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Representation of Collaborative Governance in Non-Western Contexts: Case Study of Iran

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Representation of Collaborative Governance in Non-Western Contexts: Case Study of Iran

Master Thesis

MSc Public Administration: International and European Governance

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Abstract

This study examines the emergence and conceptualization of collaborative governance in Iran, a non-Western context. Using document analysis, it explores how Iran's unique political, cultural, and social landscape shapes the development and implementation of collaborative governance practices. The research reveals a significant shift towards "people-based governance" in Iran's political discourse, primarily driven by top-down initiatives from conservative factions in response to multiple crises. This approach represents a hybrid model, blending Western collaborative governance concepts with Islamic principles and Iran's distinctive political structure. The study challenges several Western-centric assumptions in collaborative governance theory, highlighting the need for more context-sensitive approaches. It also uncovers a disconnect between adopted governance models and Iran's contextual realities, both in political rhetoric and academic literature. The findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of governance transitions in non-Western, non-democratic settings and provide insights for policymakers and practitioners working in diverse political and cultural contexts.

Keywords: Collaborative governance, Iran, Non-Western context, People-based governance, Authoritarian regimes, Contextualized approaches

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Question

In recent decades, a constellation of interconnected and ubiquitous challenges has emerged, testing the limits of traditional governance structures worldwide. These challenges, conceptualized as "wicked problems" (Head & Alford, 2013; Rittel & Webber, 1973), are characterized by their complexity, uncertainty, and resistance to conventional problem-solving approaches (Emerson et al., 2015). The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2024 provides compelling evidence for this claim, demonstrating through empirical data the complex and often intractable nature of these challenges and emphasizing that "no country is immune to their impacts" (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Concurrently, we witness a shift in the nature of power and a complex reconfiguration of state functions and authority, often articulated as a transition from "government to governance" (Jessop, 2004; Rhodes, 1996). In response to these changes, collaborative governance has gained prominence as a central approach (Ansell & Gash, 2008), seeking to bring together multiple stakeholders in collective decision-making processes (Fung, 2015; Sørensen & Torfing, 2011). This shift reflects a growing recognition of the need for more inclusive, adaptive, and networked approaches to addressing the complex challenges of our time.

However, collaborative governance theory, while offering potential solutions to complex societal challenges, is fundamentally rooted in Western democratic principles and practices (Ansell & Gash, 2008). The applicability and effectiveness of this model in non-Western or non-democratic contexts remain understudied and potentially problematic (Bryson et al., 2015). The implicit assumptions of collaborative governance - such as the legitimacy of non-state actors, the willingness of governments to share power, and the capacity for open dialogue - may not hold true in different political and cultural settings (Purdy, 2012).

In this context, Iran provides an intriguing case study to explore the applicability and necessary adaptations of collaborative governance approaches in a non-Western society. In recent years, the concept of people-centered governance has gained significant traction within Iran's political discourse, emerging as a dominant paradigm across political, economic, and socio-cultural domains (Mohammadi & Kadivar, 2022). This shift towards emphasizing citizen participation as key actors in governance represents a notable departure from Iran's historical governance models and warrants scholarly examination (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006).

The Supreme Leader of Iran, as the apex of political authority within the Islamic Republic's system, has consistently emphasized the imperative of increasing public participation, particularly in economic spheres ([Khamenei, 2024](#)). This top-down endorsement of participatory governance principles has been echoed across various state institutions, including the executive branch under President Ibrahim Raisi, whose administration has adopted "people-oriented governance" as a central policy platform ([Raisi, 2022](#)).

The emergence of this governance paradigm shift is particularly noteworthy given Iran's classification within the spectrum of non-democratic and authoritarian regimes (Freedom House, 2023). Despite the presence of certain democratic mechanisms such as elections, the extensive powers vested in the Supreme Leader have traditionally placed Iran outside the category of democratic polities (Arjomand, 2009; Boroumand, 2020). Consequently, this movement towards a more participatory model of governance merits careful analysis.

This study aims to address the gap in understanding collaborative governance in non-Western contexts by investigating its manifestation within Iran. The main research question guiding this study is:

How does collaborative governance emerge in Iran, a non-Western context?

To address this overarching question, we will also *explore how Iran's specific context shapes the effectiveness of collaborative governance practices.*

Adopting a primarily exploratory approach with elements of theory testing (Yin, 2018; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), this research aims to uncover unique characteristics of collaborative governance in Iran while also examining the applicability of Western-derived theories in this non-Western context. By combining these approaches, this study addresses the identified gap in the literature and responds to calls for more contextualized approaches to governance research (Ospina et al., 2018).

Through this investigation, we aim to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of governance transformations in non-Western, non-democratic contexts and explore the potential for participatory models to emerge within such systems (Bayat, 2017; Putnam, 2000). This research not only advances our theoretical understanding of collaborative governance but also provides practical insights for policymakers and practitioners working in diverse political and cultural contexts.

1.2 Thesis Outline

This thesis is structured to provide a comprehensive examination of collaborative governance in Iran. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework, integrating collaborative governance theory with contextualized approaches in public administration research. This framework guides the subsequent analysis, allowing for a nuanced exploration of how collaborative governance manifests in Iran's unique socio-political environment.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design, detailing the qualitative, exploratory approach employed in this study. It describes the document analysis methodology used to examine a wide range of sources, including government documents, academic literature, and media reports.

Chapter 4 offers a literature review of collaborative governance in non-Western societies, providing a comparative context for the Iranian case. This chapter highlights the challenges and adaptations of collaborative governance in various cultural and political settings.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study, divided into two main sections. The first section examines the rise of "people-based governance" in Iran's political landscape, tracing its emergence

and characteristics. The second section analyzes the representation of collaborative governance in Iranian academic literature, revealing the conceptualization of contextual factors in these studies. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses the implications of these findings, addressing the research questions and reflecting on the theoretical and practical contributions of the study. It concludes with suggestions for future research directions and broader reflections on the role of collaborative governance in non-Western contexts.

Through this structure, the thesis aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of collaborative governance in Iran, contributing to both theoretical discussions and practical understanding of governance transitions in diverse global settings.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1 A Contextualized Framework for Collaborative Governance in Iran

This study integrates the two theoretical lenses presented above - collaborative governance theory and contextualized approaches in public administration research - to develop a nuanced framework for examining collaborative governance in Iran. This synthesis is crucial for addressing our research question: How does collaborative governance emerge in Iran, a non-Western context?

2.1.1 Adapting Collaborative Governance Theory to the Iranian Context

While collaborative governance theory provides a valuable foundation, its application in Iran requires careful consideration of the country's unique political, cultural, and historical context. For instance:

- The concept of 'horizontal structure' may manifest differently in Iran's more hierarchical political system.
- 'Multi-stakeholder engagement' needs to be understood within the context of Iran's specific civil society structures and state-society relations.

