But with the coming to power of the central forces, it can be said that the local political-administrative organization had a short life.

A historical review of ethnic groups in Iran shows that they have been offended by discriminatory laws, especially on language, religion, and civil rights. In the Constitutional Revolution, rights of these groups were not taken into account, and during the Pahlavi era, the publication and distribution of newspapers, magazines, and books in ethnic languages were strictly prohibited. Today, the main reason and root of these dissatisfactions can be found in the feeling of political, cultural, economic, linguistic, and religious inequality among some ethnic groups in comparison with other ethnic groups, especially Persian speakers. In the political arena, Kurds, Turks, Arabs and the Baloch believe that they have no place in the political structure of the country and none of the officials of their ethnic groups are seen in the main high-ranking posts of the country. In economy, the non-central provinces lack the necessary facilities and it is believed that most of the country's facilities are accumulated in the central provinces. In the cultural section, the studied ethnic groups believe that there are restrictions on holding seminars and regional conferences, and the national and local media do not pay decent attention to or reflect the cultural rituals of these regions, nor do they serve their local cultures. In education, there are no textbooks in their mother tongues and the Kurdish, Turkish, Arab and Baloch children are forced to study in the country's schools in a second language. In religion, most of the Baloch, as well as some Kurds, have different religious affiliations from the country's official religion, and these Kurds believe that the religious views of the governmental officials have led to a political, cultural, social and economic oppression.

What we mentioned is only part of the ethnic demands of the last century, especially in the years after the rise of the Islamic Revolution. These demands have always been viewed as a security matter detrimental to national unity and consensus and they have been met with confrontational and violent reactions. This, as a result, has led to a violent behaviour between the centre and ethnic groups causing an irreparable damage to national unity and consensus.

Given that ethnicity and nationality are considered as modern social identities, and on the one hand in the nineteenth century ethnicity referred to groups of people living outside capitalism polis, and in the twentieth century this concept was applied to groups of people with a common language, territory and history, first defined for a nation and second with at least a language or even a territory distinct from the nation, in confrontation and competition with the nation, build their own history, unify the linguistic pluralism within themselves and specify their territory; and on the other hand, nationality is an identity that has a historical continuity and background that reflects a set of commitments and duties of a group of people who belong to a specific geographical location, decide, act and conclude together, so today there are two different views and interpretations between the political parties and civil activists in this regard. Also, considering the ambiguities between ethnic and national identities, and the fact that among some minorities present in the land of Iran, there is a great emphasis on using the term "nation" instead of "ethnicity", this study does not intend to undermine any concept by using the term "ethnicity". Since this study seeks to observe the scientific spirit without imposing individual values on the process, the author has achieved a decent understanding and knowledge of both of these views. This study is based on an anthropological and ethnocentric views. Throughout this study, the author has used both concepts of nation and ethnicity, maintaining his neutrality and keeping the issue of identity and ethnicity away from prejudice.

As mentioned, this study has attempted to answer the following questions and investigate these cases in detail using scientific methods and numerous interviews with the elites and people.

- What understanding do ethnicities have of themselves and of other identities with whom they feel strangers?
- Where do they find themselves in the political, economic and social structures of Iran today?
- What is their opinion about convergence, cooperation, political participation, the mother tongue and centralism?
- Is there an intellectual and practical room for gaining more independence among ethnicities?

The results of this study can help decision makers to solve the related problems peacefully and strengthen national unity and consensus by showing the current demands of each ethnic group.

I am obliged to appreciate the support of all those who helped me to conduct this study in various stages. Members of my family whose unconditional support never diminished, and who were by my side in all the difficult stages of this work, as well as my close friends who encouraged me in the research process. All the people who came together in order to collect and analyse the narrations of this work and conduct this comprehensive study. I am especially grateful to my assistants and colleagues, Ms. Roza Hemmati and Mr. Seyyed Mohammad (Jamal) Hosseini, who helped me during the research process to coordinate and collect contents and references. I am thankful to Ms. Sanaz Tabari for rereading the book and adding several quotes to it. Many individuals and institutions have helped to complete this research, many of the field studies were made possible only through exploratory travels, field training, support and cooperation. In this regard, I thank Mses Roza Hemmati, Sanaz Tabari, Dr. H Sorkhabi, Kurdistan Shahmoradi, Mohsen Maroofi, and Dr. Moslem N for their advice and monitoring the study's process and performing the quantitative analysis of the research, extracting field data and drawing figures and tables. My gratitude to Ms. Marzieh Nekokar for her editing, comments, and her accurate attention to details, especially in editing the content of this work. My special thanks to Dr. Hassan Rashidi for reading the final manuscript and helping to make it smoother and more accurate by providing advice and reminders about necessary corrections. I thank Shafaq Rahmani for reading and reviewing the theoretical literature of the text. I would also like to thank Professor Abbas Vali for his advice on the text and the first format of this book.

I owe my friends and colleagues for their support, hospitality, wise opinions and suggestions in thirteen provinces and cities of Iran, including Tehran, Isfahan, West and East Azerbaijan, Zanjan, Ardabil, Ilam, Khuzestan, Boushehr, Semnan, and Sistan and Baluchistan. Many of the dear friends whom we visited for interviews, and many others who helped to smooth field coordination and communication. Their names are too many to be mentioned here and there are those who kindly cooperated and asked me not to mention their names. I am also grateful to clergies, religious institutions, and other social figures who helped me with this study. I especially thank the interviewees and their families including officials in the departments and organizations of social and health services, various universities across the country, the Islamic Azad University and Payam Noor University, Al-Zahra University and Tabriz University for their unhesitating support in providing knowledge and information to complete this study.

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April 2020

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## Preface

One of the characteristics of the new world is humanity's getting rid of restrictions of traditions, accordingly, instead of being bound to the acceptance of traditional ideas, values, rules and norms of their ancestors, they redefine and define them independently. Identity and discovering what identity group each people belong to is one of the concepts that people independently seek to understand in the new world. Of course, many experts predicted that after World War II and the subsequent expansion of macro structural programs at national and international levels, as well as the growth of urbanization, education, easier travel to different environments and the atmosphere created by the media, would lead to the shrinking of time and place and reduce ethnic tendencies. They believed that today's educated young people of would not have would not be tied and restricted. But the process of autonomy in the former Soviet republics and the UK colonies and the continued process of seeking identity in Europe and developed countries such as UK (Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales), Spain (Basque Catalonia), Italy (northern and southern Italy, Veneto, and Venice), Poland (Upper Silesia), Switzerland (Zora), Belgium (Northern Flanders), France (Brittany), Cyprus (Turkish part of northern Cyprus) and dozens of other countries show that, contrary to all these views, ethnic tendencies exist in the new world.

In the last century, ethnic tendencies have also existed among Iranian ethnic groups with varying strength and weaknesses. In the early years of the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah and in Azerbaijan, the Democratic Party was able to declare its independence for about a year and take over the administration of some parts of Azerbaijan. At the same time, in Kurdistan, Kurdistan Party was able to take control of a number of Kurdish cities. In the years after the revolution, most of the Kurdish regions were in conflict over ethnic identity<sup>1</sup>. During the ruling of Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah, the Baloch regions also witnessed similar events, which were later extinguished by countermeasures of the central government. Also, among the Arabs, there have always been tendencies toward ethnic identities over the last century, Their latest activities in this field can be seen in the efforts and actions of groups such as Al-Ahwaziyah which is a sign of ethnic dissatisfaction whose main reason is political, economic, cultural, linguistic and religious inequality, and other factors that existed among the ethnic groups. They climaxed when a comparison was done with other ethnic groups, especially with Persian speakers. Politically, the

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see Cameron (2008), growth with or without equity: distributional impact of Indonesian development, Asian-Pacific economics literature, 16 (2), p. 1-17



Kurdish, Turkish, Arab and Baluch ethnic groups believe that there is no place for them in the political structure of the country, and that there are no officials of their ethnic group in the main posts of the Ministry of Governorship, the embassies, and other posts. And in economy, there is a belief that the majority of the country's facilities are concentrated in the central provinces. In regions such as Azerbaijan, where people today have some facilities, it is either as the result of the efforts of the people themselves or their industrial factories were built before the Islamic Revolution. Culturally, the studied ethnic groups believe that there are restrictions against the regional conferences, festivals and local rituals and that the national and local media neither reflect nor serve their local cultures. As for their mother tongues, 40 years after the Islamic Revolution, children of different ethnic groups are forced to learn their lessons in the second language in the country's schools, and there is no single unit for formal education in the mother tongue during the whole period of education. Baloch and some Kurds have religiously different tendencies from the country's official religion, and believe that the ideological view of the authorities has led to abuses against them in this regard. The absence of a Sunni mosque in the city of Tehran or compensating for the lack of senior managerial posts among members of these groups is among their important demands which have not been fulfilled yet, contrary to the various promises given to them<sup>2</sup>.

The above is only part of the demands of ethnic groups in the last century, and especially in the years after the rise of the Islamic Revolution, the demands that have always been dealt with as a security matter, and considered detrimental to the national unity and consensus and addressed as confrontational and violent actions. As a result, violent behaviour between the centre and ethnic groups is seen which, after a while and with the weakening of ethnic groups, has turned into an unpleasant silence over the people in those lands. Also during this period, no practical action has been taken to fulfil ethnic demands and achieve social justice and equality in order to prevent these violent acts. This is while the efforts of a government should always be in the direction of preventing violent acts and solving problems in a peaceful atmosphere and through peaceful interaction. A government should activate parties and NGOs creating a space for the ethnic elites while accepting cultural diversity through listening to the demands of different groups. The result is ignoring cultural differences, following politics of assimilation and carrying out extremist actions by both the centre and the party which may backfire and cause violent behaviours rather than achieve justice and equality - a process which may continue in a vicious circle.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information see Hooshamnd et al. (2002), development process in the Kurd regions. Tehran, Human sciences research institute

Based on these principles, in the present study, an attempt has been made to investigate the demands of different groups while investigating the topic of identity among Fars (or Persian-speaking), Turk, Kurd, Baloch, and Arab ethnic groups which can be a factor in achieving social equality and justice and, as a result, bring lasting peace to the society and show a way out of conflicts. Certainly expressing these points through scientific methods by conducting numerous interviews with the elites and at the public level. Showing the current demands of each of the studied group can help the decision-makers to resolve disputes peacefully and contribute to the national unity and consensus.

### Introduction

Identity is not an intrinsic and fixed category, but a fluid concept. Every identity is the product of a particular dispute, and accordingly identity is not static and fixed and can be considered as a process with a historical and evolving aspect. Ethnicity-ethnocentrism as a phenomenon and the formation of identities have become very important in the contemporary world. Factors such as territorial divisions based on national governments, inequality and deprivation, ideologies and post-colonial policies play an important role in the national atmosphere. Ethnic identity is a kind of social identity. It is a special set of objective, subjective, cultural, social and sensual factors that manifests itself in a human group and distinguishes itself from belonging to other groups.

Pluralism and diversity of identities have been an existing fact in most societies. In this contemporary time, despite the processes of modernization and the establishment of modern institutions, not only has this diversity of identities not been diminished, but it has become a controversial issue as to how to identify the lines that distinguishes and separates identities and differences. The subjects obtained more diverse representations. Iran is a land of diverse ethnic groups and a country with multiple ethnicities, where the topic of ethnic convergence or divergence in relation to social unity and consensus is worth considering. Ethnic and identity policies have always existed throughout the political and social history of Iran. With the rise of the Islamic Revolution, despite the recognition of ethnic diversity in the Constitution, ethnic policies in the Islamic Republic of Iran, have been subject to the time, and in many cases, the ethnic meaning has not been represented. In fact during the political history, governments of Iran have always tried for ethnic assimilation i.e. the view of the rulers was mostly the integration of different identities in the form of a single identity and under the umbrella of the Persians. For example, even the adoption of macro-policies regarding the Iranian ethnic groups in 1999 (Haqpanah, 2003) did not lead to the adoption of a specific procedure for ethnic groups, and the application of different tastes in different regions of the country continued. The

ethnic tendencies led to declaration of autonomy (in the past) and numerous protests and dissatisfactions of the ethnic groups (in recent years).

In this study, examining the theoretical literature of identity and ethnicity, a reasonable understanding of these concepts will be presented. Based on field evidence and the results of interviews with ethnic minority elites, their views on the concepts of identity and ethnicity will be explained. The demands of this group will also be discussed mainly to achieve social justice and equality. We will also speak about the role that governments can play in fulfilling these demands. The research will also consider the measures taken to eliminate economic, political, cultural and linguistic inequality, and other issues helping national unity and consensus to achieve a stable peace. Ignoring these demands can lead all the ethnic groups and the country as a whole to the edge of crisis and collapse.

#### Research objectives and significance

Life in the Iranian society has long been associated with multi-ethnic and multi-identity. Any general explanation of multi-ethnic societies without examining the factor of ethnicity will not be efficiently adequate. Considering the growing importance of ethnic societies in the formation and strengthening of social consensus, attention has been paid to the scientific study of ethnic groups, particularly at a time when democratization has led to a growth in ethnic and identity awareness. In this regard, many scholars believe that national consensus and identity are rooted in ethnic societies and a very old sense of ethnicity as a form of primitive nationalism. Ethnic solidarity and the consensus of identities in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies can bring peace, fill ethnic gaps and create an intellectual and practical atmosphere for the independence and self-determination of ethnicities, provided that the ground for decision-making and collective will are created. Here, the main problem is the collective identity of the ethnic groups in Iran. Group or social identities are a realm of social life in which individuals consider themselves as belonging to a group with the pronoun “we”. It is a feeling of belonging which brings a sense of duty and responsibility.

In humanities, a government has 4 essential foundations:

- A territory or border that defines the geographical territory of a government.
- Population or people, which means individuals with the citizenship of a government.
- Sovereignty means that internally there should be no rival or equal authority with the government and, externally, the country should be free from the domination and authority of any other government.
- And the government consists of the political and administrative organizations of a country and the methods of governing a country or a political unit.

According to this definition, the absence of any of these four components will destroy the efficiency of a government. Apparently, among these components, the first two, i.e. land and population, are more than anything else influenced by ethnicity and ethnic identity. Governments need comprehensive understanding of national identity, ethnic identities and network for communication among members of ethnic groups and also among ethnic groups to achieve stability and maintain security and safety as their most important duty. Also, the necessity for a comprehensive understanding of each ethnic group's view of itself and the identity which they believe distinguishes them from others are felt for a civil society by activists in the field of identity and culture and all those who have a heart for peace and reconciliation among the people.

### Methodology

This study has been conducted using an interpretive view and a qualitative method using grounded theory (GT). In the first group, the elite were interviewed with an anthropological approach and in the second step, ordinary people from Iranian ethnic groups (especially Turks, Kurds, Arabs, the Baloch, and Persians) were interviewed in a parallel and simultaneous process. Based on the qualitative nature of the study, purposive sampling was used, the theoretical saturation of the data was obtained from one hundred interviewees and 215 more interviews were conducted for further confirmation. Of course, on our path, we have also benefited from the supervision and advice of experts in the qualitative method. The data of the present study were collected using in-depth and semi-structured interview techniques. The interviews and data collected were analysed in three stages using theoretical coding (open, axial and selective), and at first the informal interview method was used in order to process the data to obtain the important concepts and categories of participants. At the second stage, using grounded theory, the categories and concepts obtained from the interview process were adapted for theoretical sampling, and then, the general lines of the interviews were formed through the concepts and categories. Using semi-structured interview, the questions of the questionnaire were standardized and this process continued until the theoretical saturation. Then, by open coding, at the same time of data collection, concepts, categories and sub-categories were obtained. By axial coding, sub-categories were related to each other and categories. The cause, process and consequence were determined. Finally, after selective coding, the study theoretical result was obtained.

## **Research Literature**

### **Identity and Ethnicity (definitions and concepts)**

Ethnic identity is one of the forming factors of the cultural identity in any society. The ethnic identity definition is based on cultural markers such as language, religion, customs, dress, and historical backgrounds which all people or some aspects of a group or an individual's identity are associated with. Reisman (1953) coined the term ethnicity in sociology, but it was widely used in the 1960s and 1970s (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, social science researchers often considered racial, ethnic, and linguistic interests and identities as a kind of historical regressionism and abnormality that had been destroyed by surrendering to communism or been consolidated and dissolved within the framework of liberal democratic institutions. Ethnicity was considered as a remainder of the early stages of the evolution in human society, which would sooner or later disappear (Golmohammadi, 2007) and it was believed that with the expansion of capitalism, the establishment of national governments, the increase in the level of communication and information, the growth of urbanization, the growth in literacy and education level, and the process of socialization, ethnic identity would be archived in history. This claim found stronger theoretical support by proposing related theories of globalization and the formation of the global village. It was believed that the process of globalization, especially cultural globalization, would lead to the establishment and domination of a single culture over the universe and the indigenous cultures, and lifestyles. They believed that even the languages of the ethnic subcultures would be forgotten (Tohidfam, 2003). Another group, however, believe that not only will the globalization not lead to the extinction of ethnic groups, but it will help the growth in the development of ethnic self-awareness and the strength of ethnic movements through the tools it provides. The national identity is a very key and evolving concept that, especially in the case of a country like Iran, plays a fundamental role in forming the behavior and political positions of people and politicians and, hence, the country as a whole.

Part of the ups and downs of the Iranian history has been the product of ethnic diversity. The political and military conflicts with the dominant ethnicity and other ethnicities / nationalities, and the formation of the other nationalistic views on ethnic culture and etc. are the outcome of this diversity in identities with simultaneous impact on ethnic / national identities.

Frederick Barth's understanding of cultural differences is significant. He defined ethnicity from the outside to the inside as follows: possessing some cultural features does not make a difference in a social group; rather, it is social interaction with other

groups that makes the difference from a social point of view possible, clear and significant. Accordingly, ethnicity is interpreted differently in relation to others. In Barth's own words, from this point of view, the main focus of a research is not defined by the belonging of some material cultural characteristics to a specific group, but it is the border of ethnicity is defined by the differences created, developed and continued by interaction with others. The cultural difference does not generate ethnic societies by itself; it is social contact with others that leads to the definition and categorization of "us" versus "them". Group identities should always be defined by what they are not, that is by the people who are not members of the group (Eriksen, 1993).

In addition, there are few concepts with as many meanings as identity. The trace of this concept can be found in daily disputes as well as scientific and academic debates. The existence of many synonymous or close and related concepts for identity like I, me, we, self-understanding, self-image, self-representation, self-awareness, self-concept, ego, super-ego and personality also originate from here (Doran and Mohseni 2003, p. 81).

Contrary to the opinion of psychoanalysts, social psychoanalysts and sociologists emphasize the fact that the sense of individual identity is formed dialectically between the individual and society. Although they agree that identity is usually manifested in an individual's feelings and attitudes, but it is formed on the basis of social and group life. Social identity manifested in a personality separate from the social world of other people has no meaning. The individuals are unique and changeable, but personality is constructed in a completely social way and through different stages of the process of socialization (Gol Mohammadi, 2002, p. 222 and 223).

Ethnic identity is a type of collective identity that refers to a set of characteristics distinguishing an ethnic group from others, creating a sense of belonging between their members and uniting them under a specific ethnicity. This type of collective identity in countries with ethnic and cultural diversity is so important that it is juxtaposed with other identities such as local, regional, ethnic and cultural identity and is intertwined with concepts like ethnic group and ethnicity.

Works related to ethnic studies in the Middle East not only deal with the problems arising from the definition of ethnicity and conflicting criteria that determine the nature of ethnic groups, but they also ignore the historical features of ethnic and tribal societies and their relationship to the government. The main reason is that in these studies tribes and ethnic groups usually have the same meanings and the features of ethnic groups are attributed to tribal societies. Thus, the linguistic and religious groups in the Middle East, formerly organized by their ethnicity, are now considered distinct ethnic groups in constant struggle with the government to

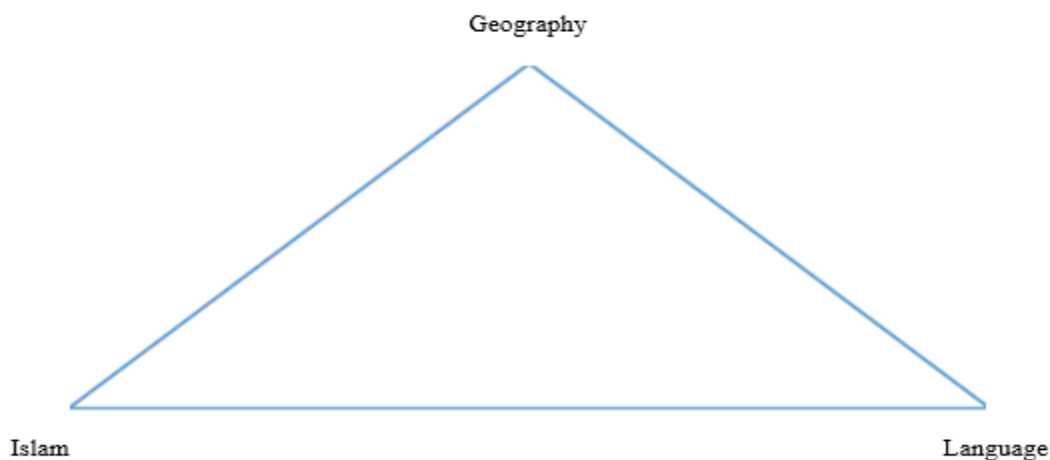
become a nation. As stated by Bassam Tibi, the terms tribal and ethnic group cannot be used interchangeably in the context of Middle Eastern studies. Scholars in social sciences interested in the Middle East have used the concept of ethnicity as an analytical tool to represent social divisions in countries without national communities (homogenous countries). It is important also in research on Iranian ethnic groups to consider the conceptual distinction between an ethnic group and a tribe.

### Identity in Iran

Given the multiplicity involved in collective and linguistic identity in Iran, a definition needs to be provided of national identity before identity can be discussed with respect to the concept of Iran as a shared homeland. National identity denotes a sense of belonging and loyalty to the common elements and symbols in the national society (the society as a whole) within the politically defined borders. According to Ahmad Ashraf, national identity has been dominant since the second half of the past century to replace the concept of national character, and is regarded as a constituent of social science (Ashraf, 1999: p. 522). Due to the particular geographic location, Iranian identity has been influenced by three domains of civilization: Iranian, Islamic, and Western.

What most Iranian scholars agree on is that the three major components of national identity in Iran are:

1. Geography and land, including the variation between the Iranian Plateau and its mountainous regions
2. Persian language, with all the changes it has gone through in contact with Turkish, Mongolian, and Arabic
3. Islam, which has remained basically the same in spite of all the sectarian discrepancy.



*Fig. 1. Components of Iranian national identity*

It should be stated that what has led to integrity and formation of political unity on the Iranian Plateau was a requirement for the inhabitants of the land to confront invaders residing on the edges (Diakonoff, 1966, p. 187).

Throughout history, the Iranian nation has purified the main elements of its identity and abandoned any element that has lost its effectiveness to replace it with functional elements. For instance, religion has evolved in Iran from monotheism and then Zoroastrianism to Islam and Shiah. This has happened on the Iranian Plateau, located between and along Alborz Mountain Range in the North and Zagros in the West.

Even though each ethnic group speaks its own language in Iran, Persian has been considered as a means of communication unifying different ethnic groups living on the Iranian Plateau with the advent of modernity and formation of public education and comprehensive national policies.

Modernism and progressivism are also part of the current identity of the Iranian nation, and Iranians have focused their efforts on the achievement of the highest levels of civilization and renewal of the glory and magnificence of their past civilizations.

### **Diversity of collective identity in Iran**

Given the ambiguity involved in the application of ethnic identity and national identity and the observation that there is a great deal of emphasis among some of the minorities present around Iran on the use of the term *nation* rather than *ethnic group*, this study is by no means intended to reduce the latter term conceptually. In other words, *ethnicity* and *nation* are applied differently in different definitions, and *nation* is applicable to any of the Iranian ethnic groups. Once the political specifications are considered, however, which constitute an essential element in the nation-state relationship, established in the specification of geopolitical borders, Iranian identity can be regarded as national identity for a set of common characteristics identifiable under Iranian culture and society, with respect to the collective identities present in Iran. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this idea also has pros and cons, and this study seeks to observe the scientific spirit attempting not to let personal values interfere in the research process. There are cultural and religious relationships between different collective identities in Iran, such as the Lur, Baluch, Turkmen, Azeri, Arab, and Persian, and ethnic groups in the neighboring countries, as they mostly reside near the borders. For example, the Baluch live in the Southeast, near the Pakistani border, the Turkmen live in the Northeast, neighboring Turkmenistan, the Azeri live in the North and Northwest, sharing borders with the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey, the Arabs live in the West and Southwest, and the Kurds



live in the West and Northwest, neighboring Iraq and Turkey, and the political borders have passed through the settlements of these ethnic groups (Jalayipour, 1993). On the other hand, the corresponding ethnic groups in the neighboring countries, including the Arabs and Kurds in Iraq, the Azeri in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the Baluch in Pakistan, can be regarded as origins of conflict and crisis (Fuller, 1993). It should be stated that Iran is a heterogeneous country in terms of social structure, in which different ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious identities live, with similar ethnic groups residing in the neighboring countries. From the perspective of social studies, there are separatist forces in Iran, particularly along the borders, that can be considered as origins of crisis in certain sociological cases and situations. The correspondence between these ethnic groups and those of the same ethnic groups or religions across the borders is more than that between them and any other group with distinct collective identity within the country from various, such as cultural, linguistic, and religious, aspects, and it is for the same reason that these groups have tended to cross the borders to establish family relationships both in the past and at present. This accounts for the abundance of kinship among these groups, particularly among the people of the border towns at both sides. Upon ethno-political conflicts or movements by the ethnic opposition, it has triggered support from neighboring countries with ethno-cultural commonalities.