2.1.2 Leveraging Contextualized Approaches

The push for context-sensitive research in public administration provides methodological and theoretical tools for this study:

- It justifies our focus on in-depth, qualitative analysis of collaborative governance in Iran.
- It encourages us to be attentive to unique features of Iranian governance that may not be captured by Western-centric models.

- It prompts us to consider how Iran's historical, cultural, and political factors shape the implementation and effectiveness of collaborative governance initiatives.

2.1.3 Analytical Framework

By combining these lenses, I propose an analytical framework that:

1. Considers how Iran's unique context (e.g., political structure, cultural norms, historical factors) shapes the manifestation of collaborative governance.
2. Remains open to identifying novel forms or features of collaborative governance that may emerge in the Iranian context.

This framework will guide our subsequent analysis, helping us to uncover the distinctive features of collaborative governance in Iran's unique socio-political environment. It allows us to contribute not only to the understanding of governance in Iran but also to the broader theoretical discussions on collaborative governance in non-Western contexts.

2.2. Collaborative Governance

2.2.1 NPG Towards a Collaborative and Context- Sensitive Form of Governance Theory

Public administration theory and practice have undergone a three-phase transformation, starting with Classical Public Administration (CPA), moving on to New Public Management (NPM), and culminating in New Public Governance (NPG).

By the end of the 20th century, the shortcomings of New Public Management (NPM) became increasingly evident, particularly its close association with neoliberalism. Both NPM and neoliberalism emphasized market principles, efficiency, and performance measurement (Hood, 1991). NPM sought to bring private-sector management methods into government, with a focus on results, competition, and client centricity (Osborne and Gaebler ,1992).

However, when implementing NPM, specifically in developing nations, several challenges emerged. As per Manning (2001) adopting NPM principles without considering the unique institutional settings and capabilities of these countries often resulted in failure. Polidano's study found that NPM-driven changes in many developing nations led to an increase in corruption and decreased accountability, which contradicts its original objectives (Polidano,1999).

The "one-size-fits-all" approach adopted by New Public Management (NPM) faced significant challenges, primarily due to its disregard for the unique political, economic, and social dynamics in various nations. (Andrews, 2012). Additionally, Peters and Pierre (1998) warn against the potential pitfalls associated with excessive emphasis on managerial independence, which could erode democratic principles, transparency, and public oversight. Furthermore, Hood and Jackson (1992) express profound concern, likening NPM's implementation to a ticking time bomb, while Farnham and Horton (1996) categorically declare it a doomed concept, devoid of any merit.

On the other hand, a group of scholars have analyzed the consequences of New Public Governance (NPG) and neoliberalism on the power structure and its relationship with other actors, such as state-society relations. According to Jessop (2002), this change represents a reconfiguration of power, introducing the concept of "hollowing out" of the state, which refers to a process where the traditional role and power of the central state are diminished or transferred to other entities. In this context, traditional hierarchical government structures are being replaced by more networked forms of governance, involving a wide range of actors at various levels (local, regional, national, and supranational).Kooiman (2003) proposed that tackling intricate social challenges necessitates interactive forms of governance, involving various stakeholders. Similarly, Pierre and Peters (2000) observed a transformation from traditional, top-down decision-making methods to more cooperative, inclusive strategies, wherein non-state entities substantially shape policy creation.

Together, these perspectives highlight a fundamental shift in the governance paradigm, emphasizing decentralization, collaboration, and the increasing role of non-state actors in addressing public issues. NPG as the latest stage of evolution of public administration represents a move towards a collaborative form of governance beyond the classical hierarchical or command-

based format of government and more context-sensitive governance theory (Osborn,2006, Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012, Head and Alford, 2015).

Table 1 Different Paradigm of Public Administration

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Classic Public Administration (PA)</i>	<i>New Public Management (NPM)</i>	<i>New Public Governance (NPG)</i>
<i>Dominant Era</i>	Early 20th Century	1980s-1990s	2000s-Present
<i>Key Principles</i>	Bureaucracy, Hierarchy, Rule of Law	Market principles, Efficiency, Performance	Networks, Collaboration, Stakeholder Engagement
<i>Nature of state</i>	Unitary	Regulatory	Plural and pluralist
<i>Role of State</i>	Centralized, Provider	Decentralized, Facilitator	Partner, Network Member
<i>Contextual Focus</i>	Limited	One-Size-Fits-All (Initially)	Context- Sensitive
<i>Influences</i>	Weberian Bureaucracy	Neoliberalism, Washington Consensus	Criticism of NPM, Complexity of Governance
<i>Criticism</i>	Rigidity, Red Tape	Ignoring Context, Social Unrest	Potential for Inefficiency, Lack of Clear Accountability

Hence it can be claimed that in the literature of governance studies NPG is articulated both a product of and a response to the increasingly complex, plural and fragmented nature of public policy implementation and service delivery in the twenty-first century (Osborn, 2010).

2.2.2 Collaborative Governance Theory

As Torfing and Triantafillou (2013) argue collaborative governance represents a core aspect of NPG, focusing on the involvement of multiple stakeholders in public problem-solving and service delivery. Ansell and Gash (2008) define it as a governing arrangement where public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in collective decision-making processes. This approach directly addresses many of the limitations of New Public Management (NPM) by promoting inclusive, consensus-oriented problem-solving for complex public issues (Emerson et al., 2012).

This approach recognizes the complexity of modern societal issues and acknowledges that no single actor, public or private, possesses all the knowledge and resources necessary to address these challenges effectively.

While NPG encompasses other related theories such as network governance (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012) and co-production (Alford, 2014), collaborative governance has gained particular prominence within the broader NPG paradigm. Its emphasis on cross-sector partnerships, shared decision-making, and collective action aligns closely with NPG's focus on pluralistic approaches to public administration.

Collaborative governance theory posits several key concepts that distinguish it from traditional hierarchical models of government:

1. **Horizontal Structure:** Ansell and Gash (2008) note a shift towards shared power and decision-making among stakeholders, challenging conventional notions of government authority. This horizontal approach aims to flatten hierarchies and promote more equitable participation in governance processes.
2. **Multi-stakeholder Engagement:** This involves the active participation of diverse actors including government agencies, private sector entities, non-profit organizations, and citizens (Bryson et al., 2015). The theory suggests that by including a wide range of perspectives and expertise, more comprehensive and effective solutions can be developed.

3. **Deliberative Process:** Emerson et al. (2012) emphasize the centrality of stakeholders sharing information, expressing concerns, and collaboratively developing solutions. This deliberative approach is seen as a means to foster mutual understanding, build consensus, and generate innovative ideas.
4. **Public Issue Focus:** Collaborative governance primarily addresses complex, multi-faceted public issues affecting diverse segments of society (Bingham et al., 2005). This focus recognizes that many contemporary challenges cross traditional sectoral and jurisdictional boundaries.
5. **Iterative and Adaptive Nature:** Ansell and Gash (2018) highlight the importance of learning and adjustment over time in addressing complex public issues. This reflects an understanding that solutions to complex problems often emerge through cycles of implementation, evaluation, and refinement.
6. **Trust-building:** Klijn et al. (2010) identify trust as both a crucial aspect and often a key outcome of the collaborative process. Trust is seen as essential for effective collaboration, allowing stakeholders to work together more efficiently and take collective risks.
7. **Shared Ownership:** Collaborative governance fosters a sense of collective responsibility over the process and its outcomes (Purdy, 2012). This shared ownership is believed to lead to greater commitment to implementation and more sustainable solutions.