Ethnic and religious identities in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran

According to the Constitution, the ethnic minorities are divided into three groups:

1. The ethnic identities that constitute a particular group solely in terms of ethnicity and distinctive characteristics, apart from religion, such as the Azeri
2. The identities of ethnic-religious minorities, such as the Baluch and the Kurd
3. The identities of religious minorities, such as Armenians.

In the Iranian Constitution, the twelfth, thirteenth, fifteenth, and nineteenth articles are concerned with the equal rights of ethnic groups, the official religion, and the religious and linguistic diversity of ethnic groups and minorities.

Besides the above, the seventh and sixty-fourth to one hundred and sixth articles of the Constitution, the basis of social order and of the behavior of social and ethnic identities, make direct or indirect mentions of the rights of ethnic groups and minorities.

Clearly, the articles included in the Constitution are brief and general, as required for the establishment of an inclusive, fundamental law, and finer, subtler points will naturally be opened upon implementation and development of bylaws. On the other hand, the ethnic movements and crises that occurred soon after the Islamic Revolution in the ethnic territories of the country due to religious, linguistic, and ethnic gaps led to significant changes in the process of developing ethnic policies,

where maintenance of national unity and territorial integrity were prioritized. In the process of codifying laws, acts, and instructions, therefore, preservation of social harmony and solidarity, concern for nationalism and unifying factors, and ethnic and national commonalities were focused on by the legislator, turning into the dominant discourse in the codification of laws, as evidenced by the first, third, fifth, sixth, seventh, ninth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, twenty-second, twenty-third, twenty-fourth, twenty-sixth, thirty-seventh, and thirty-eighth articles of the Constitution.

Geographic locations and ethnic features of the ethnic groups living in Iran

The quality of geographic environments has played a fundamental role in the cultural heterogeneity of societies. The different environments are the origins of different cultures and the grounds for their development, and the elements characterizing the environments have been derived from the (absolute and relative) geographic locations of those bodies of land. Accordingly, Iran is known as a country with a range and multiplicity of collective identities, the five major among which, in terms of research requirements and inclusion, are discussed in this study.

## **The Azeri**

This group is composed of Turkic-speaking Muslims who live in scattered regions mainly including the traditional residences of the Azerbaijani, the Middle East, and the Caucasus. The Azeri mostly reside in the Northwest of the Iranian Plateau, *i.e.* Azerbaijan and Zanjan, but are distributed around Iran, in the eastern and northern parts of Hamadan and the western and southern parts of Qazvin, along with minorities in Gilan and Markazi. The most-populated province capitals with Azeri residents include Tabriz, Urmia, Ardabil, and Zanjan, ordered by population. Most Azeri settlements are located in the Northwest and West of Iran, and there are also a significant number in the Centre.

The Azeri in Iran are in particular conditions in the vicinity of the Republic of Azerbaijan and with a common linguistic background with Turkey, and their ethnic consciousness is deeply influenced by political issues and conflicts. Integration of the territories on the two sides of Aras River has been a dream claim for promoters of Pan-Turkism, and the literature on unification of the two Azerbaijanians has gained popularity since the Soviet Era. Heydar Aliyev can be mentioned as a prominent example. In 1981, he lectured on the aspiration of the people of Soviet Azerbaijan for unification of the two Azerbaijanians while expressing sympathy for Iranian Azerbaijan in front of a group of foreign diplomats (Azari, 1982, p. 5 and 6).

Most of the Turkic peoples living in Iran speak Azeri, and there is of course a variant spoken in Khorasan. Most of the Azeri in Iran are Shiah Muslims. Of course, among the Azeri, and there are also followers of Yarsanism among them.

Besides their adherence to national and religious rites, the Azeri have preserved their own customs in many cultural aspects, and their common rituals have gained national popularity in some cases. For instance, the mourning processions of the Great Hussainiya of Zanjan, Tabriz, Urmia, and Ardabil are some of the best-known mourning groups for the Islamic prophet's family among the Iranian Azeri in the month of Muharram. Moreover, they commonly practice rituals such as those known as *Tashtgozari*, *Ta'zieh*, and *Shah Hussain Guyan* and chest-beating and self-flagellation, where lamentation is carried out in Azeri. The mourning rituals at Tabriz Historical Bazaar have also been registered nationally. In addition, Azerbaijani music is considered as an important part of this people's cultural identity, and Azerbaijani artists have presented unique music with their creativity, where those who sing their own poems in Azeri are called Ashiqs. To describe Azerbaijan and its heroes, they sing beautiful poetry accompanied by Azerbaijani music in celebrations and mourning ceremonies, which is greatly welcomed by people. Traditional Azerbaijani clothing is a special symbol of the Azeri, which has come into existence following long cultural, religious, and other processes concerning the Azeri. The clothing is not much in use in the Azeri's daily life today.

## **The Baloch**

Sistan and Baluchistan Province, located in the Southeast of Iran, covers more than 11% of the total area of the country, and is the second largest province after Kerman. It is bounded on the north by Khorasan Province, on the west by Kerman and Hormozgan, on the south by Oman Sea, and on the east by Afghanistan and Pakistan. The mountains in Sistan and Baluchistan are part of Iran's central mountain ranges. The highest point, in Taftan Mountain, is 4042 m high, and the lowest area is located on the shores of Oman Sea, including the terrains on the east of Lut Desert and the highlands on the eastern and southern walls of Jaz Murian Basin. The width of the mountains increases from the north to the south, and reaches its peak between Iranshahr and Kuhak (Saravan), where they are divided into two parts: the mountains of Sistan and those of Baluchistan. The province has desert climate, with a maximum annual temperature of above 40°C. Zahedan is the coldest city in the province, and Iranshahr is the hottest. Humidity fluctuation, monsoon winds such as the 120-day winds and *Bade Haftom*, aka Gavkosh, precipitation, and huge temperature difference during a 24-h period, except in regions with moderate climate on the Oman Sea shores, particular climatic conditions, vegetation, and animal life have

brought about unique sceneries in the province. The Baloch live along the eastern and south eastern edges of Iran, neighbouring Pakistan and Afghanistan on the east and northeast.

The Baloch are an Iranian ethnic group with an Aryan origin who live in south eastern Iran today. The vast majority of the Baloch lived within the borders of Iran until the late nineteenth century. However, as the rivalry between the United Kingdom and Russia over greater power and influence in the Middle East intensified, ethnic disputes and confrontations occurred, and the borders were shifted, they began to settle in India (and in Pakistan and Afghanistan later on) as well as in Iran. Today, more than 1.3 million of the Iranian Baloch live in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, and the rest reside in other provinces of Iran (Abdollahi and Hosseinbor, 2002: p. 104).

Since the Baloch language is spoken in different countries, there has been no consensus among linguistics on its classification from the beginning. Therefore, it has been classified in different ways. Some have considered Northern and Southern Balochi, while others have assumed Eastern and Western Balochi, and there is also a recent view involving three classes: Eastern, Western, and Southern. To ignore these somewhat complex classifications, however, one should point out the most important, in fact the best-known, dialect of Balochi, known as Rakhshani, which is one of the most widely-spoken dialects, with speakers in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan (Tameh, 2017).

All the Balochi are Muslims, who belong either to the Hanafi Sunni majority or the Twelver Shiite minority, and there is no other religion among them. Some of the characteristics that distinguish the Balochi from other ethnic groups are listed below.

1. Provision of refuge and full protection for the oppressed.
2. Promise-keeping. The Balochi are well-known for keeping promises, preferring to die rather than to break a promise.
3. Hospitality, which is one of the best-known characteristics of the Baloch.
4. Provision of the best support for anyone, including neighbours, friends, and strangers, where the entire neighbourhood comes together to do something for someone for free.
5. Donation in cash or otherwise to a groom to contribute to the costs of marriage.
6. Collection of donations in cash or otherwise for someone with an urgent financial need. It is common in some regions to construct mosques and seminaries, to pay for students' costs and their teachers' wages, and to perform other religious tasks in cash or otherwise (such as purchase of construction materials).
7. Revenge, for which the Baloch have always been famous everywhere. They never allow anyone to oppress them, or they take revenge.
8. Strong commitment to keep word. A kind of oath is common among the Baloch where a man swears to get a divorce from his wife in case he fails to meet a claim to do or not to do something.
9. Meeting between the seniors of a family or families who come together at a certain

place to address important issues. 10. Clothing made with a particular embroidery technique known as *suzanduzi*, which is an artistic-cultural product of Baloch women.

## **The Fars/ Persian**

Inhabitants of most large Iranian cities, the Persian live almost in the centre of the country. Tehran, Isfahan, Semnan, Alborz, Shiraz, Markazi province, part of Bushehr, Kerman, Yazd, Khorasan, and part of Qazvin and Hamadan all have Persian inhabitants. They are geographic neighbours of four other ethnic groups: the Gilaki in the north, the Kurds in the west, the Arabs in the south, and the Baloch in the east. In other words, the Persians live in the Centre of Iran and partly in the Northeast, although other ethnic groups also live in the Centre, particularly in Tehran, which is considered as a consequence of immigration in some cases, but not in others, as in the case of the Tat people.

Currently, Persian-speakers are known as the dominant ethnic group. Their common language, Persian, is what enhances and connects the other Iranian ethnic groups, according to some experts. Some believe that national identity has been formed thanks to the existence of the Persian language, which is agreed on and approved of by the other ethnic groups living in Iran, but the story does not end here. The presence of Persian-speakers beyond the borders of Iran (in Afghanistan and Tajikistan) and the sense of common identity revolving around the Persian language confirm that there is some sort of regional identity shared by Persian-speakers.

Persian is the language of the people of Central Iran, an Indo-European language of the South western Iranian branch, which is considered as the official language of the country. Most Persian-speakers in Iran are Twelver Shiites. However, there are also different groups of Sunni Muslims residing near some of the borders. A point to be noted in this regard is that many regions that are regarded by the public as Persian-speaking have their own local languages, which have gradually been spoken less widely until replaced by Persian. Accordingly, it is somewhat removed from historical reality to assume an ethnic group known as Persian in Central Iran.

It should be stated that some scholars believe in no such a thing in Iran as the Persian ethnic group from a historical point of view. In fact, however, the concept of minority, ethnic minority in particular, is basically relevant along with the concept of majority, and it is not possible in the real world to discuss minorities without a reference to the majorities. It is stated that the majority of the inhabitants of Iran are Persian-speakers, while there is controversy on their possession of specific components including identity, ethnicity, and religion. Currently, these components are reflected in the association of national/super-ethnic identity to Persian-speakers

under the broad title of *Iranian*. Moreover, Persian-speakers' cultural elements and rituals have acquired national identity, and are practiced all around Iran and even among Persian-speakers outside the country, being considered in fact as national rituals, such as *Nowruz*, *Sizdah Be-dar*, *Yalda Night*, and *Chaharshanbe Suri*.

### The Kurds

The Kurds live in Western Iran, neighbouring the eastern part of Iraq. They reside on the scattered foothills and plains of the middle Zagros Mountain Range, and their habitat includes the provinces of Kurdistan, Ilam, and Kermanshah, along with parts of Lorestan and the northern and mainly southern parts of West Azerbaijan. It is bounded on the north by East Azerbaijan, on the east by Zanjan, Hamadan, and Lorestan, on the south by Khuzestan, and on the west by Iraq. In general, the Kurds live mainly in the West and Northwest of Iran, distinguished by dialect and accent. However, exiled groups of them and those forced to immigrate also live in parts of Khorasan and Northern Iran.

After the Arab, Persian, and Azeri, the Kurds are considered as the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East (Olson, 2003: p. 6, cited in Abdullahi and Qaderzadeh, 2009). They generally reside within the borders of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. The majority of the Kurds (more than half of them) live in Turkish Kurdistan, followed by Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Although there seems to be more pronounced sense of collective solidarity among the Kurds in Iran and Iraq than among those in the other two parts of Kurdistan (Turkey and Syria), there is great emphasis on the cultural, social, and political commonalities among the Kurd, some of whom define themselves by referring to the concept of being a Kurd (*Kurdayeti* in Kurdish) as their identity. The Kurds have been identified as the largest nation without a government.

Kurdish is a branch of the family of Indo-European languages, and most Kurdish-speakers live in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. Different dialects are spoken in each of these regions, with those in Iran mainly including Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji); Central Kurdish (Sorani), Southern Kurdish, Gorani, and Zaza (the latter concerning Hawrami and Zaza peoples who classify themselves and their languages as independent of the Kurds and Kurdish). There are both Shiah and Sunni Muslims among the Kurd, and if the Iranian settlements of the Kurds are divided into two religious partitions, it can be stated that most of the Sunni Kurd live in the northern half. Of course, there is another group of the Kurds called the Yarsani (Kaka'i/Ahle Haqq), mostly residing in counties such as Harsin, Kerend, Eslamabad, and Sarpol-e Zahab in Kermanshah Province and villages therein.

The Kurds adhere to practicing national and religious rituals; they celebrate Nowruz with utmost glory, and highly value religious rituals and feasts such as *Eid al-Adha*, *Eid al-Fitr*, and the Islamic prophet's birthday in particular. In some regions, food

is made and distributed for free for celebration of religious feasts, including a particular type of soup-like dish, along with ceremonies involving *daf*-playing, prayers, and particular utterances made by *dervishes* or in praise of the Islamic prophet and celebration of his birthday. In the settlements of the Kurd, various types of Kurdish clothing can be observed, each in its own beautiful form, slightly different from the others. The traditional Kurdish men's and women's clothing includes headwear and footwear as well as ordinary clothes. The design and usage of each of these components vary by season, type of occupation, lifestyle, and ceremony. Although different types of clothing are used in different parts of Kurdistan, such as Hawraman, Saqqez, Baneh, Gogulawa, Gerrus, Sanandaj, Mariwan, and Mahabad, they are all the same in that they cover the entire body.

### **The Arabs**

The Arabs are mostly present in Khuzestan, Hormozgan, Bushehr, and the southern parts of Ilam Province, in Southwestern Iran and to the north of the Persian Gulf. The Arab population in Khuzestan is concentrated mostly in Ahvaz, Abadan, Khorramshahr, Shadegan and Dashte Azadegan. The province is naturally divided into two distinct regions: a mountainous region and a plain. The mountainous region is inhabited mainly by the Lur, Bakhtiari, Behbahani, and Kamari Arab (Jabilat), while the plain is resided by the Dezfuli, Shushtari, Hendujani, and Arab (Siadat, 1995: p. 10 and 29).

The Arabs live in the South and Southwest of Iran and in parts of Khuzestan Province. They have been considered as the smallest collective identity of Iran, estimated to constitute two percent of the total population of Iran (Amir Ahmadi, 1998: p. 32), although larger numbers have been stated in some references for the Arab population of Khuzestan. The point to be noted about the Iranian Arab is that they share religion with the capital, like the Azeri, which diminishes cross-border identity affiliations. Thus, religion can consolidate national identity and cut down on separatist identity-nationality tendency in this group, as confirmed by various studies.

The Arabs living in Iran mainly speak Khuzestani Arabic, which is a dialect of Mesopotamia Arabic. They reside in four provinces, but most of them live in Khuzestan Province, and are mostly Twelver Shiites. Of course, there is also a Sunni Arab minority in Iran, which makes up a very low percentage.

Like the other peoples in Iran, the Arabs in Khuzestan have their own culture. Following the Arabs in the neighbouring countries, they find *Eid al-Fitr* of much greater significance in their public culture, celebrated with a large number of norms, behaviours, and customs. Another ancient tradition common among the Arabs in

Khuzestan is the Gargee'an ceremony, which is held in Ahvaz on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan every year. Another highly important ritual commonly practiced by the Arabs is the coffee-drinking ceremony involving *dallahs*, which is held with a great deal of formality.

### **Ethnic identity-seeking in Iran**

The exclusive consideration of the Persian ethnic identity as Iranian national identity has brought about a specific definition of non-Persian collective identities, entirely affected by power relations and unbalanced communication. The particular perception of the recent Iranian nationalism of Persian-speakers and the denial of their identity has clearly led to the falsification of an exclusive national identity for their ethnic characteristic. Thus, Iranian national identity has been reduced to Persian identity, from which the official language, the official religion, the official religion branch, the official culture, and, in short, the legitimate official identity are extracted. As a result of such a process, the distinctive identities of at least half of the inhabitants of this land (the Azeri, Kurd, Arab, Baloch, Turkmen, *etc.*) have been denied through neglecting of their positions in the formation of Iranian national identity, demonstrating it as natural and obvious to approve of Persian identity as a representative of Iranian national identity.

The Persian are the major collective identity in Iran, who constitute about fifty percent of the country's population alone. However, many of the regions that are associated with Persian have their own languages and cultures. Therefore, it should be noted that there is a problem involved in the understanding of *the Persian*, where many regions have been referred to as Persian by mistake. A large number of Iranian nationalists use terms such as *Persian* and the Persian people in their descriptions of Iran. There are also some who use *the Persian* interchangeably with *Persian*. It is inferred from such classifications that Iran = Persian. One of the most recent examples of such discourse involves an interview with the President's Assistant on Ethnic Groups (Ali Younesi), published in the Ghanoon newspaper on April 21, 2018. In the interview, Younesi asserts that the Azeri are Persian, both speaking Persian and having a Persian descent. The neglect of the ethnic identities of fifty percent of the inhabitants of this land, who are not Persian-speakers, and attribution of a super-ethnic national identity to them under the broad title of *Iranian* has paved the way for introduction of the other ethnic identities as primitive, tribal, and marginal, and has demonstrated it as natural and essential to approve of Persian identity as a representative of Iranian national identity.

After the Persian, the Azeri have the second largest population in Iran. Their contemporary identity demands date back to less than a century ago, most



prominently exemplified by the demand for independence in the Republic of Azerbaijan, led by Seyyed Jafar Pishehvari, which did not last long. In the past few years, the identity-seeking movement in Azerbaijan has assumed new aspects, and seems to have taken on various forms too as it has expanded its influence among people. This includes those whose identity-seeking is limited to teaching of the mother tongue in schools and promotion of local traditions, those who define their identity through federalism, and those who find it the appropriate option to seek complete independence and separation from the country. What appears more realistic, however, is the identity demand of the Iranian Azeri, which is typically social and justice-oriented, and is raised as civil demand.

The identity demand of the Kurds is slightly different and complex due to their large population in the Middle East and nearly ten-percent share of the population of Iran. They refer to themselves as the largest nation with no government, whose identity demand in Iran dates back to more than a century ago. Although there has been scattered ethnic and identity demand by the Kurds in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, the specific event that led to a memorable movement was the establishment of the Autonomous Republic of Kurdistan (centered in Mahabad) in 1945, led by Qazi Muhammad. With the beginning of the protests and the rise of the Islamic Revolution, the Democratic Party was reorganized, and other parties, such as Komala and the Khabat Organization, were founded. After several years of conflict and pursuit, however, these political movements were finally suppressed, and the above groups fled to Iraqi Kurdistan. The identity demand of the Iranian Kurd has now taken on a new form. Kurdish identity-seeking is now represented as civic institutions and organizations and cultural and artistic activities. Although armed political parties are still active abroad, civic organizations are far more influential and popular than political parties.

There are identity distinctions between the Baloch, and more seriously the Kurd, and the dominant ethnic group in Iran (the Persian) both in linguistic and in religious terms. The Baloch speak Balochi, and are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi sub-branch. The division of Baluchistan in 1879 between Iran and India (modern Pakistan) created political borders within this integrated ethnic group, and the ethnic discrimination on both sides (*i.e.* in Iran and Pakistan) triggered ethnocentric feelings, and brought about identity-oriented and economic demand among the Baloch. The religious gap, economic discrimination, and core-periphery relationship have intensified the demand, to such an extent that different parties and entities have been organized in recent decades, which has led in some cases to destructive military measures and activities.

In Iran, identity-seeking and identity demand is based on religion and ethnicity (with a focus on language). The demand made by the Arabs and Azeris is different from

that in regions where the Kurds and Baloch reside is that the religious and linguistic demand among the latter ethnic groups has added ideological and political aspects to their movements, and is aimed at deconstruction and modification of constitutional articles. Among the Azeri, however, demand is of the civil type within the framework of the Constitution, both outwardly and inwardly. Although the Arabs are similar to the majority of Iranians in religious terms, their ethnic demand is slightly more serious and more radical than that of the Azeri, and they also find themselves more deprived in terms of concern for economic development.

### **Politicization of collective identity**

Ethnic and national movements and their political applications are products of the modern era following the emergence of modern government-nations. Ethnic movements are very old phenomena, and the separation of each ethnic group from others based on cultural features is also a historical issue, but the political claims of ethnic groups to acquire power is regarded as a new issue. The emergence of nationalism as a socio-political phenomenon coincided with the establishment of the first wave of national governments in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but it was not until the 1920s and 1930s that it was considered as a challenging issue (Özkirimli, 2004: p. 11). If political demand is based on ethnic elements, there will be identity-seeking and ethnic group politicization (political ethnocentrism). This aspect of ethnocentrism specifies the boundary between a nation and a specific ethnic group (Matil, 2004: p. 1411).

In problems concerning collective identity, political theories investigate the roles of power and lack of power to explain the phenomenon. On that basis, if there is less opportunity for an ethnic group to access the sources of power in a society, it may react by seeking independent ethnic identity.

For two reasons, the process of globalization and, consequently, the network society attenuate the national government and the associated national identity. In this process, the national government will maintain its exclusive command and, to some extent, its influence over the tools of coercion. With the globalization of economy and capital, the government loses much of its control over national economy. As mass and communication media develop, culture goes beyond the scope of the government's manipulation and influence. With the inevitable formation of global networks and organizations and regional unions, many areas of domestic and foreign policy-making where the government is independent fade away. As a large number of specific identities within the country are highlighted, the command of the government and its role in definition of national identity is challenged. Among these identities are ethnic and religious identities. The global flows of capital, goods,

services, technology, communications, and information have increasingly attenuated the government's control over time and space, and ethnicity leads to competition through politicization of ethnic groups, according to Anthony Smith. Ethnic nationalism has an important subjective characteristic, which enables selection of ethnic factors that are appropriate for politicization. This paradigm is focused on subjective elements that do not underestimate the presence of objective factors or exclude them from the scope of analysis. Instead, it more highly values the subjective elements of memory, value, emotion, myth, and symbol, thereby seeking to make an entry into the world of ethnicity to acquire an understanding thereof (Smith, 2004: p. 86).

Ethnic identity is obtained and maintained as a basis for a collective action when there are clear privileges achievement of which can be competed over through ethnic identity.

### **Stable peace**

Stable peace is a state of affairs in which peace is permanently established in a region. Justice-based stable peace is equivalent to just peace. For its realization, therefore, just methods need to be found to resolve crises through revolutionary diplomacy, and their implementation should be emphasized. The concept of stable peace was introduced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in an essay entitled *Project for Stable Peace*, which was published anonymously. However, the concept was neglected until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The term *stable peace* was acknowledged in Europe after Immanuel Kant's *Stable Peace* essay was published.

*Peymane Rowshanzade, gynecologist and writer from Semnan*

And the umbrella that should be there over Iran is the Iranian identity, and everyone is free to follow his own religion. One cannot claim that he is superior. No ethnic group can.

Stable peace cannot be achieved without the establishment of a republican system, with three independent components: governmental, legislative, and judiciary. However, this can be realized provided that there is rationality, dominance of justice, intellectual maturity, ethical conduct, and adoption of power based on the law. According to Kant, stable peace is like a child born in an instant, but it takes whom years to mature through care and education. The hierarchy presented by him to express the requirements for realization of stable peace suggests that he seeks peace

first at “home” and then “beyond the borders”. Kant argues that persistence of normal conditions for governments, anarchy, and conflict of interest lead to wars. He also suggests that the solution is to establish and join a global federation (Mir Mohammadi, 2011: p. 124).

There were also individuals in this study, particularly among the elite, who believed in the unity of all Iranians’ identities. From their point of view, identity-seeking is considered as contrary to peace and cosmopolitanism.

*Akbar Yadegari, painter, writer, and theater director from Semnan*

It makes no difference. Man lives in a huge complex known as the world, and anything that happens affects everyone. Therefore, I should not differentiate myself from others as a holder of a distinct identity.

## Results

The research data were obtained mostly on the concepts of identity and ethnicity, and the discussion revolved around the demanding nature of ethnic groups, aimed mainly at realization of social justice and equality, and the role of governments in the satisfaction of the demand, ignoring which can lead to overall crisis and collapse. The research results indicated the need for governmental efforts to eliminate economic, political, cultural, and linguistic inequality for achievement of national unity, consensus, and integrity and stable justice. Seven factors were extracted from the obtained results, as addressed below.

### Interaction or opposition: Religious identity and national identity

The political orientations within the country have always been concerned with either the national or the religious aspect. In the history of Iran, particularly in the past one hundred years, during which nationalist orientations have gained ground, the discourse elite have hardly exhibited religious concern, trying instead to align their nationalist orientations with Western modernity while avoiding religion, which constantly brings orientation toward tradition and history to mind. On the other hand, the clergy did not have much presence in politics until about fifty years ago, and attempted mainly to oppose views involving modernity and nationalism. However, after the Islamic Revolution and the dominance of the Imamate perspective in the structure of the national political system, the clergy acquired political power. They then made efforts mainly to develop religious thought, and nationalism lost the opportunity that it used to have to gain power. The results obtained from interviews with two social groups (the elite and the general public) indicated their orientation

toward either of the national and religious attitudes. What has been termed a national-religious attitude, i.e. an aggregation of both orientations in an individual, a group, or a party, was hardly observed among the interviewees.