2.2.3 Collaborative Governance: A Context-Sensitive Theory

Collaborative governance, places significant emphasis on the role of context in shaping governance processes and outcomes (Osborne, 2010; Emerson et al., 2012). As described before this context-sensitivity is not merely an incidental feature but a fundamental characteristic that distinguishes NPG from earlier public administration paradigms such as Traditional Public Administration and New Public Management (NPM) (Osborne, 2010). Notably, the focus on context within collaborative governance theory emerged as a direct response to the *context-agnostic approach* of NPM and its consequent shortcomings, particularly evident in developing countries (Manning, 2001; Polidano, 1999). *Thus, the emphasis on context in collaborative governance represents not only a theoretical evolution but also a practical response to the challenges encountered in the global application of previous public administration models.*

Accordingly, CG theory, when viewed through the lens of contextual factors, can be defined as a theoretical framework that emphasizes the critical role of situational, environmental, and relational factors in shaping collaborative decision-making processes and outcomes across diverse settings. This approach recognizes that the effectiveness and dynamics of collaboration are heavily influenced by the specific contexts in which they occur (Douglas et al., 2020; Emerson et al., 2012, Ansell & Gash, 2008)

The emphasis on context is so pronounced in collaborative governance that it has led some scholars to question the possibility of developing a universal model or theory. As Douglas et al. (2020) note, collaborative governance initiatives often emerge "in an ad hoc experimental fashion in response to local circumstances" (p. 496). This observation underscores the highly situational nature of collaborative efforts and the challenges inherent in generating broadly applicable theories. This emphasis on context is echoed by other scholars in the field.

Ansell and Gash (2008) argue that the effectiveness of collaborative governance is contingent upon the starting conditions, including power-resource-knowledge asymmetries, incentives for and constraints on participation, and prehistory of cooperation or conflict. Similarly, Bryson et al. (2015) stress the importance of understanding the "initial conditions" in which collaborations are formed, including the general environment and specific drivers for collaboration.

Among the collaborative governance frameworks, only Emerson and Nabatchi (2011 and 2015) specifically and directly highlight the position of context. Emerson and Nabatchi identify six particularly salient conditions that may influence the nature and prospects of CGRs: public resource or service conditions, policy and legal frameworks, socioeconomic and cultural characteristics, network characteristics, political dynamics and power relations, and the history of conflict . These conditions provide a sense of the broad and diverse system context that shapes and continuously influences CGRs. However, Emerson and Nabatchi note that these conditions are merely influences, not causal factors, and provide the context from which the drivers of CGRs emerge (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).

Table 2 Context in different CG Framework (Bryson et al., 2015)

CG Frameworks	Context-Centric Evidence	Specific Contextual Elements Considered
Bryson et al. (2015)	Acknowledges diversity of context, limits of research-based guidelines	N/A (Focus on practice, not specific contextual factors)
Emerson & Nabatchi (2015)	Strong emphasis on dynamic system context for practicality, viability, and sustainability of CGRs	Public resources, legal frameworks, socioeconomic/cultural characteristics, network characteristics, political dynamics, history of conflict
Thomson & Perry	Implicit consideration through factors influencing successful governance	Decision-making structures, administrative structures
Ansell & Gash (2008)	Emphasizes influence of specific contexts	N/A (Theory focused on contingency, not specific contexts)
O'Leary & Vij (2012)	Specific policy environments and broader factors influencing collaboration success	Market competition, legal frameworks
Bryson, Crosby & Stone (2006)	Implicit consideration through basic conditions and formal/informal structures	Political/social context
Agranoff (2007, 2012)	Social and political context, especially in leadership, advancements, and public value creation	Leadership, advancements, public value creation
Provan & Kenis (2008)	Implicit consideration through concepts of trust and legitimacy	Social and political context (implicitly)

2.3 Contextualized Approaches in Public Administration Research

The field of public administration research is undergoing a significant paradigm shift, challenging the long-standing dominance of Western-centric models in favor of more nuanced, context-sensitive approaches. This transition is driven by a growing recognition of the field's inherent "Western centrality" (Milward et al., 2016; van der Wal et al., 2021), which has historically overlooked the diverse socio-political, economic, and cultural realities of non-Western nations.

The push for contextualization in public administration research has significant implications for collaborative governance theory. While collaborative governance models, such as those proposed by Ansell and Gash (2008) and Emerson et al. (2012), acknowledge the importance of context, they were primarily developed based on Western experiences. The contextualized approach challenges us to critically examine these models' applicability in non-Western settings and potentially adapt or reformulate them to better reflect diverse governance realities.

Scholars such as Haque (2019) have critically examined the enduring legacy of "colonial imposition and post-colonial imitation" that continues to shape global public administration practices. Their work echoes Alasdair Roberts' observation of a pervasive "Western bias" in public management research (PMR). Roberts argues that many of the assumptions and proposed solutions in PMR are based on the experiences of a few wealthy Western democracies, ignoring the diverse needs and realities of other nations. This "imperialist" approach, according to Roberts (as cited in Milward et al., 2016), can result in the imposition of ill-fitting models on countries with unique contexts, ultimately undermining their effectiveness.

The need for culturally nuanced research that recognizes the distinct traditions, practices, and governance challenges of non-Western governments is further emphasized by the seminal work of O'Toole and Meier (2015) and Bertelli et al.(2020). Their analyses revealed a significant underrepresentation of non-Western contexts in mainstream public administration research. O'Toole and Meier (2015) found that most research published in leading journals such

as JPART focused primarily on US settings, while Bertelli et al. (2020) demonstrated that fewer than 10% of articles in top public administration journals were devoted to developing countries. This lack of representation not only reflects a dearth of research in those areas but also highlights the challenges associated with data collection and analysis in non-Western contexts.

Bertelli et al. (2020) shed light on the challenges facing developing countries, including imprecise administrative data and the importance of qualitative information for understanding bureaucratic functioning. Despite these difficulties, they argue that these countries offer unique opportunities for cross-national comparisons and the exploration of previously unexplored questions, potentially challenging existing assumptions about effective governance.

The persistent underrepresentation of non-Western contexts in public administration research limits the diversity of perspectives and perpetuates a skewed understanding of public administration phenomena. This hampers the development of effective and contextually relevant solutions worldwide.

The increasing focus on studying non-Western contexts in public administration is not merely an academic exercise; it is a critical response to the changing global landscape and the limitations of traditional Western-centric models. Several key factors drive this shift:

- **Understanding Democratic Backsliding:** The rise of global democratic backsliding, as seen in countries like China, Hungary, Turkey, Venezuela, and Cuba, necessitates a deeper understanding of how public administration functions under authoritarian rule. Non-Western context studies can illuminate the strategies, mechanisms, and consequences of governance in such settings, providing valuable insights for policymakers and scholars on how to navigate and potentially counteract these trends.
- **The Rise of Emerging Economies:** The growing economic and political influence of countries like China, India, and Brazil has shifted the global power dynamics. Understanding their unique public administration models is essential for effective international collaboration and addressing transnational challenges.
-

- **Decolonizing Knowledge Production:** The movement to decolonize knowledge production in academia challenges the dominance of Western perspectives and calls for greater recognition of diverse knowledge systems and ways of knowing. This push extends to public administration research, advocating for greater inclusion of non-Western voices and experiences.

The shift towards contextualization necessitates a reconsideration of research methodologies in public administration, particularly for studying collaborative governance in non-Western settings. This approach calls for more qualitative, in-depth case studies that can capture the nuances of local contexts. Furthermore, it suggests a need for comparative studies that examine how collaborative governance manifests differently across various cultural and political contexts, moving beyond the simple application of Western models to non-Western settings.

While contextualization offers numerous benefits, it also presents certain challenges. Highly contextualized approaches may face difficulties in generalization, potentially limiting the development of broad theories or universally applicable models. There's also a risk of over-emphasizing uniqueness, potentially overlooking valuable insights from other contexts. Moreover, deeply contextualized studies require significant time and resources, as well as extensive local knowledge, which may not always be feasible. Balancing the need for contextual sensitivity with the desire for generalizable knowledge remains a key challenge in this approach.

This examination of contextualized approaches in public administration research provides a crucial foundation for our study of collaborative governance in Iran. By recognizing the importance of local context, the limitations of Western-centric models, and the potential for unique manifestations of governance practices, we are better equipped to approach the Iranian case with the necessary cultural and political sensitivity. As we move forward, this contextualized lens will guide our analysis, helping us to uncover the distinctive features of collaborative governance in Iran's unique socio-political environment.

Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1 Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory research design to examine how collaborative governance emerges and functions in Iran's Non-Western context. The exploratory approach is appropriate given the limited existing research on collaborative governance in Iran and the need to develop context-specific understandings of this phenomenon (Yin, 2018). While drawing on established collaborative governance theories, this study remains open to identifying novel forms and features that may emerge in the Iranian setting.

The research is grounded in an interpretive paradigm, recognizing that the meanings and practices of collaborative governance in Iran are socially constructed and shaped by cultural, historical, and political contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of how collaborative governance principles are interpreted and enacted within Iran's specific sociopolitical environment.

3.2 Case Study Design

A single-case study design focused on Iran was selected as the most appropriate strategy to address the research questions. As Yin (2018) argues, case studies are particularly useful for investigating contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The case of Iran represents a critical case for examining collaborative governance in a non-Western, non-democratic setting, potentially challenging or extending existing theories predominantly developed in Western democratic contexts.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

This study employs document analysis as its primary data collection method, a technique well-suited for examining the emergence and conceptualization of collaborative governance in Iran. Document analysis, as Bowen (2009) argues, is particularly valuable for case studies, offering a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating both printed and electronic documents. This method allows for the examination of how collaborative governance is articulated, understood, and potentially implemented across various domains of Iranian society and governance.

The corpus of documents analyzed is diverse and comprehensive, encompassing government documents and policy papers, legal frameworks and official reports, academic literature, political speeches and statements, and media reports and public discourse. This wide-ranging approach ensures a holistic understanding of collaborative governance in Iran, from formal policy articulation to grassroots perceptions.

The document analysis encompasses both Persian and English language sources, ensuring a comprehensive and nuanced understanding that captures both domestic and international perspectives on collaborative governance in Iran. This bilingual approach also helps mitigate potential biases that might arise from relying solely on English-language sources (Nikander, 2008).

3.4 Sampling Strategy

The study employs purposive sampling, a method ideal for qualitative research, to pinpoint documents offering in-depth insights into collaborative governance in Iran. Selection is based on relevance to the topic, authoritativeness of the source, temporal scope with a focus on recent developments, diversity of perspectives, and accessibility in Persian or English. This ensures a rich and balanced pool of information for a comprehensive analysis. This purposive sampling approach allows for the selection of documents that are most pertinent to the research objectives, enabling a rich and nuanced exploration of collaborative governance in the Iranian context.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis process follows the thematic analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which offers a flexible yet rigorous method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. This approach is particularly well-suited to the exploratory nature of this study and its aim to uncover how collaborative governance is conceptualized and potentially implemented in Iran's unique context.

The analysis process involves six key stages:

1. **Familiarization with the Data:** This initial phase involves immersive reading of the collected documents, allowing the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the content and begin to identify potential patterns.
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** Using both inductive and deductive approaches, the data is systematically coded. The deductive approach is informed by the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2, while the inductive approach allows for the identification of novel themes emerging from the data itself.
3. **Searching for Themes:** Codes are collated into potential themes, considering how different codes may combine to form overarching themes.
4. **Reviewing Themes:** Themes are refined, ensuring they are coherent, distinct, and accurately reflect the meanings evident in the dataset as a whole.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Clear definitions and names are developed for each theme, articulating the essence of what each theme is about and how it relates to the overall narrative of the analysis.

6. Producing the Report: The final phase involves the selection of compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis back to the research question and literature, and producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Throughout this process, the analysis is guided by the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2, which integrates collaborative governance theory with contextualized approaches in public administration research. This framework serves as a lens through which to interpret the data, while still allowing for the emergence of unexpected findings that may challenge or extend existing theory.

The use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA) facilitates this process by allowing for efficient organization, coding, and retrieval of data. However, as Bazeley and Jackson (2013) emphasize, the software is used as a tool to aid analysis, with the researcher's interpretive skills remaining central to the analytical process.

This rigorous and systematic approach to data analysis ensures a comprehensive exploration of how collaborative governance is understood, articulated, and potentially practiced in the Iranian context, allowing for both the application of existing theory and the generation of new insights.

Chapter 4: Literature Review Collaborative Governance in Non-Western Societies

The examination of collaborative governance in non-Western contexts challenges and extends existing theory in several ways. First, it highlights the need for more nuanced understanding of power dynamics in collaborative arrangements, particularly in societies with strong hierarchical traditions. Second, it suggests that the role of cultural norms and social capital in shaping collaborative outcomes may be more significant than previously recognized in Western-centric models. Third, these cases demonstrate that the institutional design of collaborative governance initiatives must be carefully adapted to local contexts to be effective. These insights call for a more flexible and context-sensitive approach to collaborative governance theory, one that can account for the diverse manifestations of collaboration across different cultural and political settings.