*Shahin Sepanta, cultural activist from Isfahan*

Iranian customs are divided into two categories: national and religious. A fan, promoter, and defender of the national category, I have been working in the field for about twenty years, and I am about to have a book published entitled “Iranian Feasts...” As for religious customs, it is not the case that I am against them; after all, part of our society is religious, which is respected and cannot be opposed if we believe in freedom of thought and democracy, although I am not a promoter thereof.

Rather than weakening and eliminating national thought, the adoption of such a policy resulted in further attenuation of religious thought, as evidenced by the observations. Unlike in the early years following the Revolution, when a highly religious atmosphere had dominated the entire country, and mosques and public places were full of interested youngsters enthusiastic about holding religious rituals, there is not much religious atmosphere today, and mosques and other religious places are becoming less crowded every day, with fewer youngsters showing up. Furthermore, the roads leading to Shiraz and Pasargadae get filled now with youngster fond of several thousand years of civilization on Cyrus’ birthday, unlike in the early years after the Revolution, when there was not much discussion of the history of ancient times and historical figures.

*Javad Hesari, journalist and sociopolitical activist from Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan Province)*

Religious orientations are not in conflict with national issues. In case of an opposition, however, religious issues are more vulnerable than those concerning ethnicity and identity.

In addition, a group thinking beyond the above dichotomy, *i.e.* that between religious and national identity, have considered a modern type of identity based on citizens' personal specifications and social positions in modern life.

*Yahya Shari'atniya, lawyer and legal advisor from Tehran*

These are not national customs, and everyone performs them in his own way, in a common name only. They have been transformed throughout history, which is true also of religious customs. Before university, I studied at the seminary, where I had easy access to references, and realized that what is there in religion has been made up. I have already gone through such things.

The results obtained from this study suggest that different social identities contain a common cultural context apart from their own that takes on the form of a nation, on which basis all the involved ethnic groups define themselves within the framework of national-Iranian identity.

The dominant thought<sup>3</sup> is that remaining ethnic groups consider themselves as Aryans, who have immigrated to Iran in three major waves, called the Median, Persian, and Parthian. These are the Iranian families, mixed throughout millennia.

*Aziz Ne'mati, poet and linguist from Urmia (West Azerbaijan Province)*

We, Iranians, speak languages of the same origin, except for the Arabic language; all the others are rooted in Pahlavi, including Arsacid Pahlavi and Ancient Pahlavi, or Avesta Pahlavi.

In *ethnocentrism where ethnicity is praised*, culture, language, descent, race, religion, and culture are of high value to people living in the society, while a passive

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<sup>3</sup> There is another view in this regard, which does not confirm the idea of Iranian ethnic groups' immigration about three thousand years ago, assuming instead a history of 6-7 thousand years, with the ethnic group being a major native of the Iranian Plateau.

view is held of those of other ethnic groups. In this view, ethnic identity is silent on rather than in accordance with national identity. This kind of behavior is manifested mainly in regard to the Arab ethnic group, regarded by most of the others as separate from the national texture of the country.

Another view, noticed particularly among the elite investigated in this study, concerns approaches based on human interests in the world. These cosmopolitan orientations often accompany nationalist ones but along with human benefits in the world.

*Payam Dorfeshan, lawyer and civil rights activist from Tehran*

We should approve of nationalism. It is an effective, important parameter. In addition, I have always tried to adopt a cosmopolitan view. We should approve of nationalism while having in mind all human beings' common interests. This is an issue neglected by many global superpowers.

This approach is present also in regard to ethnic groups. This means that individuals with modernist thought potentials hold super-ethnic, super-national views of social issues and human relations, and organize their individual and social actions on that basis.

*Rasul Nami, carpet designer from Tabriz*

Lands and geographic borders do not determine humanity. I would like to get acquainted with any human being from any ethnic group with goodwill.

*Abdolghader Savari, researcher from Khuzestan*

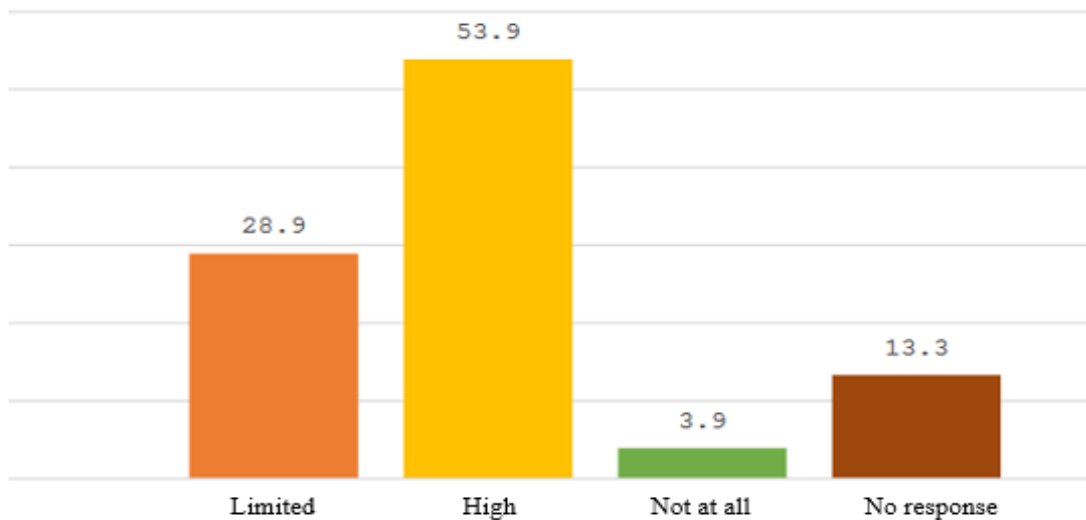
When I was at the University of Tehran, my non-Iranian Arab friends would refer to me as an Arab and to others as Iranians, which meant that we were part of a different identity.

In Iran, with plenty of ethnic and religious diversity, the lack of common norms and ethnic discrimination has attenuated national solidarity and integrity, resulting in the *ethnocentrism phenomenon*. Ethnocentrism is a kind of cultural conception according to which the members of an ethnic group consider their own values, norms, and lifestyles as superior to those of other ethnic groups, which they judge based on predetermined views. For this reason, *ethnocentrism* is regarded as a cultural barrier in a multi-ethnic society to formation and expansion of inter-ethnic

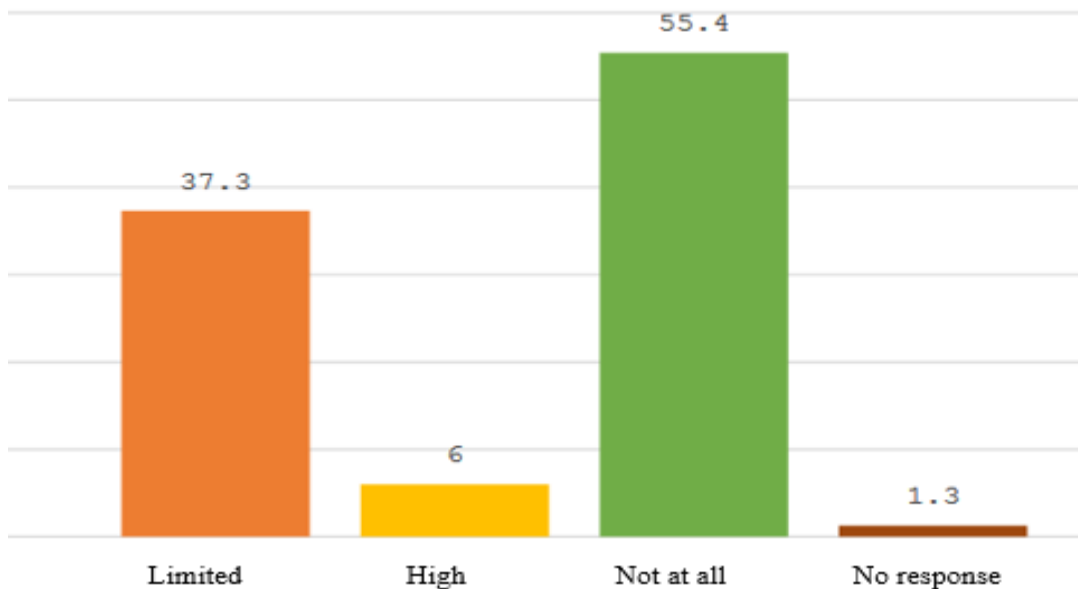
relations. On the one hand, it attenuates social, cultural, and economic coexistence relations; on the other hand, it intensifies relations involving conflict between ethnic groups. At the same time, ethnocentrism prevents diversity in collective (ethnic) identity in the network of inter-ethnic relations.

Charts 1 and 2 indicate the amount of ethnic ties. Accordingly, 53.9% of the elite have stated that they had plenty of contact with other ethnic groups, and 28.9% said that they had less contact. Among the general public, there have been fewer ethnic ties, where 55.4% have had no ethnic ties, and 37.3% have had little.

*Chart 1. Specific ethnic relationships*



*Chart 2. General ethnic relationships*





Before the 1979 Revolution, the first and second Pahlavi governments emphasized the national approach by celebrating various occasions, while religion was in the margins. With the rise of the Islamic Revolution, however, the dominance of Islamic norms in the public cultural, social, and political fields caused new socialization in Iran (Bowen, 2015: p. 2).

The results obtained in the present study also indicate the preference of the Islamic over the national strategy throughout these years and sometimes the respondents' regret for neglection of the national aspect of Iranians' collective identity. From the revolutionaries' point of view, nationalism is a kind of materialistic school based on polytheistic elements, which has always emerged to compete against Islamist ideas and thoughts based on unity of the Islamic nation. In contrast, they have emphasized religious guardianship and Imamate, observance of moral and traditional values, political elitism, and cultural control. Finally, the dominance of the above discourse in the country has revolutionized all the fields of economy, politics, culture, and society.

*Ashkan Zare'i, cultural and heritage activist and writer from Khuzestan*

Iranian culture has two wings: Iranian identity, with thousands of years of history, and Islamic identity, with a history of 1400 years. Both wings should be preserved. The cultural ego death or alienation observed after the Revolution is a consequence of the improper teachings on Islamic identity and the lack of teachings on Iranian identity.

It can be stated that each of the Iranian and Islamic strategies have sometimes been dominant as ideological issues, while one of them has been ignored, both before and after the Revolution, despite Mohammad Khatami's reformist efforts and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his associates' discussions on the Iranian school.



*Fateme (Kazhal) Hawas Beygi, university lecturer  
and cultural activist from Ilam*

Since the reign of Reza Shah, particularly since 1966, our cultural policies have never been in line with the people's concerns and needs. They have been based, instead, on the ideals and ideology of the systems.

In religious thought, the Islamic society is regarded as a single nation, and geographic borders are of secondary importance. In this view, national historical figures and events do not matter much either, and the ways of life of the Islamic prophet and Imams are investigated rather than of people like Cyrus. Thus, the annual commemoration of Cyrus is prevented, and there is little sign of historical celebrations such as Mehregan and Sedeh. Instead, religious ceremonies such as those of *Muharram* and *Safar* and *Sha'ban* feasts have gained ground.

Contrary to the above governance policies, the core of the society exhibits different behaviour patterns, and the results obtained in this study indicate that the relationship between Iranian identity and religion has different aspects among different Iranian ethnic groups. In other words, it cannot be stated definitely which of the above discourses is prioritized in the examined social groups, including the Persian, the Kurd, and the Azeri, and each has its own followers, with the individuals in the groups distributed between the two approaches, where those in the national group do not have religious concerns, and the religious individuals do not care much about ethnicity and nationality, preferably thinking in the framework of Islamic nation. In many cases, there is a kind of coexistence between the two. After all, it can be stated with regard to the Arabs and, particularly, the Baloch that the Islamic strategy can be considered as a priority in their regions, and it prevails over the Iranian strategy.

*Basim Hammadi, researcher in the Arab ethnic rituals and music and university lecturer from Ahvaz (Khuzestan Province)*

We have absolutely no *Chaharshanbe Suri*, and it is not part of our culture at all. We do not have *Haft-sin*, but consider it as a national feast. We do not believe in *Sizdah Be-dar*, but we go out in keeping with others. However, we respect *Nowruz* as the beginning of a new year and a national feast, while our most important feast is *Eid al-Fitr*, followed by *Eid al-Adha* and *Eid al-Ghadir*. We are so enthusiastic on the days of Muharram, particularly in recent years, where people compete in mourning highly esteemed among them.

The existence of such ideological objectives has caused religious minorities to feel dissatisfied in many cases, believing that their rights have not been taken into account sufficiently in the law. In other cases, they may think that their rights have been suppressed due to the ideological framework dominating government officials, while there is no problem with the law.

Along the same lines, financial compensation for a non-Muslim victim used to be one-twentieth that of a Muslim victim until fifteen years ago. As a result of such policies, even government institutions have prevented Zoroastrians from entering the city council within the past few years, exemplified by the treatment of Sepanta Niknam, elected for the Yazd City Council, demonstrating the traditional thoughts that dominate the Islamic Republic of Iran's institutions. Another case concerned Karen Vafadari, a prisoned Zoroastrian most of whose property was confiscated. He wrote in a letter to his fellow-believers that they should not expect their rights as citizens to be respected. The results obtained in this study also indicate the existence of ideological views, resulting in the failure to properly utilize the capabilities of the elite and their marginalization and exclusion from the core of the society.

*Amir Nabavi, university lecturer and researcher in political science from Tehran*

The ideological views present all around the society leave the elite inefficient and marginalized.

Apart from the above religious minorities, the Sunni minority has always reacted to cases of ideological policies adopted by the government as a result of the official status of Shiah, imposing restrictions against them. They have complained about issues such as the lack of mosques in Tehran and the restrictions on some religious leaders'; travel outside the province or the country.

The Baha'i community is in worse conditions than all the other religious minorities in Iran. Government authorities refer to them as "followers of the misled sect," and have opposed them since the early years after the Revolution.

In the ideological government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, where Shiah has been recognized as the official religion, not only followers of non-Islamic religions, such as the Baha'i, but also other Islamic groups, *i.e.* the Sunni community, complain about discrimination. According to the interviews, some of them, youngsters in particular, cannot acquire appropriate administrative positions with respect to their knowledge and academic expertise, and they have been deprived of equal opportunities to work. Furthermore, the dervish community, who are considered as Shiite Muslims, have complained about inequality, as exemplified by the way they were treated by the government's treatment of them can be seen in last year's protests in Tehran, as a result of which a number of security forces and dervishes were killed. According to the obtained results, such ideological policies have caused the elite to distance themselves from various economic, social, and cultural fields, intensifying the underdevelopment of ethnic group residences.

*Jalal Jalalizade, religious activist, university lecturer at the University of Tehran and former member of the parliament from Sanandai*

Unfortunately, the Kurd complain about discrimination, as government is in the hands of a particular religion, which is meant to be applied to all customs, ceremonies, assemblies, institutions, and government organizations. This religious gap has wasted many of the Sunni's economic, social, and cultural talents, and I think it is the hugest barrier to Iran's development, particularly to the Sunni Kurd's growth and progress.

In Iran, religious minorities consider the recognition of Ja'fari Shiah as a discrimination against them. This religious gap and discrimination has sometimes encouraged the formation of violent behaviours in different ways. As defined by the United Nations, religious discrimination is a discrimination that is imposed on a person because of his religion. It can be reflected in the economy, occupation, society, welfare, *etc.* This type of discrimination may cause the victim to be arrested or killed in very severe cases.

Many argue that religious discrimination and gap have originated from the spirit of the Constitution. This can be exemplified by the impossibility for minorities to be elected as the leader or a member of the Assembly of Experts, as asserted in Article

107. Accordingly, only a few of the Shiah clergy have the right under certain conditions. The prohibition of access to all political, managerial, and judicial positions at all levels provide further examples. Article 115 of the Constitution has granted the right of candidacy only to religious and political figures. A particular part of Article 121, on the President's oath, identifies him as the guardian of the official religion. According to Article 64 of the Constitution, on membership in the Assembly of Experts, the Islamic Consultative Assembly admits no representatives from unrecognized minorities.

Charts 3 and 4 show religious gap and discrimination in Iran from the perspective of the elite and general public interviewees. From the general public's point of view and, more significantly, of the elite, Iranian ethnic groups are subject to discrimination in terms of religion, and there are huge gaps between the religions.

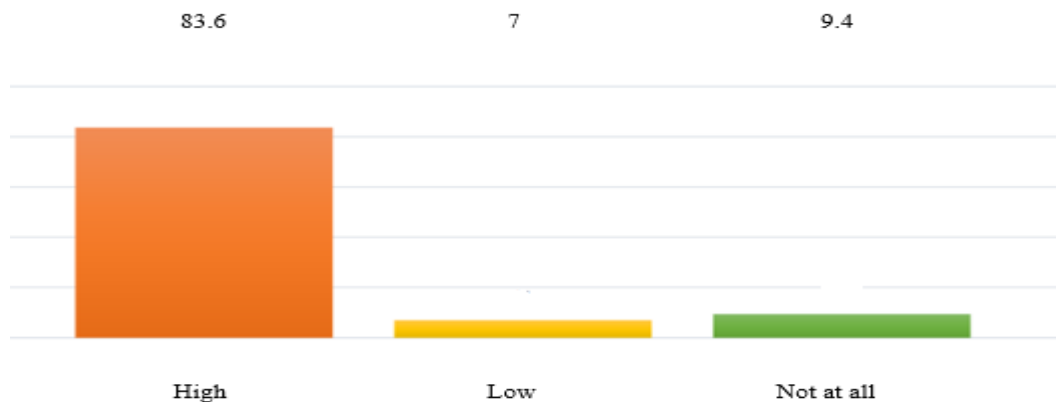


Chart 3. Specific religious gap and discrimination

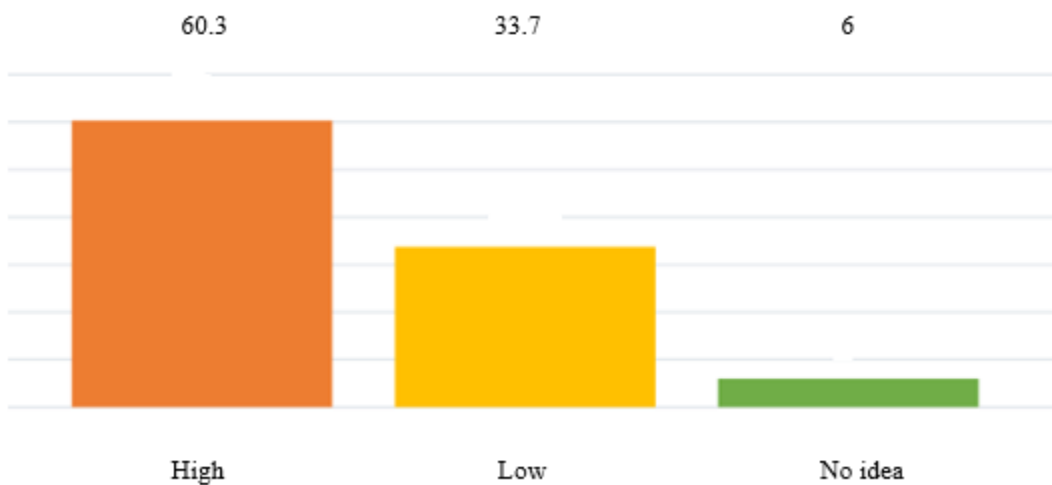


Chart 4. General religious gap and discrimination

Another issue, which has become problematic particularly in recent years, is that of women's *hijab*, where women cannot appear in public places without *hijab* or without the observance of the minimum fundamental norms set by the law. This is true even of foreign tourists, who are also forced to wear scarves and longer clothes providing sufficient coverage as soon as they enter Iran. This ideological view harms the country's tourism industry, and also causes economic problems.



*Javad Tariri, lawyer, writer and political activist  
from Khuzestan*

A Muslim woman may be forced to wear hijab, but why should foreign tourists? This cannot be explained in terms of jurisprudence, which shows that they believe in jurisprudence as long as it is to their own advantage. Why are we harming the tourism industry? The field of religion is highly polarized and ionized.

On many occasions, religious groups such as the Yarsanis, living mostly in Kermanshah, and the Baha'is, neither of whom are followers of official religions, have been severely treated, representing discrimination against minorities.

The existence of such ideological purposes can jeopardize security in the country, as observed in the cases of Gonabad dervishes in Tehran, military operations performed every once in a while in Baluchistan, the assassination of urban authorities such as Imam Jumu'ahs in Kurdistan, and the invasion of the Parliament in 2017.

Throughout history, symbols have been associated with popular cultures, to the extent that there is no choice in many cases for understanding a culture without understanding its symbols. A skilful ethnographer or anthropologist should be an experienced symbolist. Aware of this, various ethnic groups try to express their identities through their particular ethnic symbols, thereby protesting, in some cases, against high-ranking government authorities. This is manifested, for instance, by local costumes worn in special ceremonies or global and regional occasions, when different ethnic groups try to differentiate themselves from the majority of the

society and resist assimilation policies. Other cases of utilization of symbols include the use of particular colours in writing and particular neck scarves. Of course, the government also opposes these symbols sometimes. Followers of these groups, however, believe that the colours are not used with specific purposes, and criticize the government's opposition. This symbolism dates back far in history, and has been shaped beyond the control of present-day people. Local calendars and particular numbers and months used in them and in the literature and colloquial conversations are other cases of symbols representing particular identities.

*Seyyed Abdosslam Mahmudiyani, clergy and religious activist from Sardasht (West Azerbaijan Province)*

It is like crossing an important red line to discuss a national-ethnic issue on Fridays, and I myself was interrogated, for example, simply for a mention of the 2717 Kurdish year in Friday prayers. I had to explain why I was using a Kurdish timeline!

Further applications of symbols include holding local and regional ceremonies and giving children certain names or naming them after local celebrities or historical events. In some cases, ethnic groups resist the government's official naming of passages, using a different name of their own choice in colloquial language. Moreover, the Sunni minority acts contrary to the official calendar of the country and in line with the Sunni countries in the region upon the announcements of the beginning of *Ramadan*, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha. Another symbol, which has turned into a prominent sign of Kurdish protestant movement in recent years, is a region-wide holiday for all businesses, exhibiting their opposition to government policies and their loyalty to their particular identity.

There are also symbols that play an integrative role; the green-white-red flag is an official symbol of the country. Although the flag has undergone changes over time, the integrity of the three colours has been retained. The national anthem is another official symbol, which has, of course, changed three times so far. These official symbols are other factors that can bring the various ethnic groups under the umbrella of solidarity.

*Abdolhamid Irannezhad, retired teacher,  
cultural activist, and researcher from Sistan and  
Baluchistan*

I am related to the Persian as an Iranian, sharing with them language and culture, and we are identified as being under the same flag. I recognize them all as fellow countrymen, and respect their beliefs.



Different ethnic groups can become acquainted and linked through celebration of ritual and occasions throughout the year, including national ceremonies such as the ancient Nowruz feast and religious ceremonies such as the Islamic prophet's birthday, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha.

The domestic symbols of Iran, through which the government can help unite the Iranian society, can perhaps be divided into three groups. Symbols such as Nowruz, Chaharshanbe Suri, Mehregan, and Yalda are ancient, dating back to ages ago, and are rooted mainly in the myths of ancient Iran and the region. The second group includes Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Ghadir, the Islamic prophet's birthday, Muharram, the anniversaries of Shiah Imams' martyrdom, *etc.*, concerning rituals that originate from religious thought. The third group of symbols pertains to the contemporary era, resulting from the reign of the Islamic Republic. This includes ceremonies such as the *Fajr* decade, the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, the processions on 13 Aban (3 November) and on *Quds* Day, 9 Dey (29 December), and the flag and the anthem of the Islamic Republic. The question that is raised here concerns the extent to which the government has been successful in application of these factors to achieve national solidarity.

#### Cultural borders

Culture is an important factor that differentiates social groups from each other, and sets boundaries between social groups accordingly. It includes historical traditions, based on which each collective identity is made up and connected to its past. Clothing, music, and body treatment are among the features that people try to exhibit through prejudice to realize their identity and thus distinguish themselves from other



social identities. On that basis, an attempt will be made in the discussion of tradition as ethnicity to examine the amount of prejudice in the social groups under study and the role that historical traditions can play in this redefinition.

*Gholamreza Ja'fari, environmental activist from Naqadeh (West Azerbaijan Province)*

Culture can be defined as things that a person lives, works, and gets married by. The culture of each ethnic group is valuable to them. Most of it is acquired from ancestors, and the rest is obtained from historical texts and studies.

According to the obtained results, many Persian-speakers have mainly global or national attitudes toward the definition of their identity bases, and believe that identity cannot be sought in the modern world based on traditional features.



*Katayoun Riahi, actress from Tehran*

I pursue forty percent of the customs as people in the past did, but my personal beliefs affect this in any case.

*Mullah Ahmad Bahrami, religious-social activist and former parliament member from Javanrud (Kermanshah Province)*

I think that any nation wishes in principle to preserve all its ethnic customs, continue this way of life, and introduce itself to other nations. Why is it that Benazir Bhutto, the Prime Minister of a country with 190 million people comes to Tehran in Pakistani clothes, and there is no problem? Why is it that Ashraf Ghani wears clothes like those of ordinary people in his country? Why is it that Iranian rulers wear the same clothes as they have had, living in their seminary rooms with no responsibility while retaining those clothes? Why shouldn't I retain my ethnic clothes and customs, of which I am proud as my national identity?!