In addition, Studying collaborative governance in non-Western contexts presents unique methodological challenges. These include potential language barriers, differences in data availability and quality, and the need to interpret governance practices through culturally appropriate lenses. Moreover, researchers must be cautious about imposing Western-derived analytical frameworks onto non-Western cases without critical reflection. Future research in this area would benefit from mixed-method approaches that combine quantitative analysis with in-depth qualitative case studies to capture the nuances of local contexts

4.1 Collaborative Governance: A Western-Centric Theory

The theory of collaborative governance, rooted in New Public Governance (NPG), carries inherent Western assumptions that significantly complicate its global application. As Osborne (2010) astutely observes, even in Anglo-Saxon countries where this theoretical framework originated, implementation faces considerable obstacles:

"The heartland of this style of governing is Northern Europe, especially Scandinavia and the Low Countries, although there are notable examples from the United States. The dichotomy between state and society in the Anglo-Saxon world has made this style of governing more problematic, and often the close relationship between the public sector and groups may be considered corruption. Further, in the less-developed world and in transitional regimes there may not be a civil society with sufficient strength to provide an alternative to formal governance through the public sector." (Osborne, 2010)

This observation underscores the cultural and institutional specificity of collaborative governance, which is deeply rooted in particular conceptions of state-society relations that may not translate seamlessly across different political cultures.

Collaborative governance theory implicitly assumes several key characteristics of Western liberal democracies:

- **Clear Separation of State and Society:** The theory presumes a distinct boundary between state and civil society, with each having clearly defined roles (Ansell & Gash, 2008).
- **Pluralistic Political System:** It assumes a political system that allows for multiple centers of power and diverse interest groups (Emerson et al., 2012).
- **Strong Civil Society:** The theory presupposes the existence of a robust, independent civil society capable of engaging with the state on relatively equal terms (Bryson et al., 2015).
- **Market-Based Economy:** It often assumes a market-based economic system with clear distinctions between public and private sectors (Ansell & Gash, 2008).
- **Liberal Democratic Values:** The theory implicitly assumes shared values of transparency, accountability, and participatory decision-making (Emerson et al., 2012).

These assumptions, deeply rooted in Western political and social theory, may not fully capture the realities of state-society relations in non-Western contexts. In such countries, the challenges of implementing collaborative governance become even more complex and multifaceted. Entrenched structures of centralized government, often legacies of colonial or authoritarian rule, create significant institutional inertia resistant to more participatory models of governance (Hsu, 2010). The weakness or different nature of civil society in many of these contexts further complicates the establishment of the kind of state-society partnerships envisioned in collaborative governance theory (Avritzer, 2002).

Moreover, the very concept of 'collaboration' may carry different connotations in various cultural contexts. In some societies, close cooperation between state and non-state actors might be viewed with suspicion (Peters, 2010). In others, traditional forms of collective decision-making may exist that don't neatly align with Western models of collaboration (Zürn, 2018).

For instance, The case of Iran exemplifies these challenges. The Iranian state, emerging from a different historical trajectory, does not neatly fit into the categories presumed by collaborative governance theory. Instead of a clear separation between state and society, Iran's political structure is characterized by complex interrelations between various strategic groups, both within and outside the formal state apparatus (Towfigh, 2021). The neo-patrimonial aspects of state-society relations in Iran, as well as the unique role of religious authorities in governance, present challenges to the straightforward application of collaborative governance principles.

While the Western-centric nature of collaborative governance theory presents significant challenges for its global application, it's crucial to recognize that these challenges manifest differently across various non-Western contexts. The complexity of implementing collaborative governance in diverse settings necessitates a nuanced examination of the specific contextual factors that shape its development and effectiveness. As we move from understanding the theoretical limitations to exploring real-world applications, we find that collaborative governance takes on unique forms and faces distinct obstacles in different non-Western societies. This variability underscores the importance of a comparative approach in understanding how collaborative governance principles interact with local political, cultural, social, economic, and

institutional realities. The following analysis delves into these contextual factors, providing a more granular view of how collaborative governance unfolds in diverse non-Western settings.

4.2 Contextual Factors Shaping Collaborative Governance in Non-Western Societies: A Comparative Analysis

A comprehensive review of studies on collaborative governance (CG) implementation in non-Western societies reveals that its efficacy is profoundly shaped by a complex interplay of contextual factors. These factors, encompassing political, cultural, social, economic, and institutional elements, create a unique landscape that both enables and constrains CG development (Emerson, 2018; Jing & Hu, 2017; Barton et al., 2015).

4.2.1 The political environment

The political environment significantly influences CG potential in these societies. In China, Jing and Hu (2017) highlight how a strong-government culture, rooted in long administrative history, creates resistance to power-sharing with external actors. The post-1949 socialist regime initially fostered systematic distrust of nonprofits, creating an unfavorable environment for CG. However, gradual political acceptance of nonprofits as legitimate social actors has enabled CG growth over time. In Africa, Emerson (2018) notes that political instability hinders long-term collaborative relationships, while lack of political will to innovate and share power often impedes CG initiatives. This contributes to "weak states" with limited institutional infrastructure, complicating CG implementation. In Chile, Barton et al. (2015) illustrate how political context creates tension between collaborative approaches and established hierarchical structures, particularly in climate change adaptation planning.

4.2.2 Cultural norms and Values

Cultural norms and values significantly impact CG implementation across these societies. In China, a government-oriented culture impedes constructive collaboration, while emphasis on maintaining a "low profile" when working with governments influences nonprofit engagement in CG (Jing & Hu, 2017). In African contexts, Emerson (2018) points out that traditional leadership

structures and communal decision-making processes often coexist with formal governance systems, requiring CG approaches to navigate both paradigms.

Social structures and relationships crucially shape CG. In China, Jing and Hu (2017) highlight the importance of personal connections (*guanxi*) in building trust within collaborative relationships. The emerging nonprofit sector and its evolving relationship with the government are reshaping the social landscape for CG. In Africa, Emerson (2018) notes the significant role of strong community-based organizations and civil society groups in local governance, presenting both opportunities and challenges for CG.

4.2.3 Economic factors

Economic factors significantly influence CG implementation and outcomes. In China, Jing and Hu (2017) observe that rapid economic growth and urbanization create new social problems requiring collaborative solutions. The government's push for efficiency in public service delivery drives contracting adoption, leading to CG. In African countries, Emerson (2018) emphasizes how resource constraints limit capacity for implementing and sustaining CG initiatives. Economic disparities between potential collaborating partners can create power imbalances affecting the collaborative process. In Chile, Barton et al. (2015) demonstrates how economic considerations influence priorities and capacities of different stakeholders in climate change adaptation planning.

4.2.4 The institutional environment

The institutional environment significantly shapes CG implementation. In China, Jing and Hu (2017) describe how existing structures like street-level governments provide a foundation for developing collaborative relationships. Gradual institutionalization of nonprofit-government partnerships has created new spaces for CG. In Africa, Emerson (2018) points out that weak institutional capacity poses challenges for implementing and sustaining CG initiatives. The presence of international organizations and donors shapes the institutional landscape, sometimes creating parallel structures that complicate local governance.

Table 3 Some Contextual Factors Shaping Collaborative Governance in Non-Western Societies (China, Africa, Chile)

Contextual Factor	China	Africa	Chile
Political	Strong-government culture resists power-sharing; gradual acceptance of nonprofits enables CG growth.	Political instability hinders long-term collaboration; lack of political will impedes CG.	Tension between collaborative approaches and hierarchical structures
Cultural	Government-oriented culture and emphasis on "low profile" influence nonprofit engagement in CG.	Traditional leadership and communal decision-making coexist with formal governance, requiring CG to navigate both.	-
Social	Personal connections (guanxi) are vital for trust-building; emerging nonprofit sector and its evolving relationship with the government reshape the social landscape for CG.	Strong community-based organizations and civil society groups play a significant role in local governance, presenting both opportunities and challenges for CG.	-
Economic	Rapid economic growth and urbanization create new social problems needing collaborative solutions; government's push for efficiency drives CG through contracting.	Resource constraints limit capacity for CG; economic disparities create power imbalances.	Economic considerations influence stakeholder priorities and capacities in climate change adaptation planning.
Institutional	Existing structures like street-level governments provide a foundation for collaborative relationships; gradual institutionalization of nonprofit-government partnerships creates new spaces for CG.	Weak institutional capacity challenges CG implementation and sustainability; international organizations/donors shape the landscape, sometimes complicating local governance.	-

Review of two empirical case studies highlight just how critical contextual factors are in shaping the processes and outcomes of collaborative governance efforts. The Kodokushi case from Japan and the Guadalupe Valley case from Mexico provide contrasting examples of how social, cultural, political, and institutional contexts can either enable or constrain effective collaboration.

4.3 Contrasting Contexts; Kodokushi Case Study (Japan) VS the Mexico Case Study (Guadalupe Valley)

4.3.1 Kodokushi Case (Japan)

In the Kodokushi Case, the consideration of context is not explicitly analyzed as a separate category. However, the case study deeply embeds contextual factors throughout the narrative, highlighting their influence on the governance approach. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of social norms, community values (such as "mimamori," which refers to the practice of community members looking out for one another), and volunteerism as key enablers of collaborative governance. The study demonstrates how existing social structures were leveraged to address the issue of social isolation (Suzuki et al., 2021). Moreover, the case study discusses how decentralization policies and the legal framework (specifically, privacy laws) created an environment conducive to collaboration between government and community actors. The Kodokushi Case takes a holistic view, interweaving political, social, and institutional

4.3.2 The Mexico Case (Guadalupe Valley)

In contrast, the Mexican case study of COTAS Guadalupe, as described by Pells (2015), presents a more challenging picture of collaborative governance implementation. The case study focuses on COTAS Guadalupe, a local collaborative governance regime (CGR) for groundwater management in Mexico's Guadalupe Valley, established in 2004 in response to the 1992 National Water Law (LAN). This initiative aimed to decentralize water management in Mexico's most productive viticulture region, which faces significant water scarcity issues. COTAS Guadalupe, part of a broader system of groundwater committees (COTAS) organized at the subbasin scale, was designed to facilitate information flow, increase user cooperation with new institutional rules, and promote sustainable aquifer management. The CGR's objectives include fostering democratic participation, ensuring representation, promoting water conservation, monitoring groundwater conditions, and mediating between water users and the national water authority (CONAGUA). The case study examines how power dynamics and institutional structures influenced the

implementation and outcomes of this collaborative governance initiative in a non-Western context, highlighting the challenges and complexities of decentralized water management in Mexico.

The Guadalupe Valley case study explicitly identifies and analyzes various contextual factors (political, economic, social, environmental, and legal/institutional) and their impact on collaborative governance. The study emphasizes the role of power imbalances (between central and local authorities, as well as between large-scale producers and small farmers) and conflicting interests in hindering effective collaboration (Pells et al., 2015). The Mexican experience highlights several critical issues that can undermine the effectiveness of collaborative approaches:

The COTAS Guadalupe case study in Mexico illustrates several critical issues in collaborative governance. Firstly, it demonstrates how collaborative institutions can inadvertently reinforce existing power structures rather than challenge them, aligning with concerns about elite capture in such arrangements (Pells et al., 2015; Purdy, 2012). Secondly, the case highlights the impact of knowledge disparities, where unequal access to information about the collaborative institution exacerbates existing inequalities, emphasizing the need for equitable information dissemination (Pells, 2015; Ansell and Gash, 2008). Thirdly, the limited decision-making authority granted to COTAS in Mexico undermines their effectiveness and legitimacy, supporting research that stresses the importance of real authority in collaborative governance (Pells et al., 2015; Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015). Lastly, the top-down implementation of COTAS exemplifies the challenges associated with government-imposed collaboration, as opposed to grassroots initiatives, which is crucial for understanding the motivations and effectiveness of collaborative efforts (Pells et al., 2015; Ansell and Gash, 2008). These interconnected issues underscore the complexities of implementing collaborative governance in practice, particularly in contexts with pre-existing power imbalances and institutional constraints.

The contrasting outcomes in Japan and Mexico can be attributed to several factors:

1. Power dynamics and elite capture

In the Mexican case (COTAS Guadalupe), we see how collaborative governance structures can be co-opted by local elites, reinforcing existing power imbalances rather than promoting equitable participation. As Pells (2015) notes, "the initial governing body of COTAS Guadalupe was

dominated by some of the most powerful water players in the region." This aligns with critiques of Western-centric governance models that may not adequately account for entrenched power structures in different cultural contexts (Purdy, 2012). In contrast, the Japanese cases show a more equitable distribution of power and participation. For instance, the Adachi ward's Zero Tolerance to Isolation Project involved a wide range of stakeholders, including local volunteers, neighborhood associations, and private businesses (Suzuki et al., 2021). This suggests that the success of collaborative governance may depend on pre-existing social and institutional conditions that are more prevalent in some non-Western contexts than others.

2. Institutional design and local adaptation

The Mexican case highlights how top-down implementation of collaborative governance structures can lead to limited authority and effectiveness. COTAS Guadalupe suffered from "a lack of legal authority, inadequate administrative capacity, conflicting objectives, and coordination gaps with administrative bodies" (Pells, 2015). This illustrates how Western-derived models may not translate effectively without significant adaptation to local institutional contexts. The Japanese examples, however, demonstrate successful local adaptation of collaborative governance principles. The Okazaki city's partnership with private businesses for social isolation prevention shows how local governments can innovatively apply collaborative approaches within existing social and economic structures (Suzuki et al., 2021).

3. Cultural and social capital factors

The contrasting outcomes in these cases highlight the importance of cultural factors and social capital in the success of collaborative governance. Japan's long tradition of volunteering and high levels of social capital (Haddad, 2007; Suzuki, 2020) provided a fertile ground for collaborative initiatives. In contrast, the Mexican case reveals how historical centralization and different social structures can hinder the effectiveness of collaborative approaches.