It can be concluded in general that the examined Persian-speakers define their “we-identity” mainly beyond the local, traditional realm, and ethno-cultural characteristics that are true of other ethnic groups are therefore inapplicable to them, so they cannot be defined as a specific ethnic group. Accordingly, they have been referred to in this section mainly as Persian-speakers rather than an ethnic group; the concept of Persian speakers has been used for them. We-identity is more restricted for the Kurd, Azeri, Baloch, and Arab than for the Persian, and traditional customs and rituals are prioritized by people in these ethnic groups, who have admitted a number of modern age manifestations. Their efforts to maintain traditional and historical thoughts have brought about a gap between them and other social identities around the country, making them distinct and distinguished.

In today’s world, language can turn into a political issue between dominant and dominated groups as a cultural notion. The results of the present study also indicate the politicization of the mother tongue; that is, ethnic groups associate their deprivation of education in the mother tongue to the government, and believe that they should continue demanding it from the political system of the country until it is realized, because they will be assimilated to speakers of the official language if such demand and resistance does not take shape.

*Sa’dun Mazuchi, civil rights and political activist from Mahabad (West Azerbaijan Province)*

We do not have the right of education in our mother tongue, but demand it as a right, as reflected in the Constitution of Iran though not realized. This results from the lack of determination in the different governments during the history of the Islamic Republic, none of which was determined to implement this article of the Constitution, and the right has not been demanded either in any case.

For the mother tongue, the history of Iran shows that the centralist approach with an emphasis on the Persian language and restrictions imposed on ethnic minorities has been dominant after the Constitutional Revolution and during the first and second Pahlavi eras. All the laws that existed at that time were aimed at development of Persian literature and orthography, disregarding the ethnic languages.

This policy was pursued with far greater precision after the Islamic Revolution. Following the registration of companies with Azeri names (such as Galin Gaz), for example, and the promotion of their goods on the national radio and television, the members of the parliament held a meeting on 2 October 1996, a while after the advertisements were broadcast, and legislated the prohibition of broadcasting commercials for goods with trade names in the foreign language of Turkish.

Charts 5 and 6 show the attitudes of the elite and of the general public toward legitimacy of education in the mother tongue. Accordingly, 85.9% of the elite and 63.9% of the general public believed that education in the mother tongue was a legitimate right, while 14.1% of the elite and 15.7% of the general public were disagreed on legitimacy of education in the mother tongue.

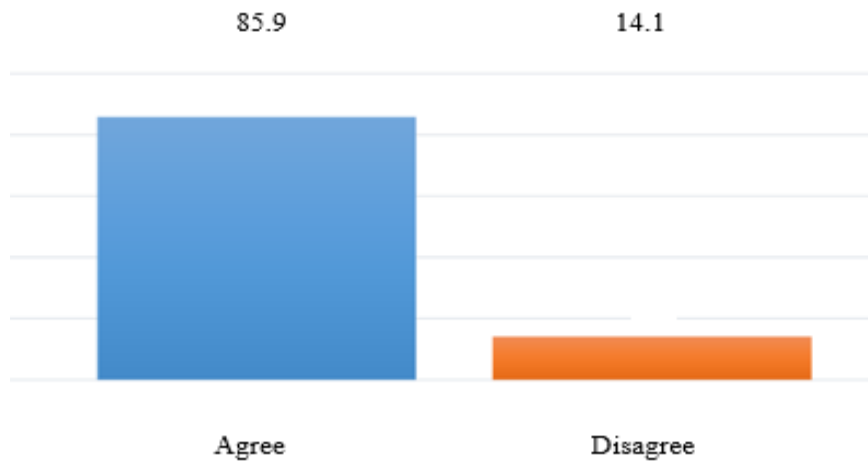


Chart 5. Specific legitimacy of learning in the mother tongue

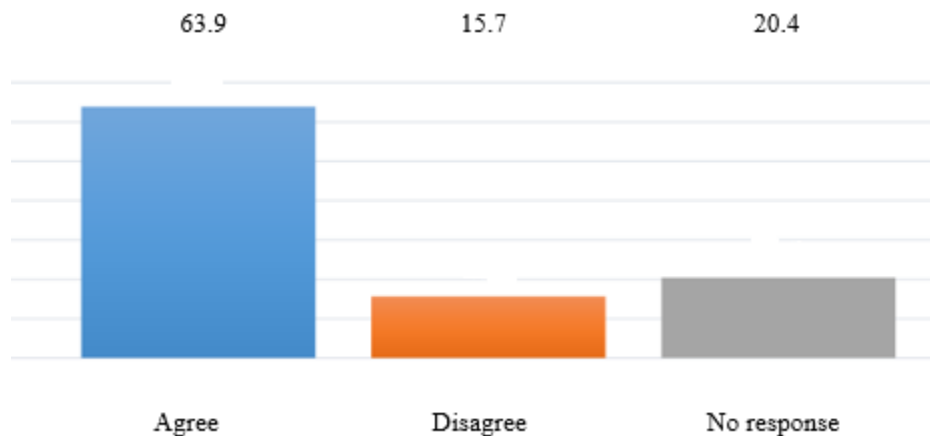


Chart 6. General legitimacy of learning in the mother tongue

The data obtained from the interviews with different participants from the collective identities examined in this study indicate that children's deprivation of the right to education in their mother tongue, especially in the first years of school, interferes with their learning. Before school, *i.e.* the age of seven, these children have been speaking in their mother tongues in their families and neighbourhoods, and the primary formal, written instruction has been provided to them in Persian upon

entrance into school. Since they have not spoken Persian until then, this certainly interferes with their learning process, and postpones it.

*Amir Sajjadi, history teacher from Saqqez (Kurdistan Province)*

If you accept as a principle that Iran is multi-ethnic, it will be a natural consequent principle that everyone should speak their own ethnic language. As stated by Mohsen Renani, a professor of political economics in Isfahan, bilinguals who do not have the right to education in their mother tongues have difficulty in learning, and suffer the issue of learning latency, resulting from an educational duality, which reduces the quality of learning. Furthermore, this is a natural, innate human right, and experiences from other countries, such as Switzerland, shows that linguistic diversity does not cause disintegration or separation.



The idea of a single Islamic nation is of great significance in the political system of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is explicitly stated in the Constitution, and its importance and necessity has been confirmed by many, who have emphasized the religious principles and great Islamic names' behavior. From the perspective of many scholars and believers, the notion of government-nation is still invalid, and the concept of Islamic government takes precedence over any other. Within the framework of these peoples' worldview and attitude, what is happening in the Islamic world is interpreted in terms of governance rather than nation-government. On the other hand, there are many who do not believe in this kind of worldview, and criticize the government policies by emphasizing the concept of

nation throughout the Iranian land. These people feel discontent with the government's foreign policy, *i.e.* the financial and life costs for defending Muslims around the world, arguing that it is unreasonable that the government should spend its capital and resources for other countries and prefer the original nation's interest to the Islamic nation's while Iranians themselves are in economic, social, welfare, cultural, and other sorts of trouble.

*Abdorrashid Triz, Mawlawi, history researcher, and socio-political activist from Sistan and Baluchistan*

The government seeks to expand its own religion, and consumes many of our resources in other countries for its promotion. In Baluchistan, you see sheds used as schools. Those who are studying there are Iranians.... The government has spent large amounts in Lebanon, which could have led to progress in Baluchistan as in other provinces if spent there. However, the money goes to a foreign Arabic country, such as Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, for religious reasons, regardless of people's welfare conditions.... As an Iranian, I expect greater concern for those inside the country than for those outside. Investment should be made inside the country, and people should be cared about.

An issue that has always been discussed by ethnic groups, particularly by *pan-*groups, is which group the collective identity of the original natives of a region is associated with, where each of the people argues that they are the main owners of the region according to the history, the names given to different regions, and the oral literature, and that others are immigrants, who have entered the region later. Accordingly, each group claims ownership of the land in that region, leading to fundamental disputes between the ethnic groups.

*Meysam Sefid Khosh, Lecturer of Philosophy at Shahid Beheshti University from Tehran*

De-ethnicization took place under the influence of an urban dispute between the Dezfuli and the Lur. Since the late Pahlavi era, the Lu immigrated to Dezful, and lived on the outskirts. My whole childhood was affected in terms of values by the conflict between these two groups, which had impacts even on the political attitudes adopted in Dezful.

Land ownership and the identity-based sense of belonging of the original natives of each part of the Iranian land has turned into a controversial issue in the past few decades. This is evident in people's feedback to an ethnic post on the Internet or in

a discussion between youngsters. As explained above, the issue is more prevalent in provinces with mixed population compositions, such as West Azerbaijan and Khuzestan, where a group of people from one ethnic group may argue that the region has belonged to them in principle by finding a word from their language in another or in the name of a region, city, or village, and that other residents there today are immigrants, who have occupied the region.

If various ethnic groups and religious minorities reside in the most important strategic regions of a country and those near the borders, with their social and cultural backgrounds located across the borders and without national governance and influence, due to their communication and connection with people there, any external issue or crisis will easily spread into the country, dramatically reducing the government's capability of monitoring the region. The obtained results also demonstrate that ethnic groups have a constant look at the borders and at the same ethnic groups across them.

*Karim Bakhsh Kordi Tamandani, socio-political activist, Iranshahr (Sistan and Baluchistan Province)*

Before the UK entered the subcontinent, there has been a single Baluchistan with a government called the Kalat government, which is in modern Pakistan. Once the UK entered, they divided the region, leaving part of Baluchistan to India and Pakistan, part of it to Afghanistan, and the other part to Iran. Many of our relatives are now in Pakistan, and we are in contact with them, because we cannot avoid this at all. The sense of ethnic and linguistic closeness and solidarity is there, and the Baluch, whether here, in Pakistan, or in Afghanistan, are hopeful to become united one day.

Threats that arise from borders crossing ethnic groups can be summarized as separatism. The settlement of different ethnic groups near the borders and in the vicinity of countries with the same languages has provided the potentials for occurrence of ethnic crisis near the borders. The Azeri are an example of homogeneity across the borders in terms of language, ethnicity, and religion and only religious homogeneity with the centre. Kurdistan Province, southern West Azerbaijan Province, and certain regions in Kermanshah Province and Hawraman are different from the centre in the above factors, shared with those beyond the border. The Baluchistan regions of Iran and Pakistan exhibit homogeneity in terms of language, ethnicity, and religion.

Iranian rulers' policy against the identity-seeking movements of different ethnic groups, most of which has of course been violent, has been more coercive, ending

in suppression and execution. This has always caused the rebellion to start from another point and the process to continue constantly. Accordingly, it makes sense for the rulers to consider the demands of the identity groups, naturally rising up from the heart of the society, once a protestant process ends, because many of these are civil demands, and can be resolved through negotiation.

To summarize, it can be stated that the ethnic groups in Iran, who reside mainly along the borders, share language, ethnicity, and religion with those in the neighbouring countries, which has led the two groups to pursue news about each other closely and to become happy or sad upon each other's joy or sorrow. Kinship has long existed between people from two countries with the same collective identity, and the existence of these similarities and family relationships has led in many cases to marriage of youngsters on the two sides of the borders and formation of new kinship and business.

### **Connection or disconnection: Background of Iranian identity**

Iran's neighbours include ethnic groups such as the Arab, the Azeri, and the Afghan, each with their own historical and cultural background. However, Iranians have always regarded their own history as more honourable, finding themselves superior to the peoples in the neighbouring countries. The results obtained from this research also confirm this kind of sense of superiority, part of which can be accounted for by the history and the sense of honour that is there with respect to figures like Cyrus and Zoroaster and their realms and doctrines. This sense of superiority can be observed also in the ethnic groups under investigation, each arguing that they have been the primary followers of Zoroastrianism, and that they have sacrificed their lives in confrontation with the Arab invasion and prevented foreigners from domination and achievement of control over the land. This historical sense of honour of the past was reflected in the 2017 and 2018 street protests, with slogans in praise of the Pahlavi government. Accordingly, it can be stated that there is greater concern for the history of the ancient land than focus on the future.

Some sort of narcissism with respect to a grandiose Iran is common in the Iranian society with a historical origin. This socio-cultural anomaly can be seen with a review of historical texts, literary books, speeches and writings of certain politicians and intellectuals, and cyberspace. In the 42<sup>nd</sup> issue of the *Mehrname* monthly, Dr. Mostafa Malekian<sup>4</sup> describes the manifestations of the historical narcissism, where

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<sup>4</sup> Fararu website, news ID: 250360

he asserts that narcissism can sometimes be collective and intellectual rather than individual. According to him, Ferdowsi, who has claimed that art can be found only among Iranians, and Nezami, who has stated that the whole world is a body, and Iran is the spirit, have suffered collective narcissism. A narcissist, Malekian says, builds a wall around him, and eliminates the possibility of a debate.

Another manifestation of this collective narcissism is that most human inventions are attributed to Iranians, especially to ancient Iran, and many discoveries are claimed to be originally Iranian. The latest revealed case concerns the tie, as reported by Seyyed Sadegh Kharazi, Iran's former ambassador in France; in the *Shargh* newspaper<sup>5</sup>. According to him, the tie has gone to Europe from the desert part of the world, *i.e.* the Iranian Plateau, where people would tie an ascot to cover the nose upon the monsoon winds to protect the nose. He emphasizes that Iranians have invented the tie, and it has belonged to them. In other cases, Iranian narcissism enters the domain of colour and race, where Iranians consider themselves superior, particularly to their Arab, Afghan, and Turk neighbours.

Besides national and ethnic issues and relations, the entry and expansion of modernism is regarded as an effective factor on the fade of ancient cultural elements.

*Mohammad Ali Daneshgar, theater director from Semnan*

Part of the crisis is a result of modernism. Modernity has brought about changes, leading to identity confusion in Iran.

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<sup>5</sup> Issue 2418, 10/10/2015



*Sardar Kiyani, poet and popular activist from Zabol  
(Sistan and Baluchistan Province)*

When the Arabs arrived in Eastern Iran and noticed Zagros, they were fond of the gardens and trees with rivers flowing down there. Coming from Saudi Arabia, where nothing but dust and dust storm exists, with no idea at all what a tree is, they saw paradise here.... They passed through Zagros, and noticed the beauty of Iranian women, and thought they were the nymphs mentioned in the Quran, which everyone could pick up and take with him.... The Arabs arrived and did everything. I am so sad, I swear to God...! Does it really make sense that an Iranian woman, with thousands of years of civilization, is picked up and taken by a lizard-eating, barefoot Arab? That the daughter of Yazdegerd III, the world's King, is picked up and taken by an Arab?



Any kind of government in which different ethnic groups live and have demands would adopt its own strategy and approach in that regard. This could range from approval of the ethnic demands to harsh confrontations for their elimination. When the strategy is based on coercion and military perspectives, with discourse and interaction ignored, the social elite will naturally not dare rise up, criticize, and lead ethnic demands, and will therefore be secluded. Such conditions will result in ethnic groups' ignorance of their rights. Moreover, the military atmosphere, confrontations, lack of official parties, and seclusion of active forces, ethnic and national movements will not achieve their objectives, which would require a democratic atmosphere, and identity demands and their suggestions will be made only occasionally.

The incapability of the identity construction policies of the Pahlavi regime in nation-building in accordance with democratic norms and citizenship principles led to the formation of a new issue in Iran known as *resistance movements*. The resistance and struggle of local rulers in residences of the Kurd, Lur, Arab, and Baloch against Reza Shah and the severe ethnic crisis after his downfall nearly led to separation of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan from Iran, which can be investigated within this framework. Clearly, the Islamic Revolution of Iran, which is known mainly for its

religious identity, and is inextricably linked with Shiah Islam and Iranian-Aryan thoughts as the basis of its formation, will also be subject to this approach. From Ahmad Ashraf's perspective, the historical notion of *Iranian identity* in ethnic, political, and religious movements, formed during the Sassanid era, remained there in the Islamic era with ups and downs, was reborn in the Safavid era, and was manifested in the modern era as *Iranian national identity* (Tajik, 2000: p. 159).

*Jabbar Rahmani, faculty member at the Center for Cultural and Social Studies and anthropologist from Tehran*

In foreign fields, we are culturally broke. Domestically, the set borders leave our cultural levels in crisis.

After the Islamic Revolution, religious, linguistic, and ethnic diversity was recognized as an obvious fact in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and emphasis was put in Articles 13, 19, 20, 26, *etc.* on observance of the social and political rights of ethnic groups and religious minorities and provision of equal opportunities in economic, social, cultural, and political fields. However, it was not until the late second decade in the post-revolution era that appropriate conditions were met in the dominant political discourse for addressing these articles. The major policy of the government then (in the first post-revolution decade) with respect to the ethnic groups involved the use of military means and the widespread presence of the army and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the relevant regions, which resulted in the exclusion of social activists and enhancement of national identity by denying ethnic demands, and banning part of ethnic press. At that time, when an ideologized atmosphere was dominant in the country, an opposing voice, contrary to the government's views, would not be heard. In fact, the government's strategy then against the demand for identity was to use coercive military means.

*Rahmatollah Hemmati, economic activist from Semnan*

Unfortunately, the government suffers political and cultural dogmatism, does not tolerate any criticism, and does not admit reforms.

The second decade in the post-revolution era and the performance of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> government, focused on reconstruction, also involved a military nature. Although the major orientation of the government then was defined as an economic approach,

the Kurds and Baloch residences were still of not much concern in the development and economic plans.

The first serious steps taken by the government to promote democracy included the rise of the 2 Khordad Front, with slogans such as *democracy* and *Iran for all Iranians*, the agreement on the formation of new political parties and groups, and the socio-political freedom granted to the extent of allowing newspaper publication and founding ethnic NGOs, which led to high levels of participation by the ethnic groups.

During the eight years of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government, as in the previous one, there was greater concern for economy than for the society and culture, and little attention was paid to the ethnic regions and the Sunni Muslim.

Finally, Hassan Rouhani has been in power since 2013, with slogans on realization of minority rights in both 2013 and 2017 elections. In practice, however, the majority of social groups has acknowledged positive action in only a few areas, and believes that most of the slogans have remained slogans as such, with few measures taken to fulfil the promises.

The present study demonstrates that the dominant strategies adopted by the central systems in the past one hundred years in addressing the demands of the collective identities under study have been based on a military perspective, fear, threat, and forceful confrontation. Of course, the severity of the strategy differs from one ethnic group to another. For example, the movements and actions made by the Kurds are monitored more precisely, and more serious reactions are made against them than against other ethnic groups, since they have exhibited the most serious political movements among the ethnic identities over the past one hundred years.

*Amir Nabavi, university lecturer and political science researcher from Tehran*

The problem is that everyone is counted as an Iranian upon wars and problems, *i.e.* at the time of expenditure, and all the people must fight in a war, while some of them are considered more Iranian than others and benefit more as resources and advantages are distributed.

Ethnic groups also believe that their feelings and emotions are usually abused, where their presence is considered necessary at the time of expenditure, while they are discriminated against upon implementation of development plans.

*Mawlana Abdolhamid Ismail Zehi, Sunni  
Imam Jumu'ah of Zahedan (Sistan and  
Baluchistan Province)*

We participate in elections, but that is all; we play no role in the rest of the country's decisions.



In general, political movements are organized in Iran as political parties and cultural and civic institutions because of ethnic and national demands. However, these political parties and institutions have been faced with serious issues and usually moved beyond the borders of the dominant political system due to the lack of the required background and conditions therein.

The ruling system attempts in various ways to restrict social forces and activists, and one of these restrictions concerns the field of media. Media are an important tool available to social activists and civic institutions to approach their goals.

In Iran, there is a negative attitude towards participation in the public sector and civic organization, which is usually associated with security issues. This, some argue, has prevented civil and social activists from activity in the public sector, secluded them, and captured them in political and security dead ends.

*Jalal Jalalizade, religious activist, lecturer at the University of Tehran, and former member of the parliament from Sanandai*

As the general secretary of a party, who has not been approved of in parliamentary elections, can one really encourage political activity in youngsters?

The statesmen had better seek the reason why civic institutions are silent and passive, because social issues are so complex that they suddenly emerge as critical phenomena, which can upset social discipline.

In many cases, certain ethnic and religious identity origins have prevented the elite and active forces in ethnic groups from reaching important, high positions. In the past few years, a range of videos have been published in the cyberspace of youngsters from these identity groups with high degrees and various domestic and foreign scholarly articles working as kolbars, factory workers, hawkers, and public

servants such as waste collectors, indicating the improper employment of specialized forces from ethnic groups.

In some cases, the improper employment of minority specialized forces has a legal basis, where minorities such as Sunni Muslims cannot reach high political positions such as the presidency according to legal provisions. In other cases, it is not a matter of law, but of the subjective views of the high-ranking government authorities, arbitrarily causing such restrictions on activists from certain ethnic and religious groups. For example, Sunni Muslims or collective identities such as the Kurds and the Baloch have not been able to obtain positions as ministers, holders of important security posts, ambassadors, or governors general after the Revolution (Since 2019, of course, two Sunni ambassadors have been appointed for Far-Eastern countries). A very important point to be noted about the rights of the ethnic groups is that most of them are not aware of the existence of such explicit laws about them. The findings demonstrate that the ethnic groups' knowledge of their rights mainly concerns the issue of mother tongue, and most of them do not have much information about their other rights. Part of this lack of knowledge of rights involves those that should be demanded from the government, and part of it involves those that everyone holds with respect to others in places where they live.

*Akbar Yadegari, painter, writer, and theater director from Semnan*

Some do not even know that their citizenship rights have been violated. For instance, a car dealer may park their cars on the sidewalk and occupy yours; another example concerns the pedestrian crossing rights, which are not observed at all in Iran. Citizenship rights are developed to ensure your safety on the street or on the bus, in life in general.

According to history, different ethnic groups have always drawn borders between them and other collective identities. These borders have sometimes had limited scopes and been very difficult to get through. The main reason for such security fencing is to protect one's own culture and customs against other ethnic groups. On the one hand, this may succeed in helping the ethnic group achieve their objectives; on the other hand, it has diminished their bargaining power upon different relationships. Therefore, it can be stated that restriction of inter-ethnic communication can disrupt the development procedures of the communities.

It can be concluded from an investigation of the Azeri's political behaviour that they have exhibited dynamic political performance and asserted their loyalty to the Iranian national government and their membership therein in practice through their

beneficial political measures. This has also had exceptions, including the foundation of the Azerbaijan People's Government (1945-1946), led by Seyyed Ja'far Pishevari. A few political measures have also been taken in the past decade; during a soccer match held in Tabriz, for example, the flags of Azerbaijan and Turkey were raised by a group of the Azeri audience along with relevant slogans. This was carried out by Azeri-speaking youngsters with no particular organization or leadership, and seemed more like an emotional, momentary measure than a deliberate, contemplative political action. Of course, it was not a deal big enough for the central government to react.

The political behaviour of the Kurds depicts an unpeaceful population struggling to obtain an independent cultural and political identity, with all its spatial divisions constantly seeking to gain autonomy during the past century, whether as a public movement or as individual ones, and have never withdrawn. This includes the attempts by Ismail Agha Simko, a leader of the Shikak tribe, between 1920 and 1925 and by Qazi Muhammad between 1945 and 1946 to declare independence in Mahabad and the movements by Kurd parties after the Revolution. The political-military movements of the Kurds can be described as movements mostly involving a kind of leadership and demand for the right to autonomy. For the past three decades, of course, it is not easy to discuss the existence or non-existence of such cases given the strategy adopted by the Islamic Republic Government, and this requires particular scientific investigation.

The people of Khuzestan are predominantly Arab Shiah Muslims, and are similar to those of the central part of Iran, as the Azeri are. This behavioural characteristic has been reflected in the political performance of this ethnic group in the past century. Thus, the political movements in the region were not welcomed by the natives, and faded away rapidly. This is well demonstrated by an investigation of the centralist and separatist forces' political behaviour over the past one hundred years and the controversy between them, leading to the domination of the centralist forces. For example, the case of Khaz'al Ibn Jabir between 1920 and 1925, triggered by the UK simultaneously with the end of World War I and its transition period, failed despite the little resistance by the central government due to the lack of support from the masses of people of the region. It is interesting to note that there was no separatist crisis in Khuzestan during the political transition period following World War II, unlike in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, but there were movements and activities by the ethnocentric groups during the period of transition from the Shah's regime to the Islamic Republic. The activities by these groups after the Revolution can be divided into two categories: those in progress within the period from the Revolution to the Iran-Iraq war and those occurring after the war. With the beginning of the war in 1970, the ethnic issues in Khuzestan were affected by the particular conditions in the

region and the presence of the military, reducing their intensity and turning them into subtle activities. After that, however, two groups gained ground: the separatist Pan-Arab group and the federalist Pan-Arab group. Favouring a multinational country, the latter group does not differentiate the functioning of the revolutionary political system from that of the Pahlavi political system, and is disagreed on separatism, unlike the former group, finding regional autonomy under the rule of a single country of Iran the way to realization of their rights. This group has been active in both international and domestic dimensions.

In the past century, there have been a number of political activities seeking autonomy in Baluchistan, as in other marginal regions in Iran with potentials for crisis, and some of the Baluch elite have utilized forces opposing the central government in transition periods to achieve their purposes. A movement led by the elite of this region involved Dost Mohammad Khan's uprising during the period from 1906 to 1928. Minor political movements for autonomy and reconstruction of Baluch nationalist thoughts also took shape upon the Islamic Revolution, where central power was missing in Iran, which failed due to the lack of support by the masses. In recent years, individuals such as Abdolmalik Rigi and the Jundollah militant organization have also caused the central government problems in the region.

All these issues concern one side of the problem, *i.e.* how the central system encounters different ethnic groups. The other side pertains to the structures of the ethnic groups themselves, *i.e.* the extent to which they approve of the coexistence based on cultural pluralism. First of all, it needs to be acknowledged that the politicization of the issue of ethnicity dates back to one hundred years ago, before which Iranian individuals would define themselves in terms of tribal rather than ethnic groups, according to various scientific references and the results obtained from the interviews with the different ethnic groups.

*Ashkan Zare'i, cultural and heritage activist and writer from Khuzestan*

There have been no such debates previously, when all lived together under Iranian identity. Today, everyone tries to stick to their own ethnic group and prove it.

Currently, there may be no demand by the ethnic groups in organizational form, but there is still such demand at the heart of the society, manifested in a different form once in a while. It should also be noted that the marginal units are interested in attendance of the Iranian nation and national government, considering themselves as part of the Iranian nation, despite their tendency to have some relative freedom and local autonomous alternatives, particularly in the cultural field.

## Inefficiency of Iran's institutionalized social structures

Every society has its own structures for management of its domestic affairs and achievement of development. Local institutions have been formed in order to let escape the centralization of the government, for problems to be expressed and solved at the heart of the society, and form local and regional cooperatives and develop the cooperation and collaboration culture for provision of many of the services needed by people. They also let compensate for the absence or weakness of free political parties that represent people with diverse thoughts and ideas to meet their demands, for the dependence of political structures and overlapping or parallel tasks performed by them, for the excessive concentration of facilities and population in one or more parts of the country and deprivation of other parts with all its potential social consequences.

*A 43-year-old man, employee from Tehran*

The point is that discrimination has nothing to do with ethnic groups. Here in Tehran, you will be discriminated against if not regarded as an insider, no matter what ethnic group or city you are from. It has nothing to do with ethnic groups whether you are an insider or an outsider.

Non-governmental organizations, which can increase people's participation, are also turning into part of the new paradigm of development, *i.e.* the New World Order, in today's world (Gosh, 2009). The participation of non-governmental organizations in local development as voluntary, non-profit organizations indicates the emergence of decentralization and delegation of authority at the level of local decision-making and management, which leads to exclusion of bureaucracy at the national level. Mohammad Khatami's most significant reformist political development project was perhaps the nationwide establishment of local councils in 1998.

The results of the present study indicate the extent of governmental power in the administration of the country. Although entitled *local* and elected by people, the minority local institutions also act entirely in line with government institutions and their interests after the election process. This inefficiency is attributed to the overall structure of the country, of which ethnic groups are considered a part.



*Naser Amoli Moghaddam, journalist and reformist activist from Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan Province)*

The very economy has a twofold management. One facet holds 65 to 70 percent of the power, with which most of the violations are associated, and which is not responsive. The other facet, holding 30 to 35 percent of the violations, is elected by the people, not fully controllable either. It is most unfortunate when the 35 percent collaborates with the 65 percent, as in the case of municipal corruption.

In fact, it can be stated that local, governmental, and quasi-governmental institutions in Iran have so far failed to be properly institutionalized in order to function as expected. At the provincial and urban levels, the Iranian administrative system simply obeys commands from higher levels. The senior managers are appointed and employed via the centre, with no role assumed for the people. This top-down perspective on the country's management process and the appointment of non-native managers for administrative positions in ethnic regions accounts for the severer inefficiency of the institutions in these regions, because most of the managers are unaware of the sociocultural issues concerning their administration zones, and their management terms end, and they are replaced by others as soon as they begin to become acquainted with these issues.

Like government departments and organizations (the executive branch), institutions such as the city council and municipality do not function positively, according to people. They have even hindered development and brought about severer economic and administrative corruption in some cases. Thus, the level of public trust in them has dramatically lowered, and they have strayed away from their actual roles and duties.

*Zhila Hesami, literary activist from Naqadeh (West Azerbaijan Province)*

In the past few years, there has been so much distrust that I would not participate even if my own sister were nominated.

Cooperatives are among the most democratic organizations everywhere, where the members are the main owners. The major capital of the cooperative sector results from the accumulation of people's micro-capitals, used to develop employment and production. The lack of material and spiritual support for cooperatives and their members, the lack of insight and belief in their effectiveness and efficiency, the poor

collective work and participation culture in the society, the value added tax, and many other barriers against cooperatives do not bode well for their future. By far the worst event in that regard involved the decision to merge the Ministry of Cooperatives, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Welfare and Security in recent years into the single Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare.

With the assumption of democracy as political participation and competition of a number of groups and organized interests for possession of political power and administration of the country according to the policies and attitudes of all those groups, political parties and elections constitute the core of free, democratic life.

There are two major points about the activity of parties in this period. Firstly, not only does the existence of so many parties in a country not indicate political advancement and development, but it demonstrates imbalance in its political structure and culture with respect to party activities. The existence of nearly two hundred certified political parties and associations in a country suggests that the society has not yet reached the level of political development and socialization required for party activity in cultural terms. The second, more important point is that many of these parties are no more than names, far removed from the notion of party in its literal sense, because none of them has been capable of exhibiting the real functions of a party, including political participation, socialization, communication, force training, *etc.* Most of them simply contain the concept of party, emerging in masses upon elections and fading away at the end of the process. Sadegh Zibakalam, a political science expert, argues that no party has ever taken shape in the literal sense in the Islamic Revolution. Instead, political groups have been active as parties temporarily during elections, while no precise, defined relation has been established afterwards between their representatives and the parties themselves (Zibakalam *et al.*, 2014: p. 7).

*Shahin Sepanta, veterinarian, writer, and civil activist from Isfahan*

I find our domestic policy in regard to individual and political freedom and parties a total failure. Almost forty years after the Revolution, parties should have been freer now, and political groups should have been active. I myself am a member of a political group, which is faced with a problem every time. Although we have stated every time that we are simply a critical opposed group with no intention of overthrow and no destructive activity, they have never given us the opportunity to take a measure, and have always restricted us.

Such conditions result in inefficiency of political parties, excessively involving politics in many of the life routines, such as culture, language and literature, sports, society, and environment, followed by the ruler's confronting reactions. Another consequence of these conditions can be observed in the process of candidacy for presidency or parliament membership elections, where the easy terms and conditions set in the election law causes a large number of individuals to register, including not only well-known political figures but also ordinary people with no political background and sometimes totally unacquainted with politics.

The government is administered based on the Constitution and a set of other laws, such as the Civil Code, the Criminal Law, and the Islamic Penal Code, each enforced by the relevant authority. On that basis, it may be thought that all the legislation is carried out by the legislature, as in many of the world's countries, but the Supreme Leader in fact holds plenty of power in that regard as the highest political authority. As explicitly stated in the Constitution, it is up to the Leader to determine the general policies of the system.

The conflicts between the branches and the lack of an understanding of the positions of Iranian institutions indicate an internal inconsistency in the political structure of the country. The existence of institutions parallel to the government, which is in charge of the executive branch, is a manifestation of the inconsistency. The issue is so serious that the 12<sup>th</sup>-government President, Mr. Rouhani, announced the existence of a shadow government in a speech, stating that they had handed over part of the economy to an armed government with media.<sup>6</sup> This concerns the influence of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the economic sector and political administration beyond the body of the government. The results of the present study are also indicative of the existence of this inconsistency in the political structure of the country.

*Ali Sahebi, psychologist from Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan Province)*

Iran's foreign policy has two sides, which are at different levels. There is a Foreign Minister and a representative of the Leader in foreign policy, in international affairs, Velayati, who goes to Lebanon to negotiate with Hezbollah, while no one asks him about his position.

Although used in the negative political sense of conspiracy theory to describe an influential group in disguise that has formed a subtle government, the term *shadow government* is recognized today as a positive phenomenon common in the political

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<sup>6</sup> Khabaronline, news ID: 679394

systems of some of the world's democracies and as a place for the opposition. Politically, a shadow government is a non-operational cabinet pending to gain control of the government in response to an event.

In Iran, the term was first used after the presidential election in 2017, won again by the moderation movement, by Saeed Jalili, a fundamentalist and a defeated candidate in the 2013 election, published as part of a manifesto. His office has already turned into a place for shadow government meetings, where the performance of a minister is investigated once in a while mainly by those who are likely shadow-government ministers.

According to Saeed Jalili, shadow government means that every individual or group should enhance anything that is done well, even by a rival, while closely monitoring the issues concerning the country. At the national and local levels, he argues, it is one's duty to help anyone who does something good, just as they should point out any observed mistake and have it corrected legally and morally while observing piety.<sup>7</sup>

Mohsen Hashemi Rafsanjani, head of Tehran City Council and a senior member of the Executives of Construction Party, made a precise statement free from political compliments about the shadow government's function. According to him, the government may decide to improve its relations with a certain country and resolve the issues, where a group in disguise decides to do something to cause a fight between the domestic and the target government to avoid an improvement. It is the very shadow government, asserts Hashemi, which decides to do something to disrupt the relations between Iran and that country".<sup>8</sup>

The results of the present study indicate a disagreement in the country in the process of decision-making on interaction with the world.

*Mojtaba Gahestuni, correspondent and cultural heritage activist from Khuzestan*

In general, we have failed in politics, being incapable of interacting with the world. In a country where governance is in the hands of one party, and the government is in the hands of another, shadow governments take shape. We already have not only more than one government but in fact several shadow governments that make decisions, and the conflict can be felt.

In general, it can be stated that there is inconsistency and divergence from the norms in the political structure of the country, part of which is accounted for by the structure

<sup>7</sup> Dana Information Network, news ID: 1389632

<sup>8</sup> Iran newspaper, Issue 6874, 12/9/2018

of the government, where inconsistency can be observed between the different departments and ministries. Another cause concerns the macro-structure of the government, where certain institutions function quite differently from the government in many cases.

In underdeveloped countries, the consecutive or sharp rise in inequality in different regions and cities has inevitably led to search for better living conditions and immigration opportunities. The rapid growth of the country's urban population during the past four decades has not been guided within a comprehensive national planning system based on sectorial and regional coordination. Given the close relationship between the population distribution pattern and political, economic, and social performance, the population will naturally move towards a number of cities around which activities and capitals are concentrated. Such a population distribution pattern has brought about population and function gaps at the middle and low levels of urban centres, causing the country to be confronted with problems in the urban hierarchical system (Rezaei and Taqvaei, 2009: p. 1).

*Mohammad Ehsani, filmmaker and documentary filmmaker from Tabriz*

As you step out of Tehran and four or five other cities, you are faced with a cultural, economic, and social catastrophe, until you arrive in Sistan, where poverty is as severe as there is hunger. Near the borders, public poverty can be observed. In Tehran, there is poverty, but it is not public.

In Iran, population is concentrated in a few cities, mainly in Tehran, which indicates regional imbalance. Tehran alone is home to more than ten percent of the country's total population, a phenomenon known as macro cephalization.

Although high population density in an urban settlement does not indicate a disorder in itself, it leads to significant inequality and improper distribution of facilities around the country. According to the results of the 2016 public census, where the ten most-populated cities were specified, the first five provinces of the country, in which about forty percent of the population live, are not among the main residences of the Azeri, the Kurd, the Baloch, or the Arab. Due to the concentration of human resources and economic capitals in these regions, capitals have been depleted in other regions, gradually widening the gap between cities. The major economic resources have been concentrated in the five regions at the expense of poverty and inequality in others.

The existence of inefficiency has sometimes made the people of the ethnic groups under investigation exaggerate, “project” in technical terms, when discussing them or the prevalent economic, social, cultural, and other inequality.

*Ghanem Savari, teacher from Hamidiyeh (Khuzestan Province)*

It is intentional...; what else could dry up Karun, Karkheh, Dez, and *etc.* all at once?!

The Iranian society regards most events from an excessive political perspective. The crises have been treated by the respondents in an absolute manner. As can be observed in the quotations, they argue that the government has not met any of their rights, all dedicated to the central regions.

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

Employment, production, and wealth are distributed totally unfairly and highly oppressively in Iran. Economy is in the hands of one who is ignorant. This is deliberate and conscious. You can observe the economy in this region, where the Shia and the non-Kurd have been granted administration everywhere, with lower positions filled with the Kurd.

Such an attitude toward and treatment of some compassionate government officials, who are of course few, discourages them instead of encouraging them to try harder; when they see that they are treated like that despite their efforts to realize social justice, they become discouraged from continuing their activities, by which no one will be harmed as much as the ethnic groups themselves.

The conducted interviews demonstrate that the Kurds have a more positive attitude toward their lives than the Baloch, and believe that they are in more appropriate conditions than them. On the other hand, they believe that they are in less favourable conditions than their neighbours, *i.e.* the Azeri, thinking that the Azeri, particularly in economic terms.

The Baloch regard their lives as filled with deprivation and underdevelopment. As detailed in the previous section, they believe that this is due in part to defects in the group itself, including the small number of the elite and of university alumni, and there is of course religious discrimination. This ethnic group feels that they have more in common with the Sunni Kurd than with other ethnic groups. They are most concerned among the other collective identities with the other ethnic group from the

same province, *i.e.* the Sistani, who, they believe, enjoy greater privileges in the province despite their small population as they follow the same religion as the central government, and are in charge of most important provincial affairs. In their view, this is why they are suppressed most by this local group apart from the central government, and the existence of this group can be considered as an external reason for their underdevelopment. In contrast, the Sistani believe that they share their history with the Baluch, and their underdevelopment can be accounted for more by the improper internal conditions than by external factors.

*Mawlana Abdolhamid Ismail Zehi, Sunni Imam Jum'ah of Zahedan (Sistan Baluchistan Province)*

There are a lot of problems in Baluchistan, and poverty is severer there than in any other part of the country. Most of this poverty is in turn a result of discrimination. Throughout the world, discrimination manifests itself in two ways: economic and cultural poverty. We suffer from both types.

The Arabs find their lives more favourable than those of ethnic groups such as the Baloch, and they also believe that the Baloch are in the worst conditions for around the country in terms of development. This ethnic group themselves have been regarded by the Bakhtiari as fanatical.

The Azeri believe that they are in better economic conditions than the other ethnic groups, and that this is mainly a result of their harder work and greater effort than the other ethnic groups'. They have negative attitudes mostly toward the Persian, who have command of the country's administration, and seek to integrate the ethnic groups' cultures.



*Rasul Nami, carpet designer from Tabriz  
(East Azerbaijan)*

I think the Persian have somewhat violated the Azeri's rights, and the issue has unfortunately spread to families.

The Persian believe that the problems in the country are not particular to a specific ethnic group, and different regions in the country are vulnerable in this respect. This group's attitude towards the Sunni minority suggests that they have the potentials for toleration and flexibility in behaviour.

*Naser Amoli Moghaddam, journalist and reformist from Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan Province)*

In Khaf Seminary, I entered into arguments with Mawlana Motahhari on Shiah and Sunni, where he would easily argue with me in front of the Sunni students. They seem to be open-minded, tolerant people.

The results obtained above on view of one's own life and of another party's and comparison thereof bring about a sense of discrimination, according to which each ethnic group believes that there is discrimination against them, and the country's facilities are in the hands of another group. This sense of discrimination can result from various factors, which is partly rooted in the law, where different ethnic and religious groups believe that there is discrimination against them in the official laws of the country. Another source of this sense of discrimination is religious issues, which leads to the belief that there is discrimination against unofficial religious groups in the country. Moreover, the sense can be rooted in political affairs and the government authorities' subjective behaviour, as administration has been in the hands of a single linguistic, regional, and religious orientation throughout the forty years following the Islamic Revolution, with the other orientations almost deprived of the authority, and more facilities have thus been dedicated to those specific regions to the others' disadvantage.

Charts 7 and 8 show the amounts of the sense of political discrimination among the elite and among the general public from the ethnic groups under investigation.

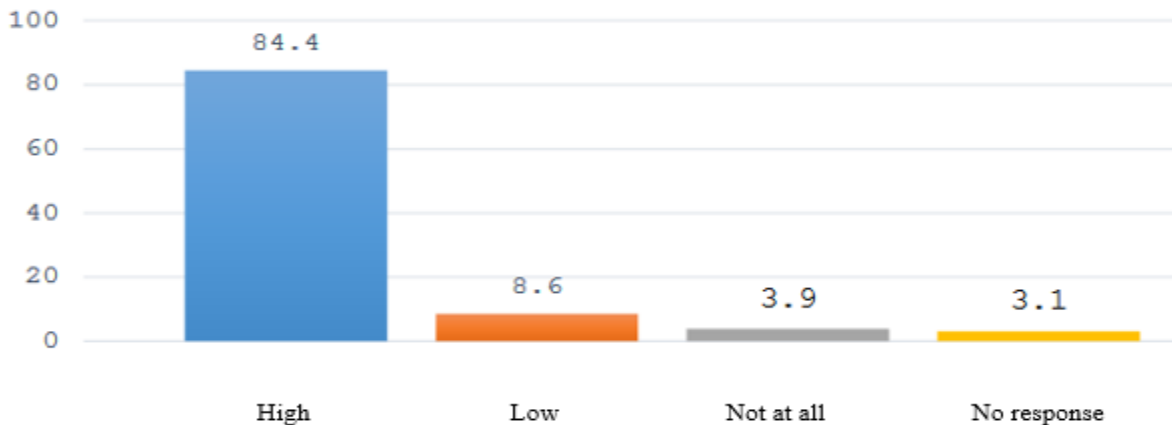


Chart 7. Specific sense of ethnic political discrimination



From border to border  
A comprehensive study on identity and ethnicity in Iran

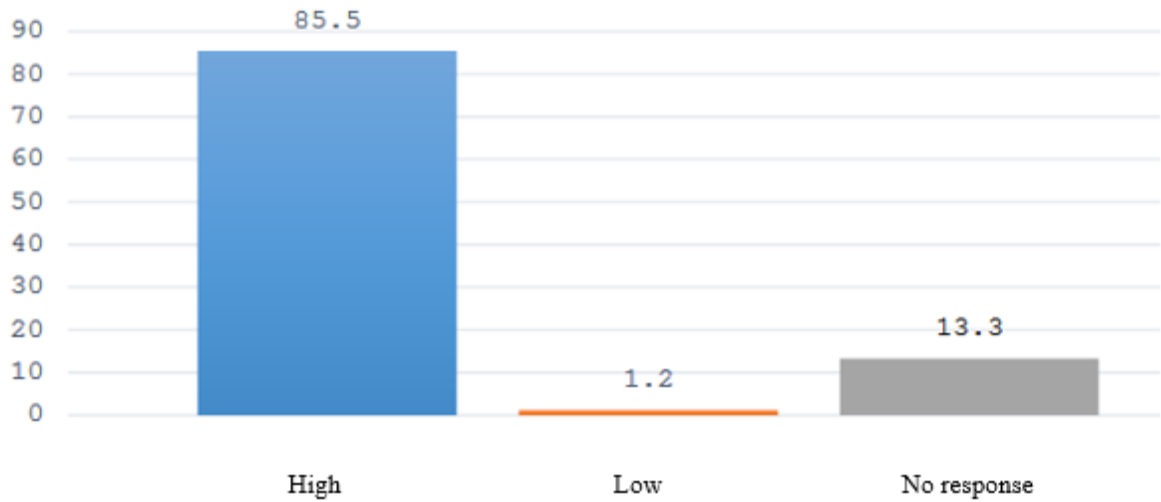


Chart 8. General sense of ethnic political discrimination

According to the results of this study, different ethnic and religious groups tend to preserve more reasonable traditional-historical customs, but do not hesitate to exclude or neglect the unreasonable aspects of their cultures. In other words, the interviewees have pointed out by making distinctions between good and bad customs and mentions of instances thereof that they maintain and enhance customs that are more rational and capable of adapting to the conditions of the day, *i.e* those with human and moral aspects in the modern world. However, customs that are not morally or logically justifiable, and consist mainly of superstitious, illogical behaviour should be excluded.

*Hasan Fesharaki, writer and translator from Isfahan*

Neither Nowruz nor Ashura should be imposed on anyone. People are free to have customs. However, there are good customs and harmful customs. Examples of harmful customs include *Qama Zani* (a bloodletting ritual) and circumcision. Rational, human, moral customs appropriate to the modern world are a requirement.

Values that have been seriously criticized in the modern age include improper religious values, beliefs, and customs. Individuals believe that religion is a personal choice, and it is not immutable simply because it is transmitted through the society; in fact, anyone can make the right decision by thinking and reasoning about it. Of course, people's criticism and revision of values is associated with the society's perception and interpretation thereof. In other words, some of what we are faced with today originates from a history not so far away.

Underdevelopment is conditions in which people are attached to modernity and at the same time unfamiliar with and perhaps even strongly opposed to it, because things have hardly occurred at the right place and time in the underdeveloped world.

*Mahmud Eftekhari, retired Tehran Cultural Heritage official and Iranian art expert from Semnan*

In the land where we live, nothing can be said with certainty..., as if we have not learned any lesson from history, and keep moving in a circle.

The results of the present study also confirm the key role of internal factors in the development of the ethnic groups under investigation. For instance, the interviewees have pointed out the importance of the return by university graduates from Tabriz after completing their studies in the development of the city. On the other hand, the role of internal factors and the small number of university graduates from provinces such as Sistan and Baluchistan have been mentioned as a reason for the underdevelopment of the region.

*Peyman Nasehpur, university lecturer  
from Ardabil*

Tabriz is superior to Ardabil since the graduates return to their city after graduation. The Tabrizi progress along the route to development of their city.



Accordingly, the underdevelopment of different ethnic regions, and of the entire Iranian society in general, is accounted for in terms of four perspectives: breach of law and underdevelopment, underdevelopment and Iranian behaviour, Asian production method and Iran's underdevelopment, and rationality and underdevelopment, all of which emphasize the inherent nature of the issue.

Relationship between the government and ethnic groups

The results presented in this section, to be discussed below, suggest that there is an inappropriate relationship between the government and ethnic groups. A clear example involves a demand made by ethnic groups, particularly by the Sunni community, the largest religious minority in the country, concerning the lack of religious centres in province capitals, especially in Tehran. The media is another important issue that plays a role in cultural monopoly. In Iran, the audio-visual media are controlled by the government, and the issue of interests is naturally raised when there is such command, with the group holding command utilizing it in accordance with their interests. Another factor that has contributed to ethnic groups' dissatisfaction with the government is their unfavourable economic conditions. These groups believe that most of the country's economic resources are concentrated in Persian residences. Another source of dissatisfaction among the ethnic groups with government policies is how the mother tongue is treated, where enforcement of the relevant laws is believed to have been pending so far.

*Nazar Mohammad Didgah, former parliament member and Mawlawi from Iranshahr (Sistan and Baluchistan Province)*

We do not have mosques in Tehran and Isfahan. The Sunni say their prayers at home. Imam Khomeini had given land at Tehran Grand Musalla ('prayer hall') in Abbas Abad to us in a letter he had written to Mawlana Abdol'aziz. I even opened an account to collect public donations to have a mosque built there. When I was a parliament member, a Kurd told me not to collect public donations at all because he would pay for the costs of construction. However, no building permit was given. The very gentleman who is in charge now stopped us, along with others, while we were friends at the parliament.



The Sunni Online website, publishing news from the Iranian Sunni community, has repeatedly reported in recent years on ban on Sunni Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha prayers. Another recent event that dissatisfied and enraged the Sunni and the Imam Jumu'ah of Zahedan was the destruction of their prayer hall in Punak, Tehran by municipal forces, supported by the police and security forces in 2015.<sup>9</sup>



*Fig. 2. Line of the Sunni saying prayers in a prayer hall in Tehran and the involved difficulty due to the small space*

Respect for cultural diversity involving an acceptance of the differences in the society can lead to peaceful coexistence and the enhancement of national integrity and security. The presence of restrictions in that regard may account in part for the formation of radical groups in the neighbouring countries.

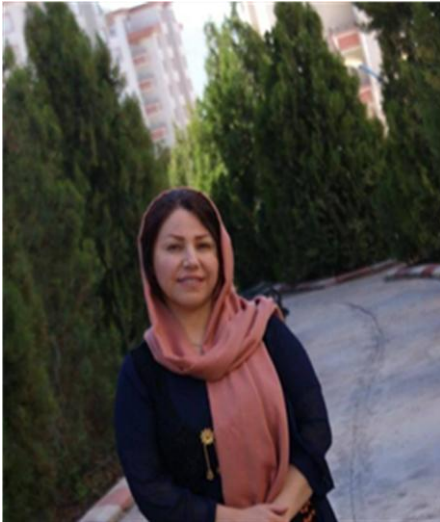
The results of the study also indicate restrictions imposed on different ethnic groups for possession of free media. Apart from the ethnic and religious groups' deprivation of their own free audio and video media, filtering dominates their press and websites.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://sunnionline.us/farsi/2015/07/3914>

*Mawlana Abdolhamid Ismail Zehi, Sunni Imam Jumu'ah of Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchistan Province)*

The ethnic groups have in fact no voice to express themselves and no media of their own. If someone interviews them out there now, will the authorities be dissatisfied? Who should we talk to then? Our words will not be broadcast on the radio or the television, and we do not have our own media. Where should we state our problems? We have a website known as Sunni Online, which is subject to filtering, and so is my own.



*Shno Hosseini, civil and women's rights  
activist from Javanrud (Kermanshah Province)*

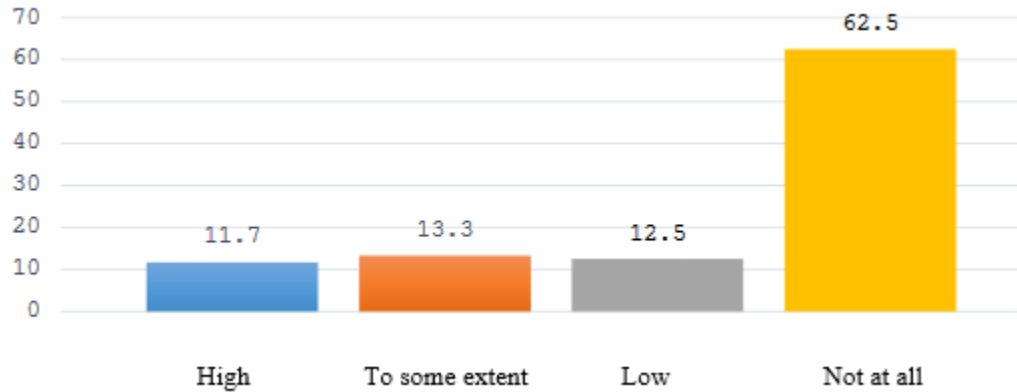
I am less than satisfied with the performance of the radio and the television at the national and provincial levels. In my opinion, they are not popular media, and their contents are not responsive to ethnic groups, in that the programs are not aimed at serving these groups.