4. Knowledge distribution and participation

The Mexican case reveals significant disparities in knowledge about the collaborative institution and its functions, with "knowledge about COTAS Guadalupe... limited to the most powerful viticulture producers" (Pells,2015). This asymmetry in information access and participation challenges the core principles of collaborative governance. The Japanese cases, however, show more equitable information dissemination and participation. For example, the Adachi ward's project involved door-to-door notification of residents about the initiative (Suzuki et al., 2021), demonstrating a more inclusive approach to engagement.

Table 4 Contextual Factors Influencing Collaborative Governance: A Comparison of Mexico and Japan

Guadalupe Valley region, Mexico			Kodokushi Case study, Japan	
Contextual Factors	Description/Example	Impact on Collaborative Governance	Description/Example	Impact on Collaborative Governance
Political	Centralized legacy, decentralization reforms, influence of elites	Undermined local autonomy (COTAS)	Decentralization policies, emphasis on local welfare, ordinances on privacy	Facilitated information sharing for welfare monitoring
		- Shaped governance structures or capital accumulation		Enabled co-production between government and non-governmental actors
Economic	Viticulture & wine tourism, privatization of water rights	Divergent interests between large-scale and small-scale farmers	Aging population, need for elder care	Created demand for innovative solutions to address social isolation
		Capital accumulation opportunities for the powerful		Encouraged community-based care systems and volunteerism
Social	Declining water levels, contamination, social movements	Conflicts between large producers and small-scale/ejido farmers	"Kodokushi" phenomenon (lonely deaths)	Highlighted the urgency of addressing social isolation
			Tradition of "Mimamori" (watching over others)	-Provided a cultural foundation for community-based care and support
		Divide between powerful producers and lower-income users	Strong community ties and volunteerism	Enabled the success of co-production models in addressing social isolation
Environmental	Semi-arid climate, high demand from various sectors	Stress on groundwater resources (declines, drying wells, ecosystem degradation)	N/A	
		Increased urgency for effective governance		
Institutional	1992 water law, COTAS, CONAGUA	New framework for decentralized governance	Privacy laws, community-based integrated care system	Balanced privacy concerns with need for welfare monitoring
		COTAS faced limitations (limited autonomy, unclear roles, lack of authority)		
		- Power imbalance between local and central governance undermined collaborative efforts		Balanced privacy concerns with need for welfare monitoring

In sum, the examination of collaborative governance (CG) in non-Western societies underscores the critical role of contextual factors in shaping its implementation and efficacy. This comparative analysis across various non-Western settings reveals a complex interplay of political, cultural, social, economic, and institutional elements that both enable and constrain CG development.

Political environments emerge as a significant determinant, with strong-government cultures often resisting power-sharing, while political instability hinders long-term collaborative relationships. Cultural norms and values profoundly impact CG implementation, influencing engagement patterns and requiring navigation between traditional and formal governance systems. Social structures, particularly the role of personal connections and emerging civil society organizations, prove crucial in building trust and reshaping governance landscapes.

Economic factors, including rapid growth, urbanization, and resource constraints, create both new challenges requiring collaborative solutions and barriers to CG implementation. The institutional environment, encompassing existing governance structures and the gradual institutionalization of cross-sector partnerships, significantly shapes the foundation and spaces for CG development.

The contrasting experiences from China, various African countries, and Chile highlight the diverse manifestations of these factors across different contexts. They demonstrate that while CG faces considerable challenges in non-Western settings, it also presents opportunities for innovative governance approaches tailored to local realities.

This analysis sets the stage for a more in-depth examination of specific case studies, such as the Kodokushi case from Japan and the Guadalupe Valley case from Mexico. These cases promise to provide concrete examples of how social, cultural, political, and institutional contexts can either facilitate or impede effective collaboration.

The comparative analysis of collaborative governance in non-Western contexts provides valuable insights for our upcoming examination of Iran. Like the cases of Mexico and Japan, Iran presents a unique political, cultural, and social landscape that will likely shape the implementation and outcomes of collaborative governance initiatives. The emphasis on contextual factors observed in

this review will be crucial in understanding how Iran's specific characteristics - such as its theocratic political system, rich cultural heritage, and complex state-society relations - may influence collaborative governance practices.

Chapter 5: Findings

In recent years, Iran has witnessed a significant shift towards people-based governance (Hokmrani Mardomi), a concept that has gained substantial traction across political, economic, and socio-cultural domains. Despite the efforts to formulate people-based governance according to Islamic principles, the path to realizing this style of governance is illustrated by the path of CG theories, participatory governance (Esmailpour et al., 2022)

Notably, this shift is being endorsed at the highest levels of Iran's political hierarchy. The Supreme Leader, as the paramount authority in the Islamic Republic, has consistently emphasized the need for increased public participation, particularly in economic spheres. For instance, in his annual Nowruz (Iranian New Year) address in 2024, he designated the year as one of "Production Leap with People's Participation," signaling a policy shift towards greater public involvement in economic activities. This trend is further evidenced by the Raisi administration's adoption of "popularization of governance" (Mardomisazi Hokmrani) as a central policy platform, and unprecedented coordination among various state institutions in calling for greater public engagement in governance processes.

The emergence of this governance paradigm shift is particularly noteworthy given Iran's classification within the spectrum of non-democratic and authoritarian regimes. Despite the presence of certain democratic mechanisms such as elections, the extensive powers vested in the Supreme Leader and the existence of numerous unaccountable institutions have traditionally placed Iran outside the category of democratic politics.

This chapter aims to examine how this apparent rupture with previous governance models has become possible in Iran, its distinctive characteristics, and the role of Iran's unique contextual features in shaping the implementation and effectiveness of this governance model. By analyzing

these dimensions, we seek to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the potential for and challenges of collaborative governance in non-Western, non-democratic settings.

5.1 The Rise of People-Based Governance: A Paradigm Shift in Iran's Political Landscape

In the Iranian presidential election of 1400 (2021), Ebrahim Raisi emerged victorious, buoyed by substantial support from the conservative faction. This electoral outcome marked a significant shift in Iran's political landscape, as Raisi and his allies consolidated control over all major governance institutions in the country, including influential foundations, the executive branch, and the parliament. Despite this concentration of power, the new administration faced an imperative to broaden the scope of governance, incorporating new actors into the political process.

This political transition catalyzed a remarkable shift in Iran's governance discourse. The concept of "people-based governance" ascended to prominence, becoming the central tenet of political rhetoric. This development is particularly noteworthy as it signifies a return of the populace to the governance arena as active participants, occurring 16 years after the conclusion of the reformist government. In this new paradigm, the people are conceptualized as the third pillar of governance, complementing the traditional dyad of government and market.