An analysis of the contents of these statements indicates different ethnic groups' overt and covert dissatisfaction with the media active in the country. According to interviewees from different ethnic groups, including the Azeri, Kurd, Baloch, Arab, and Bakhtiari Lur, the domestic audio and visual media are directed toward assimilation of Iranian ethnic groups, without as much concern for the ethnic groups as they deserve. Unlike the discussed ethnic groups, the Persian are rather satisfied with the performance of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting.

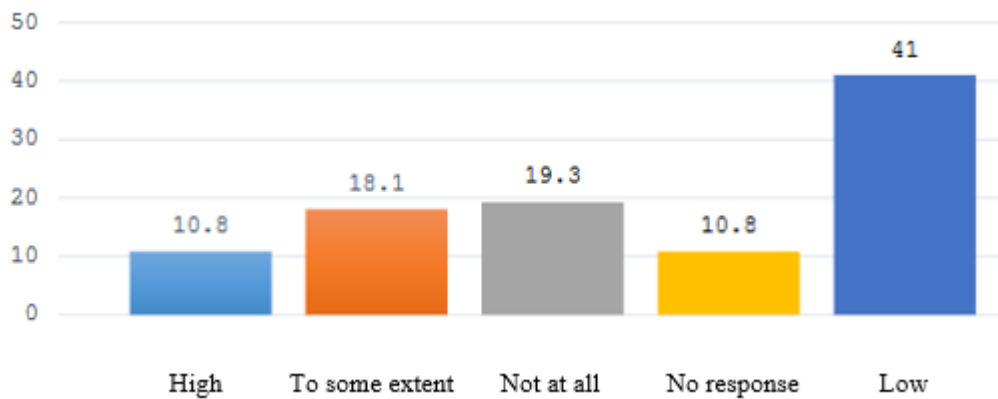
The provincial audio and visual media do not perform any better than the national radio and television. There is again dissatisfaction among the ethnic groups with the performance of these media. It is reported that most of their programs are also directed in form and format toward the centre. Producing programs of lower quality than the national radio and television, these media convey cultural superiority of the Persian and the religion of the government, intentionally or unintentionally.



It is important for national media to function based on justice and to be free from discrimination with respect to ethnic and social groups. If they function selectively, severer averse and destructive positions will likely be adopted around the society. Charts 9 and 10 show the levels of satisfaction with the provincial and national radio and television programs.



*Chart 9. Specific satisfaction with radio and television*



*Chart 10. General satisfaction with radio and television*

In conditions of censorship and control of the media, the audience functions as activists, seeking an alternative by searching the media with similar orientations. This was confirmed by the results of the interviews made with the different ethnic groups.

*Ghasem Ale Kasir, ethnic researcher and activist from Khuzestan*

We use cyber and media cultural products from the Arab world, which have influenced various aspects of our lives, from the naming process to style, to clothing, to music, and to catchphrases.

In Iran, ethnic groups have an unbalanced share of the economy of the country as a whole. A major part of the heavy industry, involving steel, car, petrochemical, and similar companies, is located mainly in the center, in Persian-speaking provinces. The largest shares of the industrial sector belong to the provinces of Isfahan (41.4%), Alborz (44%), Tehran (7.3%), Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari (39.6%), Qom (4.43%), Markazi (40.3%), and Yazd (47.8%).<sup>10</sup> As in the industrial sector, crops gaining high income such as the pistachio and saffron are grown in the agricultural sector in Central Iran, which has led to the large share of GDP in the Persian residences.

*Abdossalam Bozorgzade, radio and television producer from Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchistan Province)*

In our province, there are two governments: the Islamic Republic and the Republic of Sistan. I have made a pledge not to mention the Republic of Sistan again, but I will. There is a group of at most two percent among the people in the province who have created a republic of immodest totalitarians that has gained command of everything in the province, including political, economic, and administrative power, thanks to their religious identity and the particular conditions following the Revolution. We, the Baloch, hate them. I call them the Republic of Sistan, because they have united to suppress the remaining ninety-eight percent, tear them apart, and get rid of the poor Baloch as a counter-revolutionary, discouraging and ignoring those with fortunes at offices, which are in their own hands.

According to official statistics and indicators, the ethnic groups are in unbalanced economic conditions within provinces such as Sistan and Baluchistan and West Azerbaijan, which are multi-ethnic. For example, the Sistani and the Azeri have larger shares of the economy and industry than the Baloch and the Kurd, respectively, and political and economic opportunities are at the disposal of the ethnic groups closer to the centre in orientation.

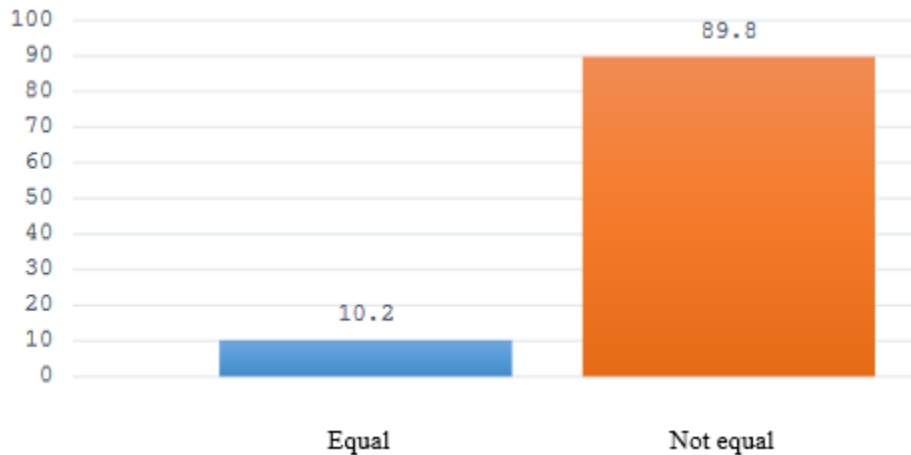
The economy of the Kurds is based on agriculture and pastoralism. In the northern parts of the Kurds residences (southern West Azerbaijan), horticulture is common as well as agriculture, while in the southern parts (Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and Ilam), rain fed agriculture and pastoralism are more common due to the presence of pastures and lack of fertile lands. The Kurds residences of Iran are not highly developed in industrial terms due to their geographic location near the borders and security issues. This region is not in proper economic conditions, and suffers a high unemployment rate among the active population due to the lack of economic infrastructures, factories, and investments in the industrial sector. Therefore, a large

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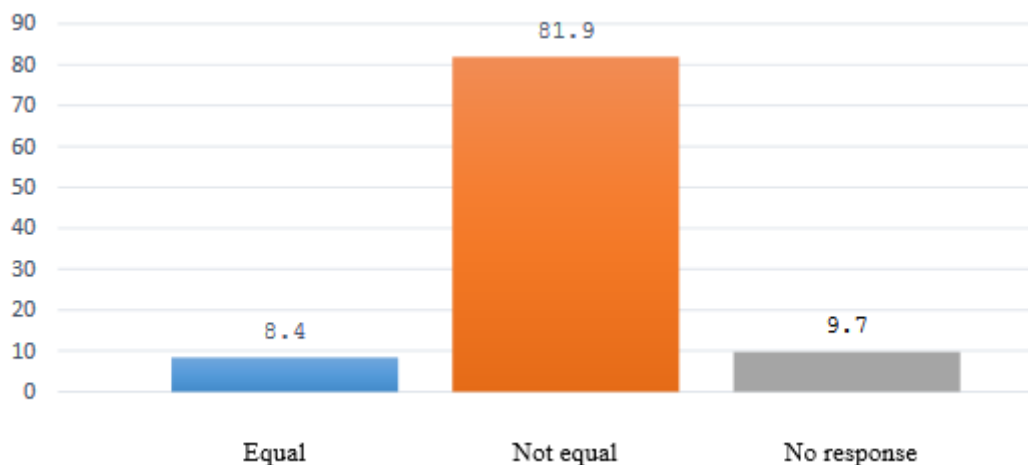
<sup>10</sup> Khabaronline, news ID: 375259

number of the Kurds have to engage in fake occupations as smugglers, kolbars, and the like to earn livings.

Charts 11 and 12 show the employment opportunities of the ethnic groups, which exhibits an aspect of the economic inequality. Accordingly, 89.8% of the elite and 81.9% of the general public believed that job opportunities were not evenly distributed among the ethnic groups. Only 10.2% of the elite and 8.4% of the general public believed otherwise. Only 10.2% of the elite and 8.4% of the general public believed otherwise.



*Chart 11. Specific equal employment opportunities for ethnic groups*



*Chart 12. General equal employment opportunities for ethnic groups*

The data in Chart 13 show unemployment rate in the thirty-one provinces of the country in descending order. Accordingly, the left-side half of the chart contains the multi-ethnic provinces, including the Kurd, Azeri, Arab, Baloch, and other populations, and the right-hand half, with lower unemployment rates, contains provinces mostly located around the centre of Iran's map, from which the high-



ranking officials have been selected over the forty years following the Islamic Revolution. The main causes of unemployment in Iran include the centralist policy, economic and political crisis in Iran, improper economic policies, financial and administrative corruption, ignorance of entrepreneurial values, and association of security issues to ethnic groups.

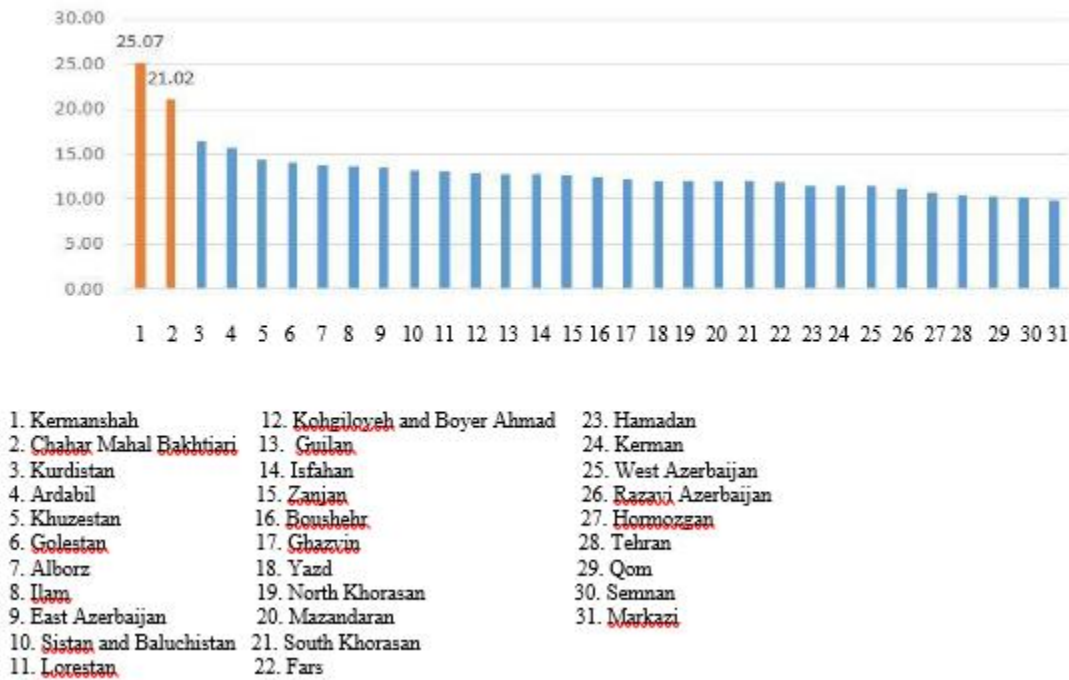


Chart 13. Unemployment rate (Statistics Centre of Iran)

The Azeri are in relatively good economic conditions, and there are better job opportunities and facilities in their region than for the other ethnic groups. This region has common borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey and particular cultural and economic exchanges with these two countries, where similar languages are spoken. Their economy is based mainly on pastoralism and agriculture. The region has a considerable share of the production of dairy products and those containing protein. However, that is not all about economy for most of the people there, given the plenty of job opportunities provided by large factories and industries such as tractor manufacturing, the petrochemical industry, machinery manufacturing, and the steel industry. Of course, the conditions are not so good in some marginal parts, especially in villages far from the centre, as demonstrated more clearly upon the earthquake in Varzeqan, near Tabriz.

The communications established and the maritime boundaries delineated at the Arab residences in Khuzestan and Hormozgan provinces have thrived international commerce. The important ports in these regions include Bandar Abbas and Bandar

Imam Khomeini, having a major share of the country's maritime transit. Moreover, the oil-richness of the Arab residences and the presence of large industries has attracted workforce from everywhere around the country. The resulting conditions have somewhat disrupted the ethnodemographics of the region as well, as various ethnic groups have settled there to obtain job opportunities. Unfortunately, however, the Arabs are overall at low economic levels.<sup>11</sup>

*Basem Hemadi, researcher in Arab rituals and ethnic music and university lecturer from Ahvaz (Khuzestan Province)*

I live in a province with water, oil, and gas. Unemployment should not make sense here, and there should be little poverty, but horrible deprivation and poverty is observed in villages and suburbs. This may be the case also in other provinces, but we wonder why we should suffer it despite our wealth of oil.

In Baluchistan, the economic conditions are miserable, and no factories or investments have been observed in recent years. The border is semi-closed, and there is not much economic or cultural interaction with the other side. For the same reason, border markets have not taken shape, and most people are engaged in occupations as goods and diesel fuel smugglers, and there is widespread poverty in the province. Sistan Baluchistan used to be Iran's granary, but agriculture is faced with many problems today, with many agricultural lands being infertile, due to the particular climatic conditions, water shortage, and severe drought.

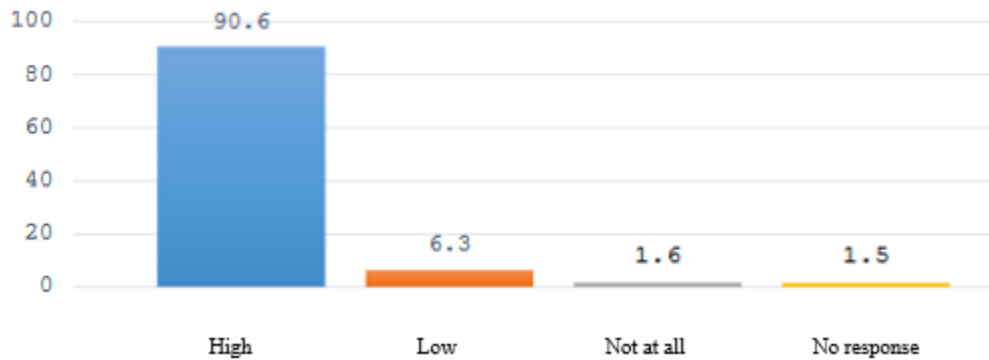
*Mohammad Bahari, university lecturer in literature from Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchistan Province)*

Our economy is naught or less than naught, and that is the case for all the Sistani. Economy is based on animal husbandry, agriculture, and industry, but there is no such a thing as industry in this province. Zabol was supposed to turn into an agricultural center, Baluchistan into an industrial center, and Zahedan into an academic center. Zabol has nothing now. I won't utter a word if a factory is said to have been made in Zabol throughout the past forty years. Our people used to earn livings through diesel fuel and gasoline. They can no more do that either as long as a wall has been stretched along the border. We have been left at the wall now, unable to escape either way.

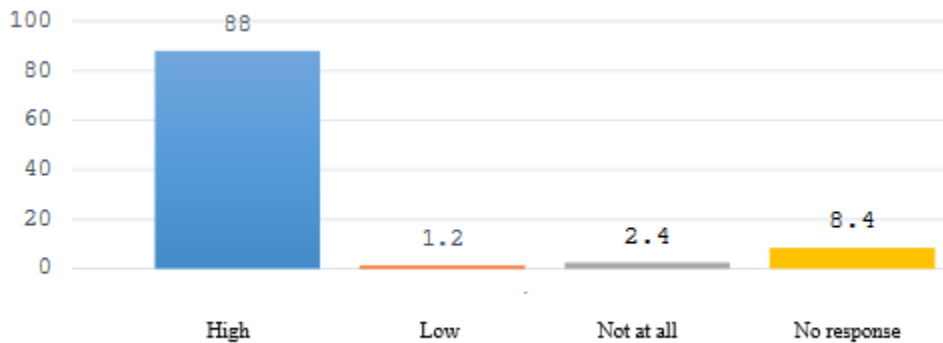
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<sup>11</sup> www.citypedia.ir

Charts 14 and 15 show the sense of economic inequality among the ethnic groups. According to the figures obtained from these charts, 90.6% of the elite and 88% of the general public believed that ethnic groups in Iran suffered from economic inequality, and only a very small percentage of both groups believed that there was a small economic gap and little discrimination in that regard.



*Chart 14. Specific sense of economic gap and discrimination*



*Chart 15. General sense of economic gap and discrimination*

The overall results obtained in this section indicated that each of the regions under investigation had rich, unique resources depending on their situations. These include abundant water, suitable climate for cultivation of various agricultural products and livestock and poultry farming activities, rich, diverse metal and non-metal mineral supplies, especially gold and decorative stones, natural fields and landscapes and cultural, historical, and tourist attractions, the capacity for construction of small hydropower plants given the surface water resources and appropriate topography, young, efficient, committed manpower interested in modern technologies, and appropriate conditions for establishment of free-trade zones. Besides the unavailability of policies for water control, storage, and transportation, the above factors have provided potentials for development and prosperity in various areas of agriculture, industry, and services. Development has its own particular process, and

its requirements should be met for it, including the provision of security and facilities for investors and their encouragement to invest. Thus, the government plays a key role in initiation and continuation of development, particularly in activation of productive investments and those that should be made in infrastructure facilities. As long as the current procedure continues, without the government being activated and major projects being implemented, not only will the backwardness of different regions not be compensated for within the upcoming one hundred years, but the gap between the deprived and developed regions in the country will also widen.

There is plenty of historical and contemporary evidence in Iran of political militarism, an important topic in political sociology addressing the intervention of the military as a social group organized in politics. Political militarism in Iran has its roots in the first and second periods of the Pahlavi era, and has continued after the Revolution. The major characteristic of the first Pahlavi king, Reza Shah, was his profound sense of militarism. Throughout his twenty years as minister, prime minister, and king, he insisted on empowerment of the army and spread of militaristic thought. Mohammad Reza Shah also relied on the military to maintain his reign by overthrowing Mossadegh's national government on August 19, 1953. In the post-revolutionary period, many military men have held important political positions in the country, such as Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Ali Larijani, and Mohsen Rezaee.

*Mehri Pakzad, faculty member at the Islamic Azad University of Mahabad (West Azerbaijan Province)*

I have a doctoral student who confesses that he does not know anything, and I have to give him additional grades as long as he comes from a certain organization.

The evidence of economic rent for the military suggests that some kind of militarism has infiltrated the internal structure of the country, and is severer and broader among the communities under investigation. Usually with excuses made by the government such as social control, order, and security, economic rent has both enhanced the military perspective in the society and spread various aspects of administrative and economic corruption in different parts of the society. Some of the evidence in this study attributes the prevalent underdevelopment to economic rent, and even regards the inefficiency of governments as resulting from this deep-rooted phenomenon in the politics of different periods. Part of the data obtained from the partisans refers to the cultural monopoly granted to the Persian in Iran. The issue of cultural assimilation in Iran has a long history, having long sought to eliminate the

multiplicity of cultural identities. It has been intensified in the modern age by the new media and administration tools, oriented toward the centre to enhance the cultural elements of the Persian's collective identity and to attenuate the other collective identities. This is of course done also by residents of other provinces, such as the Azeri in West Azerbaijan, and some participants in this study have used the term "colonialism in colonialism" to refer to it. After all, this movement is a process attempting to assimilate the cultural diversity present in Iran, reaching its peaks in the final years of the Qajar and Pahlavi eras, particularly during Reza Shah's reign. Still in progress today, the policy was officially promoted then in magazines including *Iranshahr*, *Farhangestan*, and *Ayande*<sup>12</sup>

*As'ad Ardalan, researcher in history and international lawyer from Sanandaj (Kurdistan Province)*

Reza Shah's policies in 1926 and 1938 caused a "Speak Persian" sign to be installed at schools in Kurdistan.

In an article about religion and nationality, *Iranshahr* stated that the issue of ethnicity was so serious that when an Iranian traveling abroad was asked about his nationality, he would mention his place of birth rather than the name of his country. It was then asserted there that the local sects, dialects, costumes, customs, and sensitivities were to be eliminated.

In 1929, the parliament declared the old costumes of the Iranian ethnic groups as illegal, and forced all men except registered clergies to wear Western clothes including "Pahlavi hats." Eight years later, these hats were replaced by European chapeaus. Reza Shah prescribed the latter hats not only to exclude ethnic identities but also to interfere with the ritual of saying prayers in Islam, requiring the forehead to be rested on the ground. In addition, he changed the names of many cities.

As the Islamic Revolution took place in 1979, the article in the Constitution that granted the ethnic groups the right to read and write in their mother tongues at all levels of education never became operational in practice as desired by the target groups, with the emergence of the authorities' subjective behaviours.

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<sup>12</sup> [www.fa.wikipedia.org](http://www.fa.wikipedia.org)

*Hamid Hamadi, university lecturer from Khuzestan*

Our children speak Arabic at home, but they speak Persian to them upon their entry into school, and this is oppression. Assumed to hold 100% talent, they will be using 50%, which will be a cause of academic backwardness. We can see our children shine and succeed even though it is not their mother tongue; that is, I think we would be more sophisticated than in the current conditions if they studied in their mother tongue.

Furthermore, it comes to mind at first glance upon investigation of the political structure and laws of the country that the government has a precise, unbreakable legal structure that no one can violate. However, the various political and social events may raise the suspicion in a citizen's heart that the political structure is far apart from what it should be. The wide range of corruption and breaches on high-ranking officials' part and the negligence on the legal institution's part reinforces the suspicion. Moreover, the illegal measures taken to impose legal restrictions on individuals and certain movements with no legal process gone through indicates the inconsistency of the political structure with the actions taken within the system.

*Marziye Mohebbi, lawyer from Mashhad*

Almost the entire political structure is based on the Governance of the Jurist's rule, and the economy is based on oil. The old reactionary politics, not willing to communicate, has totally hindered achievement of the development purposes, and the conditions have deteriorated every day according to the indicators.

This institutional dependence results in conditions where there are sometimes decisions and measures within the system that not only no one takes responsibility for, but are sometimes even attributed to external factors. For example, the assassinations that were committed in different periods, such as the serial murders and the invasion of the boys' dormitory of the University of Tehran in 1999 and 2009 (known as the university campus invasion) were attributed to forces inside, *etc.*, and some highlighted the role of *the West* to acquit the government and authorities. Such opacity and complexity in political action in Iran is already quite different from what was demanded by the people shortly after the Revolution. In general, it can be said that part of the inconsistency and deviation of the discipline from the routine in the political structure of the country results from the structure of the government, with such lack of coordination observed between different

departments and ministries. Another part concerns the macro-structure of government, where particular institutions function totally differently from the government in many cases.

### **Exclusion of cultures**

The existence of ethnic and cultural diversity in the realm of a government has been regarded by them in various historical periods as a threatening or opportunistic component. Based on the above view, certain policies have been adopted for strategic management of the diversity in favour of the government. Therefore, it is only from the perspective of governments and their interests and security that the issue of ethnic and cultural diversity has gained significance.

*Asghar Izadi Jeyran, sociologist and lecturer at the University of Tabriz (East Azerbaijan Province)*

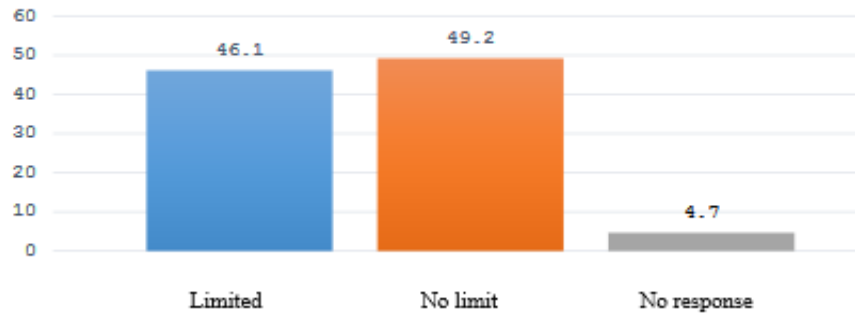
The Azeri spoken in radio and television programs is ridiculous, and the Azeri are represented in the series with contempt.

In Iran, some kind of confrontation, exclusion, or ridicule of the cultural manifestations of the different ethnic groups is observed in practice either generally or occasionally. One type of exclusion can be seen in radio and television programs, which have sometimes caused protests by the relevant ethnic groups, including the Azeri, Lur, Kurd, Baloch, *etc.* Another type occurs in the representation of ethnic and religious rituals, which are not allowed to be carried out in groups. The people from these ethnic groups believe that there is a planned attempt to devalue the ethno-cultural manifestations in the eyes of the youth and to value in their minds a specific cultural type instead in order to make everyone similar and easier to manage.

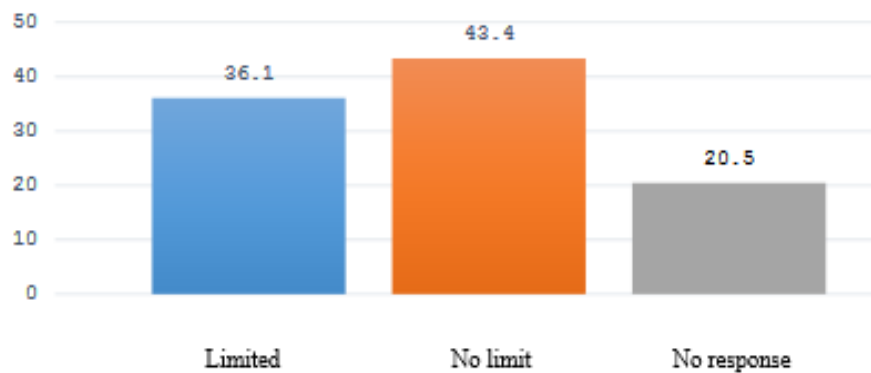
*Abdorrashid Triz, Mawlawi, history researcher and socio-political activist from Sistan and Baluchistan*

On the radio and television of the province, with a 70-80% Baloch population, Balochi is the language with the fewest programs, no investment is made in the folklore and public culture of Baluchistan, and the activists are given no opportunity.

Charts 16 and 17 show the amount of restriction on ethnic and religious rituals from the perspectives of the elite and the general public.



*Chart 16. Specific restrictions on ceremonies*



*Chart 17. General restrictions on ceremonies*

Many scholars and experts in the field of social sciences believe that the current conditions in the country is anomic, discussing attenuations of social order and consensus (Abazari, 2014). A reformist activist, Abbas Abdi (2006) addressed the issue of social collapse seriously for the first time in the 2000s. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad<sup>13</sup> and his associates are also among those who have recently raised the issue of social collapse in the Iranian society. According to them, there has already been collapse in various economic, social, political, cultural, environmental, and other fields. Activists in various fields find the current conditions as improper, which could pose a risk to the future of the country. The results of the present study also confirm the existence of these crises.

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<sup>13</sup> Resalat newspaper, Issue. 9187, 8/4/2018

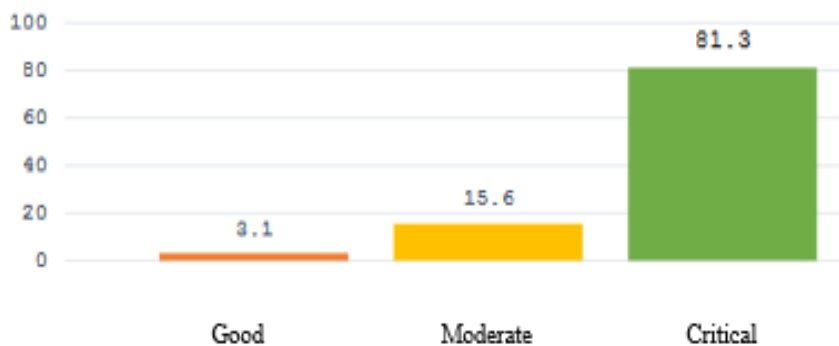


*Mehdi Feizi, faculty member in economics at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (Razavi Khorasan Province)*

There are a series of crises and issues, in fact hyper-issues, in the country that are ready to explode like time bombs, concerning topics from banks to pension funds, to water crisis, to unemployment, to divorce. Each of these is horrible in itself, and becomes more horrible along with the others; once one explodes, so can the others, and that is horrible.

It is thought that the inefficiency is caused by the government, which is always regarded as the accused party. It can be stated in general that the central government has hardly taken practical measures since the Pahlavi era to earn the public trust of the ethnic groups, and that the governments' strategies with respect to the ethnic groups have involved unfulfilled economic promises or coercion. Committees have been dispatched on certain occasions to regions such as Kurdistan, and there have been negotiations in the years following the Revolution with the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan and other parties and with the big Sunni names as the Central Sunni Council (Shams). However, such attempts have failed due to the dominant centre-based, power-oriented, non-pluralist spirit, and the negotiators from the ethnic and religious groups have been imprisoned or exiled in most of the cases. Throughout this period, the central governments have in fact insisted on their ideologies despite all the promises that they have made, and do not seem to wish to do anything in practice for achievement of unity, through which they could win the trust of different ethnic groups.

Charts 18 and 19 show the views of the elite and the general public on the political conditions in the country.



*Chart 18. Specific political status of the country*

From border to border  
A comprehensive study on identity and ethnicity in Iran

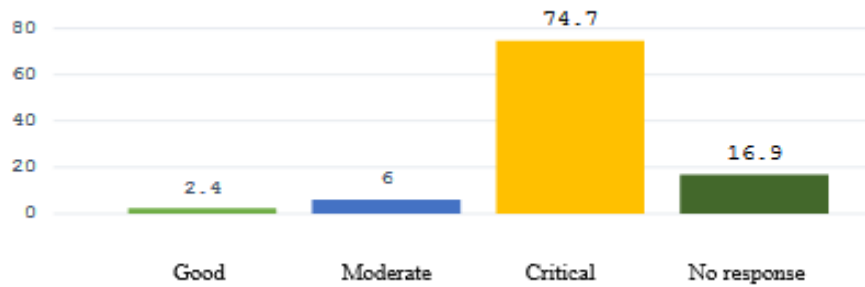


Chart 19. General political status of the country

Another aspect of social collapse is disruption of national-territorial unity. In the land of Iran, a variety of populations have always lived side by side, and there have been plenty of competitions and struggles between these different manifestations of Iranian collective identities. During each period, a certain group has gained power, which has never denoted the exclusion of the other groups, as the main issue in these competitions and struggles has not involved being or not being Iranian. No single historical case can be found in which an orientation or government has sought upon their achievement of power to completely exclude the other groups and question their Iranian entity. In fact, however, there has been ethnic discrimination throughout the discussed historical period in economic, political, cultural, social, and other aspects, which has been considered as a threat to national-territorial-unity.

*Ahmad, carpet merchant from Urmia (West Azerbaijan)*

With all this discrimination, Iran will fall apart. In the short run, people's disgust will increase, which will lead to collapse and dissolution in the long run.

In general, it can be stated that ethnic issues are considered as the most complicated, at the same time the most influential socio-political issues in today's world, based on evidence from various sources. Some of the evidence indicates that enhancement of ethnic identity and movement will be one of the most prominent manifestations of Iran's socio-political dynamism in the near future. The involved factors include enhancement of the gap between national and ethnic identity, rise in social-dignity, economic, political, and cultural demands, increasing development of ethnic organizations, institutions, associations, and centres, emergence of extremist identity-seeking feelings among some of the elites, intellectuals and political parties, increase in political alienation, separation of ethnic groups and the political system,

and emergence of identity demands in opportunities for political expansion such as national and local election (Karimi Maleh, 2009: p. 23).

Another important case that was discussed in the interviews made with various ethnic groups in regard to cultural monopoly concerned how the cities, passages, streets and allies, and places of residence of the groups were named. They pointed out that the government institutions were trying to change the local names and replace them with Persian ones.

*Sardar Fotuhi, public and private research project consultant, Saqqez (Kurdistan Province)*

The square is known as *Halow* ('falcon'), but is now referred to as *Jomhuriye Eslami* ('Islamic Republic'). Language and culture resist here, and the square is still called *Halow*.  
Language escapes from power.

The results obtained in that regard from the interviews indicate resistance by the ethnic groups, who still use the native and local names in colloquial language regardless of the official naming. There is an important point involved here: that language policies will work only if they are in line with the public opinion in the society. Rarely can language or modification be imposed on people against their will.

Ethnocide is a consequence of failure to approve of cultures and orientation toward cultural monopoly, as a result of which the identity and ethnicity of the social group fades away over time, and is replaced by a set of superficial cultural features. The term was coined by the anthropologist *Robert Jaulin* in the 1970s to refer to a set of methods aimed at destroying the culture of a people and replacing it with other cultures (Burton, 2017: p. 189). The term *ethnocide* should not be confused with *genocide*. The former means the destruction of ethnic culture and identity, while the latter means the murder of individuals in the society and the termination of the generation of an ethnic group through a holocaust, an epidemic, or an unlimited prevalence of alcohol or drugs, of which there are numerous examples (Ruholamini, 1989: p. 115). In the process of ethnocide, the culture that replaces the other is usually that of the conquerors or colonizers or a more powerful national culture. Thus, once the process of ethnocide is completed, the ethnic group finally disappears as one distinct from the others, as it is inevitably integrated into a larger group.

#### Overcoming the crisis

In the previous section, cases were discussed that indicated the existence of socio-political crises in the country. In this section, solutions will be presented according to the obtained results to overcome these crises. The most important issue here is to help preserve collective identities with reference to multiculturalism. The findings

demonstrated that many of the demands made by ethnic and religious groups fell within this legal framework, and a number of the people in these groups considered the implementation of the existing legal provisions as their ultimate demand. Therefore, it is worthwhile to take full advantage of these democratic capacities in order to overcome the crises mentioned in the previous sections.

The issue of citizenship rights and belief in and respect for it are other factors that can help to overcome socio-political crises.

Another important issue in this regard is the observance of moderation and avoidance of any form of extremism with respect to ethnic groups. From the point of view of the participants in this study, this will lead the country to national reconciliation and perpetual peace rather than to collapse. Each of the above will be discussed in more detail below.

The issue of national unity can be investigated from two perspectives. Firstly, national unity is based on extreme nationalist views, where a society combines its nationality with sacredness and worship, and considers other nations and nationalities not as equivalent to theirs but as inferior and worthless. From this perspective, national unity requires an urge for pride and supremacy, based not on original, common values but on ethnic and national prejudice, resulting in the view that it is legitimate to dominate over other nations and regard them as tools.

The proponents of this view believe that national identity can be enhanced provided that ethnic identity is attenuated, and reinforcement of collective identity will lead to debilitation of national identity and consensus. From another point of view, national unity denotes self-confidence, reliance on the nation's capitals and capabilities, and reduction of the distances and gaps arising from the religious, ethnic, territorial, and linguistic differences within the nation in order to enhance the groups' and individuals' solidarity, empathy, and collaboration for the growth and excellence of the nation. On that basis, ethnic and national belonging never assumes an intrinsic or absolute value, not resulting in prejudice, and belonging to a nation or land never arouses a negative or superiority-seeking attitude toward others. Most collective Iranian identities prefer the latter view. In fact, this view suggests that there is no conflict between local and regional identity and macro, *i.e.* national, identity in spite of the greater concern for the latter in the modern world.

*Mohsen Gudarzi, sociologist, researcher, and  
university lecturer from Tehran*

Large political identities do not function like the original factions, representing the interests of the large departments and groups in the society to some extent, and micro ethnic, regional, familial, and friendship identities have grown instead.



The teachings of such developments concern the view that the Iranian society needs a fundamental paradigm change in its intellectual infrastructures to progress from collectivism to positive individualism based on undeniable citizenship rights. Iran's social and economic institutions should gain enough knowledge to be capable of distinguishing between collectivism-based policies and those based on positive individualism. They should be able to reject the government's supportive policies that ensure the satisfaction of their short-term interests and voluntarily refuse to receive them. They need to know that supportive policies will result in their dependence on the government, which will prevent them from mobility and dynamicity. On the other hand, national policies arising from socially organized disputes guarantee observance of citizenship rights, and will lead to national development and prosperity.

The first step for achievement of the desired conditions of perpetual peace through operational dispute is to revise Iranians' beliefs at both governmental and national levels. For that purpose, it seems essential to make revisions in the following areas.

1. It is very important to avoid ethnic ridicule at all levels of the society, from everyday social dialogs to radio and television programs, to the statesmen's and celebrities' words.
2. It is essential to avoid ethnic self-exaltation to enable dialog and establish perpetual peace. In fact, the self-exaltation in the Iranian ethnic groups, which exists more or less in them all (more in the Kurds and Azeri, for instance, and less in others) is a serious barrier to achievement of perpetual peace and national reconciliation.

3. It is important to respect all the religions with followers residing within the Iranian territory and to believe in equal social rights for the followers of all those religions.
  4. It is of great significance to avoid discriminatory behaviour toward the other ethnic groups. The unpleasant sense is not restricted to a specific collective identity, and has been experienced by most ethnic groups. The ethnic groups complain about the Persian's improper behaviour toward them at the centre. On the other hand, those living in Tehran discuss their experience of behavioural discrimination among the ethnic groups in trade and other aspects of life.
  5. It is important for the government to change their methods in order to realize economic, social, and cultural equality for all Iranians.
- Another group believe that many of the demands made by ethnic and minority groups have been considered in the Constitution, and there are problems only in their implementation. Accordingly, the enforcement of these laws is suspended mostly due to the subjective, personal treatment by the relevant officials.

*Salaheddin Khadiv, civil activist and journalist from Mahabad (West Azerbaijan Province)*

If citizens were given as great a deal of rights as in the Constitution, a revolution would take place in Iran.

For citizens' rights, collective and religious identities believe that they have been deprived of these rights, *i.e.* they have not been given the rights as they should. Important issues referred to by the collective identities as violation of their citizens' rights included the failure to use ethnic and religious capacities in important, strategic positions, such as presidency, ministry, and governorship, lack of religious places, such as mosques in Tehran despite the large number of the Sunni in the city, cultural exclusion of artists, women, and social and environmental activists, *etc.*

Chart 20 shows satisfaction with the application of citizens' rights from the perspective of the elite. 92.2% of the elite are dissatisfied with the way civil rights are applied, and only 7.8% of them are satisfied with the human rights conditions in the country. Chart 21 shows the sense of discrimination with respect to the ethnic-citizenship right, on which basis 73.4% of the elite believed that ethnic groups did not enjoy equal citizens' rights. Since most of the interviewees in the general public group lacked a precise understanding of citizens' rights, as indicated throughout the explanations of the concept by the large gaps between their conceptions and the real sense, the quantitative findings concerning the general public were excluded in this section.

From border to border  
A comprehensive study on identity and ethnicity in Iran

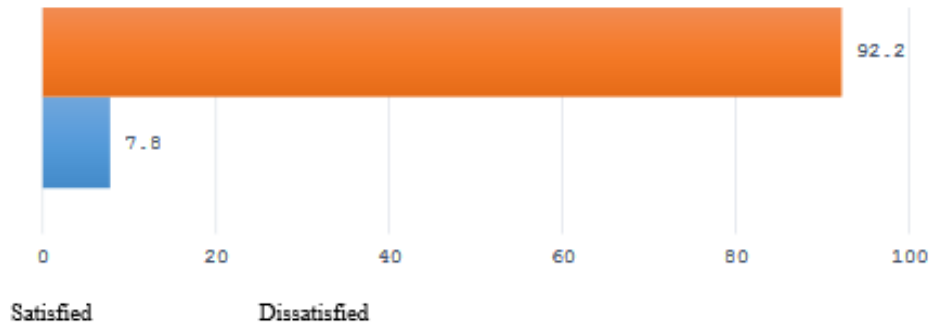


Chart 20. Specific satisfaction with citizenship rights

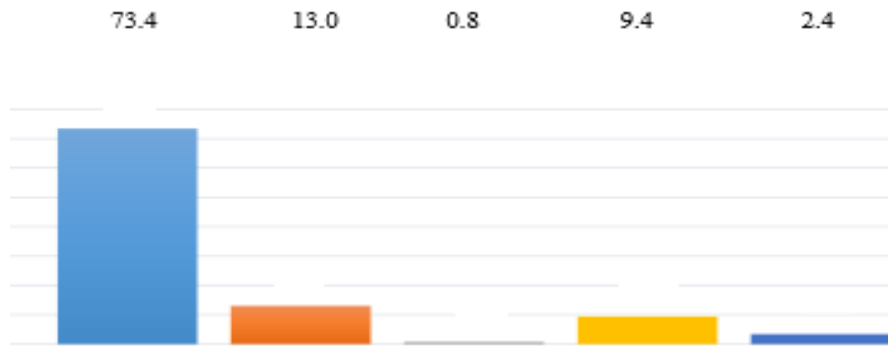


Chart 21. Specific sense of discrimination against ethnic citizens

Today, the concept of citizenship is considered as a social status in the view of the civil society, and a citizen is defined as a member of the political society who has rights and obligations pertaining to the membership. Concern for citizens' rights in any society will provide the dominant political system with consistency, legitimacy, and continuity. There are civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and judicial aspects to these rights, and the quantity and quality of their utilization in any society is considered as an indicator of development and a component of proper governance. It has already been found that cultural requirements need to be met for regularization of modern order, where incorporation of values functions far better than methods of social control. In other words, a first step to have citizens' rights respected by people is to try to integrate them in the society by increasing knowledge and ensuring the enforcement of laws. It was found through the interviews that there was a vague image of citizens' rights even in the minds of the elite. There has been dissatisfaction and senses of discrimination among the ethnic groups, since specific cases have not been specified for exemplification, and there is even inconsistency in the instructions

concerning the contents of the Constitution on civil, social, political, and economic rights.

*Riyaz Ali Farhani, social activist from Khuzestan*

The target society still does not know exactly what their rights as citizens are!

According to the interviewees in this study, a large number of people still do not know what is meant by the term *citizens' rights*, and it seems that the most important point before all these discussions are made by the government, a human rights charter is prepared, *etc.* is to raise people's knowledge of the term, so that they can refer to and demand it in the next step.

Topics such as citizens' rights first and foremost require instruction and cultural information, for which social activists and civic institutions are partly responsible. Instruction of citizenship behaviour is highly effective on the performance of civic organizations, and the teachings will help enhance social ethics and expand social consensus locally, nationally, and globally. The government and state institutions are responsible for another part of the instruction and information. In fact, the government and legislative institutions, national and local organizations, civic entities, *etc.* play an important role in training citizens through instruction of citizens' rights and group life skills and introduction of the principles of urban management. For instruction and cultural information in the area of knowledge of citizens' rights, it will help increase the quality of group life and enhance social capital in life to learn about civil behaviour instruction parameters.

Some of the participants in this study confirmed that alignment of ethnic interests with national interests has led to revision of certain religious and ethnic beliefs in an attempt for establishment of a social consensus between the ethnic identities and the national identity in Iran. On that basis, the different governments have taken shape on close spectra from the right and the left, and groups far away from the route have been marginalized, or have joined the opposition. Thus, the eleventh and twelfth governments, headed by Hassan Rouhani, succeeded in the invitation of the factions existing in the political system framework to moderation, which was their slogan, at least during the period of elections. This would give a pleasant taste to the spectrums forced away from government during the elections period due to the possibility of participation of different spectrums and ethnic and other groups, but finally failed to achieve much success. That is evidenced by the poor participation in the elections for the twelfth parliament, indicating the right party's return to power and implying the reformist's disappearance from Iranian politics. If this process continues, there



will be progressively tighter potential loops in politicism within the political system of the Islamic Republic, which will increase the population of critics and the opposition.

After all, access to perpetual peace is clearly a necessary condition for coexistence of ethnic groups. The concept of perpetual peace can be found in the thoughts of the philosopher Immanuel Kant. His ideas in that regard are based on the definite prerequisites and conditions of peace and understanding between nations and states, a combination of realistic ideas such as that of the “federation of free states” and ideas that do not seem to be easily realized, but can serve as motives for mankind’s progress in the future.

An important part of what concern perpetual peace is explained within a cultural framework based on cultural criteria. A cultural approach should include and approve of the similarities and differences in all traditions so that it makes it possible to believe in them and even feel proud and happy to have them (K, 2002: p. 36-44). Undoubtedly, the most important topic on the issue of peace is interaction and dialog. Social and ethnic movements is an issue that most countries in the world are involved in. An evident manifestation of these movements and the demands of the participating groups is the street protestant movements, which may be led in some cases to deviation and chaos by those abusing the excitements of the youth. What matters here is how these protestant movements are treated. In some cases, the reactions are manifested as violence, threat, and imprisonment. Of course, interaction and dialog can always provide more appropriate solutions. According to the obtained results, the political structure of the government has failed to go through the route of interaction and dialog as expected. Apart from the government’s approach, there is violence in Iranians’ behaviour at the micro level and at the heart of the society.

*Javad Tariri, lawyer, writer, and political activist from Khuzestan*

Your inability to interact well with Gonabadi dervishes demonstrates that you would even fail to interact with the founders of Iranian Shiites, who were dervishes, the noblest people.... When there is no opportunity for me to talk with my spouse, to love, to caress my child, or to study, what will be the output? Violence against my spouse, child, colleague, *etc.* will come about, want it or not.

A fundamental problem in political and international theory, with which it has long been concerned, is how you can help establish peace-based ethics and perpetual peace in domestic and worldwide governance. Any criterion required for peace that

applies across societies and cultures should be created based on free consent, in fact based on consensus resulting from dialog. It is as important as the final result how you can formulate a set of ethical principles applicable to all societies and cultures. A cultural approach should be comprehensive and approve of similarities and differences in all traditions so that it make it possible to believe in them and even feel proud and happy to have them. In the interviews conducted among experts from different collective identities, they mainly pointed out the lack of peace in the current conditions of the Iranian society, and most of them found the government and the governance responsible for such conditions.

*Nazar Mohammad Didgah, former parliament member and Mawlawi from Sistan and Baluchistan*

If they do not take a serious action, Iran may fall apart as in the early years. It is in the hand of God. If the conditions persist, that will result.

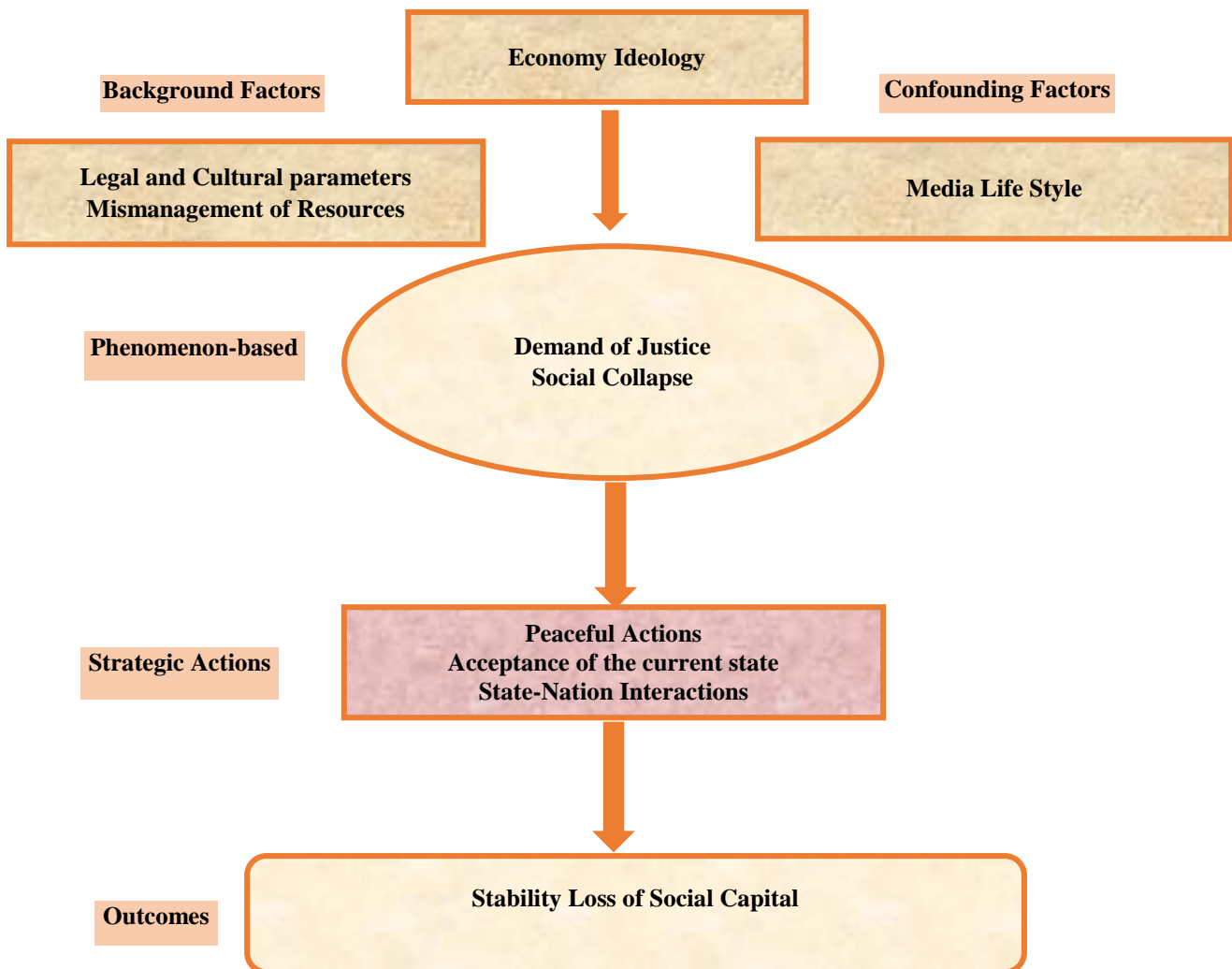
It is a result of this study that the system has paved the way for enmity and irrationality rather than for peace and friendship with its wrong policies. In other words, the policies adopted in the past few years, involving opposition of collective and religious identities, have resulted more in their repulsion than in their fascination and formation of a national unity. Undoubtedly, the most important component of the new theories is return to the dispute, but in the public field. Despite all the cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic differences within the cultural geography of Iran, what matters in achievement of perpetual peace in Iran is to provide an appropriate platform for dialog and interaction between the ethnic groups to share and utilize the wealth and power resources equally and ensure individual, social, political, cultural, and religious freedom.

## **Conclusion**

It will be of no practical use to conduct any study as long as it has not led to a formulation of strategies and practical plans for solution of a problem modification of conditions. In other words, recognition and evaluation of the current conditions can simply help problematize an issue and state the problem from different aspects. The present study has provided a suitable framework for planning and presentation of appropriate strategies since it involves an investigation and identification of Iran's domestic and foreign issues and conditions with respect to the ethnic groups through modern scientific methods.

Given that general strategies for solution of the problem can be achieved along the methodology of this project the major problem facing Iranians is the sociopolitical gap that causes the demand for justice on the part of different ethnic groups in the society, as can be observed from the extracted theoretical model. These conditions are brought about by changes in the livelihood and economy of the country and the ideology dominating the society, and the issues can be considered as the main cause of the phenomenon-based approach.

In general, the resulting conditions have led to various strategic actions, each forming different outcomes. The two outcomes of stability and decline of social capital represent different scenarios that outline the future challenges of the country. The following figure shows the final conceptual model of data analysis, derived from grounded theory (GT). The proposed scenarios and strategies are investigated below.



*Fig. 3. GT model of collective identity study in Iran with emphasis on peace*

The above model is a theoretical model resulting from the data collection and analysis. The unbalanced economy was a feature pointed out by the ethnic groups in Iran. A major part of the heavy industry, including steel and automobile companies, is located in Persian-speaking provinces, such as Isfahan, Alborz, Semnan, and Markazi, with which the highest economic revenues are associated.

It can perhaps be stated that the Azeri, especially those in East Azerbaijan Province, are the second most important group after the Persian in terms of economic revenue. In spite of these conditions, the Azeri are no less satisfied with the government than the other collective identities. The Azeri's sense of inequality can be summed up in two aspects regardless of identity and language. Firstly, this group compare their economic conditions to Persian-speakers', and argue that the Azeri-speaking provinces have a very trivial share as compared to the central provinces, such as Isfahan, Semnan, Markazi, Qom, Alborz, and Tehran. Given the Azeri's perceptions and the relative nature of economic conditions, the existence of such inequality has caused their dissatisfaction. The second point that has given rise to this ethnic group's dissatisfaction with the government is the belief that the construction of most of the industries active in those regions today dates back to the previous regime.

In Iran's Kurd residences, from the cities in southern West Azerbaijan Province to Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and Ilam, there is no prominent factory, workshop, or industrial town in the industrial sector with proper revenue, contributing to employment of large groups of young people in these regions. Accordingly, there is a high unemployment rate among the people of this ethnic group. Therefore, much of the manpower from the Kurds residences seeks employment to earn a living in Persian-speaking provinces, especially in Tehran, for construction jobs and occupation in the fruit market, and in workshops in East Azerbaijan Province, where the natives are not willing to work due to the difficulty of the jobs. Another group of the youth from these regions, who are mostly educated, seek refuge in the towns near the borders, where they work as kolbars with minimal daily wages and with no prospect or insurance, and even jeopardize their lives. Due to the lack of industrial factories, most of the agricultural products are exported raw and unprocessed to other provinces. Such conditions for the Kurd, who are different from the majority of the society also in ethnic and religious terms, have caused inequality and dissatisfaction among the people of these regions, who assume a significant role for the government in the prevalence of such conditions.

As stated earlier, the Arab population of Iran is scattered in the provinces of Khuzestan, Bushehr, and Hormozgan. The existence of oil in these regions and of important ports in the Southwest and South of the country has thrived commerce and

international trade there, which is why workforce from other regions is admitted to supplement the native labour force. In spite of the above advantages, the Arab collective identity is in rather inappropriate conditions, so they also have a sense of economic inequality and dissatisfaction. In fact, the appropriate economic and environmental conditions in these regions have failed to improve the Arab residents' living conditions.

The most difficult economic conditions and the severest dissatisfaction among the ethnic groups under investigation concern the Baloch, who are different from the majority of the society in religious as well as ethnic terms. As in the Kurds residences, the industrial sector has not grown significantly in this region. Furthermore, the agricultural sector is almost destroyed due to the environmental conditions and the dried-up rivers and Hamun Lake in recent decades. Another reason for the inappropriate economic conditions in this region concerns the domestic conditions, *i.e.* the illiteracy of the Baloch, who have therefore failed to play a leading role in the administrative positions in their province, and most high administrative ranks in the region are provided to the Sistani, who share the religion of the government. In addition to all these conditions, the remote, marginal geographic location dramatically contributes to its underdevelopment, because the people cannot easily interact with their neighbouring provinces and trade with them economically and financially. These conditions have caused the people of this region, particularly the youth, to undertake risky jobs as goods and diesel fuel smugglers, in which case their problems have been duplicated by the closed borders. According to the conceptual model of this research, two main scenarios can be presented for Iran: social sustainability and the decline of social capital. If the current conditions continue, in which social capital has declined in various dimensions, social, economic, political, and cultural collapse will finally take place. In the second scenario, however, social sustainability will be achieved, and the scenario can therefore be referred to as optimum. It requires fundamental reforms (in the infrastructures and superstructures of the society or in economic, political, social, cultural, religious, educational, and medical fields) and appropriate decisions made by different governmental institutions and different ethnic groups.

As mentioned earlier, the current conditions scenario will take place if the strategy of accepting the current conditions continues, and will expand the social, ethnic, and religious gaps. This will cause the social system to collapse and enmity and conflict to occur between social groups. Furthermore, the disappointment of the young generation and the elite of the society with improvement in their living conditions will cause them to leave the country and move to European and American countries. As a result, the country will suddenly face human resource crisis due to residents who have imposed costs on the society for many years, taking away all their

scientific capitals exactly when the product of their knowledge should be harvested, and their absence will cause severe damages to the society.

In the second scenario, which is favourable, Iran will be in sustainable cultural, social, economic, and political conditions. According to the obtained results, Iran's future trend will finally be known in the few years to come, specifying whether the first scenario will be realized, or the society will move towards the second scenario, which is the optimum scenario.

*Mawlana Abdolhamid Ismail Zehi, Sunni Imam Jumu'ah of Zahedan (Sistan and Baluchistan Province)*

I am hopeful about the future of Iran. Finally, there is some progress. I believe that domestic and foreign pressure will force us to make changes in our behavior. I believe that the current conditions cannot continue, unless there are changes that satisfy the people. A series of policies should be changed, and a series of issues should be resolved.

In general, the perspective of the country can be drawn as follows in the favourable case, where the second choice of scenario has been made.

Iran will be a country with ethnic and religious diversity, which is the source of national unity and consensus. Political and cultural decisions will be made so as to develop interethnic relations based on national reconciliation, and the political system will eliminate the hierarchical social system and the ranking of citizens in domestic policy-making by accepting ethnic identity as parallel to national identity. National determination will take shape to fill the gap and resolve discrimination.

In order to realize the above prospect, operational strategies in various social, cultural, political, and legal fields have been formulated and proposed, as discussed below. It should be noted that these strategies have been extracted mainly from interviews with the elite and the local society, formulated as strategies and measures.

## **Suggestions**

Under the inappropriate conditions that have come about, where political loyalty has taken precedence over any kind of planning in Iran, human resources have been organized based on non-specialized criteria, and it is observed that Iran is facing a crisis of mismanagement. This has reduced the conception of national consensus and social solidarity to theoretical slogans, away from social reality. Finally, peaceful coexistence loses its meaning, and a military-like atmosphere casts a shadow over many activities concerning ethnic groups and citizens' rights. In this regard, the following suggestions are made, which are based on the analysis of the data obtained in the present research.

## **Realization of economic justice**

In the industrial sector, most products of the country are produced in the central provinces, and the marginal provinces, which are the centres of ethnic residence, have been deprived in this regard, and different ethnic groups, including the Azeri, Kurd, Arab, and Baloch, are therefore filled with dissatisfaction and senses of inequality, as already detailed. Moreover, there were discussions of the lack of factories and industrial towns in Kurdistan, Baluchistan, and other regions, which has inevitably led the people of these regions to occupations as smugglers and kolbars, an issue that will hurt national economy and production. Construction of factories in these regions will improve the conditions in the manufacturing sector and prevent the outflow of foreign currency from the country's economic market for the purchase of foreign goods. It will also provide employment for the natives and make it possible to benefit from their scientific and practical potentials, thereby satisfying the educated youth. The life and financial security of this group of people will also be ensured with their official employment within the country.

Of course, mere possession of industrial equipment cannot create a sense of equality in these regions, because the sense of dissatisfaction can be observed at significant levels also among the Azeri and the Arab. This certainly results from the law of relativity, according to which human beings always compare themselves with their superiors, and a sense of dissatisfaction will take shape in them if they possess less than their superiors. The economic conditions of the Azeri and Arab are not comparable to those of the Kurds and Baloch, but the sense of inequality takes shape also in them because they compare themselves with the Persian, assumed to be in better economic conditions than them. It should be noted that the residents of some oil-rich southern regions (where the Arabs live) also suffer from economic underdevelopment. Of course, all this does not mean that there is absolute prosperity and no dissatisfaction among the Persian. The results obtained from the interviews with the people of these regions also indicate dissatisfaction in different sectors, and the lack of concern has caused plenty of poverty and unemployment in more remote Persian residences. However, it is undeniable that provinces such as Isfahan, Markazi, Semnan, Kerman, and Alborz are in relatively better economic conditions than the other regions of Iran. The point found in the obtained results about the Azeri and Arab ethnic groups, which has been of greater concern for the people of these two regions rather than the others, was that they regard the improvement in their economic conditions today more as a result of the previous regime's economic policies, stating that their economic gain in the industrial sector has not been so high after the Islamic Revolution. Consequently, the government officials need to strive

for fair, balanced distribution while helping to improve the economic conditions of the ethnic regions.

### **Realization of social and cultural justice**

Today, research in various fields of science indicates the inefficiency of top-down, centralized policies and perspectives, and it is stated accordingly that the government should step aside from management of many local affairs and leave it to the people themselves. However, this is possible through delegation of independence to parties and freedom of thought and action; otherwise, any activity is destined to be inefficient, like the Islamic councils of cities and villages, which are weaker, more corrupt, and less efficient now after five terms.

Throughout their history, the Sunni community has always been in charge of managing their religious centres in workforce, financial, and other fields, and has not faced any problem in that regard. Therefore, it is suggested that there be no more controlling, military-like view of various social, cultural, and political activities, and local leaders and people be free to manage their religious affairs.

The military operations in the late 2000s and early 2010s in Sistan and Baluchistan and Kurdistan might have resulted from this discriminatory view. It cannot cause any of the other religions a problem if the Sunni have a religious and worship centre and their own mosque in Tehran along with the places of worship of the other monotheistic religions, and fulfilment of this forty-year-old demand will definitely be in line with justice and equality.

Another important finding of this study concerned the issue of mother tongues and their utilization in education. According to articles of the Constitution, different ethnic groups can be taught in their mother tongues in school, and there should be no restrictions on this, a law that has not yet been implemented, and has remained a mere law. In fact, when there is no provision for this, and an ethnic language is regarded from a security point of view, it is just like there is no law at all in that regard. Recently, of course, two disciplines have been established at universities in Kurdistan and East Azerbaijan that are focused on Kurdish and Turkish language and literature, but the point to be noted here is the lack of support for them in terms of work space and employment. Since the objective of many university entrance exam candidates is to choose fields that can ensure their future careers, the mere existence of such university fields with no support in the labor market has caused them not to be welcomed by many students. In order to turn these fields into applied ones, therefore, the topic of education in the mother tongue should be addressed from lower levels, especially the first years of education.



For achievement of social justice in the field of languages, the right policies should be made with guidance from ethnic linguists and the language elite to eliminate the sense of discrimination. When all the facilities are employed for promotion, propagation, and extension of a particular language and religion, with minorities holding collective identities restricted with a security point of view and provided with no appropriate conditions for development and extension, the policies of integration and elimination of ethnic identities are considered, which represents unjustified inequality. Breaches and mismanagements are among the most important reasons for the failure to realize social justice, originating from lack of concern for meritocracy.

Iran is a country with a diversity of identities, which requires the government to provide the conditions needed for cultural activities particular to different ethnic groups and religions, with the groups allowed to hold their own ethnic ceremonies and rituals, not forced to obey the government or restricted. In the practice of religious rituals such as Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr, for example, there is general disagreement between the Sunni and the Shiah, where the former celebrate them at the same time as the Arab countries, while the Clergy Council usually warns the Sunni clergy not to make public announcements. Similarly, restrictions are imposed on the celebration of ceremonies such as Nowruz in some parts of Kurdistan and Uramanat. In some cases, there has been governmental sensitivity to celebration of cultural ceremonies such as the International Mother Language Day (21 February) and the Baloch Culture Day (2 March). The latter is celebrated officially and maximally in the Baluchistan region of Pakistan and in Afghanistan, while it is held minimally inside Iran with restrictions due to the poor announcement, public unawareness of the existence of such an occasion, and excessive emphasis on religious rituals and mourning rather than concern for joyful celebrations.

Another important issue involves gender discrimination at the governmental level as well as at the heart of the society, pertaining largely to social norms and rules, apart from legal restrictions. At the social level, the labour and employment market is controlled by men given the customary and religious belief that they are in charge of paying for the family's expenses, and that they have greater responsibility and ability to work than women. Despite the high percentage of women admitted to universities in the past fifteen years, no appropriate job opportunities are available to them after graduation either at government offices or at private companies. Consequently, they are forced to return to the traditional family environment to take on their duties as wives and mothers according to the customary rules as their mothers have. Even in cases where they are employed by companies, they earn inconsiderable wages, with huge differences from those earned by men doing the same jobs.

To progress toward balanced, sustainable development, one undoubtedly needs to take advantage of all the potentials of the society. If part of the people in the society is ignored and left aside, human resources have not been utilized properly. Logically, it is estimation of all the power of human and non-human resources that leads to the highest resultant, and this is the case for any exclusion of minorities, being religious, ethnic, or sexist. For instance, a topic discussed by the participants in this study pertained to women and girls who have competed equally with men in the Iranian university entrance exams; Not only have they been less talented, but they have even taken most of the university seats. In order to take advantage of all the capabilities of the population of a country, the government should strive, in employment tests for example, to provide equal shares and privileges for men and women as well as to exclude the employment quotas that have existed so far. Appropriate shares should also be assigned to women to be selected as manager in departments where the position has been exclusive to men, including posts as minister or governor. Moreover, the power of the media and of the social elite and civil activists should be used to eradicate the idea of women's inefficiency so that managers will choose their forces simply on the basis of individual talents with no sexist view.

The concept of second-order citizens or lower was a topic discussed by the interviewees, and it makes sense for the ethnic community to express such a feeling. These conditions can be considered as a serious warning to cultural policy-makers, and it is suggested that economic and cultural gaps be minimized to help remove this concept from the minds of the Iranian society and ethnic groups. For that purpose, the following solutions are emphasized:

1. Comprehensive development of deprived regions with priority given to the ethnic groups and religious minorities
2. Development of participatory planning by utilizing the diverse cultural capacities of the ethnic groups
3. Reduction of centralism and redistribution of economic and social opportunities
4. Bottom-up planning and reverse development so that the distribution of resources starts at the border, and leads to the center; and
5. Reformation of the administrative system and the managerial hierarchy of the country by delegating greater power to local managers.

### **Realization of political justice**

The results of the present study indicate the belief held by the social groups under study that parties in Iran mostly appear upon elections and disappear once the election process is over. Moreover, these temporary parties function mainly in

accordance with a macro-structural thinking, and there is no party in ethnic regions, which could function as the people's voice demanding identity. Perhaps the most important reason for the isolation and withdrawal of parties in Iran is the existence of the atmosphere focused on security, monitoring, and control imposed by various institutions, largely out of the control of the government, and the numerous filtering networks in the country. The most important function of a party can be to express the demands of those with affiliated thoughts through democratic principles and the process of discourse. When there is no such a procedure in the society, these are replaced by strife and violence, and formation of such an atmosphere can jeopardize the legitimacy of the system. Therefore, it is necessary to spread the atmosphere involving parties to the ethnic groups while taking the militaristic atmosphere off the society, activating licensed parties, and allocating multiple media to them. Thus, the ethnic groups' demands could be expressed and resolved in a fully democratic manner simply through the process of discourse.

At the executive level, a government is just if it enables equal, free participation in different political areas by removing the restrictions imposed on the people, and divides political power and positions according to their talents and merits. The dissatisfaction of those residing outside the centre with the above conditions was evident, where the Kurd, Arab, and Baloch stated that there had been no case throughout the forty years following the Islamic Revolution of election of those speaking their languages for high political ranks, such as the heads of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, government ministers, governors, and ambassadors.

From the point of view of some of the interviewed elite, what brings about success in political areas is to approach similar fields of thought rather than ethnic ones.

*Bagher Sadrinia, university faculty member from Tabriz (East Azerbaijan Province)*

Intellectual factors help connect to other countries, not ethnic factors. Thought is a means of communication with oneself and with countries. This is an important point.

## **Realization of social welfare**

Social welfare encompasses both the material and the spiritual aspects of life. The material dimension emphasizes satisfaction of the basic needs: for food, clothing, occupation, housing, and health, while the spiritual dimension can be assumed to include literacy and education, legal protection of the public, and enjoyment of human, political, social, and economic rights.

According to the data collected in this study; access to hospitals, medical centres, and other necessary services in the field of healthcare is highly disproportionate and unfair, as stated mostly by interviewees from Kurdistan, Baluchistan, and the South. According to them, hospitals are incapable in parts of Kurdistan of performing many surgeries and healthcare services, where the patient has to travel for three to four hours or more to provincial centres in West or East Azerbaijan, and it is the patient's body in some cases that is returned in the middle of the road. Moreover, a visit to hospitals in Tehran can demonstrate the large number of patients from different counties, seeking refuge in Tehran due to the deprivation of their own regions, where they stay overnight along with their families in the hospital yard or in the surrounding streets.

*Young Arab man, working in a grocery store in Mashhad*

I want nothing from the society anymore, because I will get further disappointed if I do.  
I am from Abadan, but had to move elsewhere to earn a living due to the unemployment in my city.

There is still no access to natural gas in the South Sistan and Baluchistan, and regions near the borders, particularly in the villages over there. In recent years, major disasters have occurred in schools in Kurdistan and Baluchistan due to the use of oil heaters, which killed several students and teachers, and the burns will remain forever on many of the students' bodies.

Movie theatres, parks, and leisure time do not make much sense in counties located near the borders of Iran. Development, industry, and road infrastructures among the minorities and near the borders are non-standard and catastrophic, and the roads in those regions have turned into places of murder. Therefore, it is necessary to seriously revise the indicators of social welfare with proper management and without ethno-religious discrimination, particularly in the fields of health and education, with the minimum regional scopes and road infrastructures considered. Then, the troubles need to be shot, and appropriate measures need to be taken to prevent irreparable damages.

Role of mass media in identity solidarity (existence of inter-ethnic media justice)

Clearly, the national media propagate and show off the collective identity that is approved of by the dominant system in religious and political terms, and Iran's ethno-religious minorities thus have no place in the policies of the national radio and television. The national radio and television, manifested by the governmental television and virtual media, has never represented ethnic identity as it should have, so much so that the country-wide radio and television channels can by no means be referred to as national. In fact, the provincial media also function more as models of

the ethnic groups' cultures and lives, and fail to reflect and meet their cultural needs to the extent that they should. However, media should pursue the mission to produce media content in accordance with ethnic convergence, integrity, and solidarity. For this purpose, those involved can produce products that emphasize Iranians' common historical and cultural background, ethnic media experts can be employed in the radio and television, and the policy of exclusively religious assimilation should be avoided. Politicization of cultural issues should also be avoided, all the ethnic groups should be regarded as equal, and their cultural traditions and behaviours should be respected, on which basis ethnic familiarity can be increased and the distances between the collective identities decreased. Certainly, media are considered as basic elements in provision of an atmosphere appropriate for peaceful ethnic coexistence. To date, however, public media, especially the television, has failed to meet the needs of the public, which has led them to use online media and cyberspace. Moreover, filtering and hardware confrontation with media on the part of certain intellectual orientations demonstrates information monopoly and prevention of free flow of information. It is suggested that the issue should be addressed openly rather than through confrontation with virtual media and blockage of information channels. Not only should the online media space be freed, but the private sector and independent parties should also be admitted to the field of television media. Moreover, establishment of private channels should be permitted, so that private media can produce and broadcast programs along with the national media, leading to healthy competition and return of public trust to the national media.

Greater concern for the role of proximity of religions in Iran

Part of the results obtained from both the Shiah and the Sunni suggested that religious thought could be left out of the foundation of governance, following the conditions of secular government. An important potential effect could be to put aside any privilege or discrimination based on religious thought and to utilize human talents based exclusively on individuals' knowledge and expertise.

The solution proposed by the majority of the elite under investigation was to take advantage of "majority religious democracy."

*Bagher Sadriena, university faculty member from Tabriz (East Azerbaijan Province)*

The official religion should not be presented in such a way that some feel minoritized, insulted, or suppressed.

### **Utilization of the legal democratic capacity and implementation of the pending articles**

A point widely discussed in the chapter on the results concerned reference to different articles of the Constitution, where it was stated that many of the demands made by the ethnic groups could thus be found. Examples include the issue of religious and human freedom, included in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth articles of the Constitution, the issue of education in the mother tongue, in the fifteenth and other relevant articles, the issue of equality of different ethnic groups and races, in the nineteenth articles. These and several other cases indicate the existence of some potential democratic power and capacity in the laws of the country to realize the rights of ethnic and religious minorities. However, what has caused dissatisfaction among these groups according to the obtained results is that these laws are pending at the level of legal books, and have not been implemented throughout the forty years following the Islamic Revolution. In some cases, the ethnic groups' protest against the issue increases so much that it proceeds toward a crisis or social collapse. Democratization of the ethnic groups' cultural affairs is a key to the problem. Throughout the Islamic Republic era, different governments with different intellectual and political orientations gained and lost power, but none of them had the courage to discuss the pending articles and attempt to implement and practice them, and the current government has hardly taken a step forward in that regard either.

*Mohsen Sudmand, psychologist and consultant from Ardabil*

Education in the mother tongue can be democratized. This should be left to the people themselves. This is a right, mentioned in the Constitution. If allowed by the government or the Ministry of Education, it will be welcomed, and classes will be held.

As mentioned, many of the different ethnic and religious groups' demands are in line with these articles, and a great deal of the injustice has resulted from incompetent managers' subjective behaviour. In the current conditions of the country, therefore, where a variety of crises exist, these legal democratic articles should be referred to again as a solution concerning ethnic demands and achievement of reconciliation and perpetual peace among the different ethnic and religious groups. With reference to the law as a firm basis, the protestant ethnic and religious movements will calm down, besides confrontation with the subjective views by individuals and certain institutions.

This is a summary of the book *From Border to Border: Comprehensive research study on identity and ethnicity in Iran*, the full English and Persian texts of which have been published by Mehri Publication in London, and now available to the public.

***About the Author :***

A social anthropologist and scholar, **Kameel Ahmady** received the IKWR 2017 Truth Honour Award from London Law University and placed first in the literary category at the 2017 Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation ceremony hosted by George Washington University. Dual British-Iranian national, Kameel Ahmady studied economic environment and publishing at the University of Communications in London, earned an M.A. in Social Anthropology from the University of Kent, and pursued additional courses on research methods and Middle East Studies at the London School of Economics and Birkbeck, University of London. Kameel has worked mainly on international and social development focusing on gender and minority issues. Published in English, Farsi, Turkish and Kurdish, his previous pioneering research has garnered international attention. In 2011, Etkin in Istanbul brought out *Another look at east and south-east Turkey*, and his ground-breaking research, *In the Name of Tradition. Female Genital Mutilation in Iran*, appeared in 2015 with UnCUT/VOICES Press. Nova Science Publisher added *An Echo of Silence* – the study of Early Child Marriage (ECM) in Iran -- to its program in 2017, a work that Shiraze publishing made available in Farsi. In 2020, *A House on Water*, investigating temporary marriage in Iran, was brought out by Shiraze in Tehran and Mehri in London, as well as, in 2019, *Childhood Plunder* (scavenging—i.e. waste picking—in Tehran), printed by IRSPRC. In the last few years he has focused on LGBT and ethnicity in such works as *Forbidden Tale*, a comprehensive study of LGB individuals in Iran, printed in English and Farsi by Mehri publishing in 2020 along with *The House with an Open Door*, a comprehensive look at temporary marriage in Iran, and, in 2021, *From Border to Border, an analysis of Iranian identity and ethnicity*, based on research with five major Turkish (Azari), Kurdish, Baloch, Arab and Fars (Persian speaking) ethnic groups also published by Mehri in Farsi and English. His new book on child labour “Traces of Exploitation in Childhood” (A Comprehensive Research on Forms, Causes and Consequences

of Child Labour in Iran) in June 2021 published by Avaye Buf publishing. His latest research on male circumcision (MGM) will appear soon.

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From border to border  
A comprehensive study on identity and ethnicity in Iran

Iran has high identity pluralism and ethnic and religious diversity, the lack of common norms and ethnic discrimination has led to loss of national unity, which creates a serious ethnic status. Identity pluralism and diversity is a reality in most societies since the past and we are still witnessing it today. And contemporarily, along with other social and cultural developments, identity pluralism and diversity has increased, and beside ancient sources such as race, religion, and nationality, new gender-based identities, sexual orientations, lifestyles, quasi-religious groups and other demand factors are demanding to be recognized.