Paradoxically, this embrace of collaborative governance principles was initiated by conservative factions, traditionally associated with more centralized and authoritarian approaches. This unexpected ideological pivot aligns Iran's governance discourse with global trends in participatory democracy and collaborative governance. It represents an attempt to emulate and adapt Western governance models to the Iranian context, albeit under the stewardship of a conservative administration.

The concept of "people-based governance" goes beyond traditional notions of citizen participation, positioning the people as a fundamental pillar of governance alongside the government and the

market. It represents a departure from the previously dominant state-centric model, aiming to create a more inclusive and participatory governance structure.

At the heart of this new governance model is a conscious effort to address and transform the traditionally paternalistic role of the state in Iran. This paternalistic approach, characterized by the state acting as a 'father figure' that makes decisions on behalf of its 'children' (the citizens), has been a longstanding feature of Iranian governance. The new model acknowledges this historical pattern and explicitly aims to shift away from it. In the part of this document that explains the government's plan to change the country's administrative system, the government's guardian approach in governance is considered as one of the challenges of the governance system, the description of this Article is as follows:

“ 2-2 Challenge of the Government's Paternalistic Approach in Managing the Country
Strategy 1: Withdrawal of Government Agencies from Business Ownership, Unnecessary Interventions, and Inefficient Concentrations

Key Actions:

1. Enhancing local governance by delegating responsibilities and authorities of agencies to provincial and county levels through the establishment of a decentralized execution/centralized supervision model using data-based governance (medium-term - Administrative and Employment Affairs Organization of executive agencies)
2. Identifying instances of unnecessary interventionist activities at the level of government agencies and developing a program to transfer these activities to non-governmental entities by implementing Article 13 of the Civil Service Management Law (medium-term - Administrative and Employment Affairs Organization, Planning and Budget Organization, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance)

Strategy 2: Redesigning the Role of People in Managing the Country

Key Actions:

1. Reviewing the duties and structure of executive agencies based on their main functions, including: Policy-making, Regulation, Facilitation, Service delivery, Redistributive affairs. With consideration of the following:
 1. Concentrating policy-making duties at the macro level of government

2. Strengthening the government's regulatory role to ensure quality, accessible, and cost-appropriate public services, and separating these types of duties from service-providing agencies
3. Maximum transfer of service production and management in executive agencies to people and the non-governmental sector
4. Redesigning decision-making processes in the administrative system to enhance stakeholder and public participation in planning and decision-making by proposing necessary laws (long-term - Administrative and Employment Affairs Organization, Planning and Budget Organization, Legal Deputy of the Presidency);

In addition, the report titled "The Concept of 'People-Based Governance'" published by the Parliamentary Research Center is also noteworthy. This document presents people-based governance as a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to public participation in governance processes, which has both similarities and significant differences with the conventional concept of participatory governance (Esmailpour et al., 2022).

In this framework, people-based governance goes beyond merely using public data and considers the active and direct participation of citizens in all stages of public policy-making, from problem identification to implementation and evaluation. The report emphasizes that "in participatory governance, there must be this understanding and will that, in a real and not a symbolic way, the power of decision-making and management within a certain and specified framework be granted to the people" (p. 11).

One of the prominent features of this model is the emphasis on public participation in all stages of the policy cycle. The report refers to "involving people in decision-making, finding solutions, and contributing diverse public resources (collaboration and cooperation) in the implementation of policies" (p. 10).

So, Key aspects of this transition can be articulate as:

- Recognition of Citizen Agency: Moving from viewing citizens as passive recipients of state care to active, capable participants in governance.
- Empowerment over Protection: Shifting the focus from protecting citizens to empowering them to participate in decision-making processes.

- Collaborative Problem-Solving: Encouraging citizens and local communities to engage in solving local and national issues, rather than relying solely on top-down solutions.
- Redefined State Responsibility: Transforming the state's role from a paternalistic caretaker to a facilitator and enabler of citizen-driven initiatives.

This shift away from paternalism is reflected in various dimensions of the new governance model:

1. **Redefinition of State-Citizen Relationship:** At the core of this new governance model is a fundamental reconfiguration of the relationship between the state and its citizens. The traditional view of citizens as passive recipients of government services is being replaced by a conception of citizens as active participants in governance processes. This shift is evident in the emphasis on.

This is manifested in:

- Involvement of citizens in all stages of the policy cycle, from problem identification to policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation.
- The stated goal of transferring real decision-making power to people within a defined framework.

2. **Decentralization and Localization of Authority;** The model reconfigures engagement through decentralization of power and decision-making:

- Delegation of responsibilities and authorities to provincial and county levels.
- Enhancement of local governance structures.
- Shift from a uniform national planning system to one that activates regional capacities based on local needs and characteristics.
- Utilization of local institutions like mosques and religious groups for community-level governance.

3. **Multi-level Engagement Structure;** The model envisions engagement at multiple levels of governance:

- Decision-making: Involving citizens in policy formulation and strategic planning.
- Oversight: Implementing participatory oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability.

- Implementation: Engaging citizens and civil society organizations in service delivery and project implementation.
- Evaluation: Incorporating citizen feedback in policy and program evaluation.

4. Institutional Mechanisms for Engagement

The model proposes several institutional mechanisms to facilitate engagement:

- Restructuring of executive agencies to include citizen participation channels.
- Creation of formal platforms for citizen input in policy-making processes.
- Development of digital governance tools to enhance citizen access and participation.
- Establishment of local councils and committees with significant citizen representation.

In sum, what in Iran under the rule of the people in the literature of politicians and the reports of the governing institutions is an imitation linked to the religious literature. Regardless of the widespread political rhetoric regarding the link of popular governance with Islamic ideas and ideals of the Islamic Revolution, it seems that the partnership of the market and political power in Iran has not been successful and now there is a determined will for the people to enter the realm of governance. In the following, we will first take a look at the situation in Iran before the introduction of popular governance, and then we will see what changes in power relations led the atmosphere of governance in Iran to the direction where the people enter the realm of governance, beyond elections in a political system that According to the prevailing current of Iranian studies, it is classified under the headings such as totalitarian, autocratic, autocratic, quasi-democratic, etc., and it becomes the subject of consensus in the tense and conflicting atmosphere of political groups.

5.1.1 Iran: besieged in wicked problems

Recent surveys on the values and attitudes of Iranians (Arzeshha va Negareshhaye Iraniyan) , conducted by the Ministry of Culture in four waves, provide a comprehensive picture of Iran's current situation. The latest survey, conducted in 1402 (2023-2024), reveals how Iranian policymakers grappling with multifaceted challenges across economic, political, social, and cultural domains, painting a picture of a society on the brink of significant change (Iranian Students Polling Agency [ISPA], n.d.) .

Economic Instability and Social Stratification

The economic landscape in Iran is characterized by widespread dissatisfaction and pessimism. A staggering 72% of respondents believe that their tax contributions have not translated into improved government services, indicating a perceived disconnect between civic duty and governmental responsibility. The survey reveals a stark picture of social stratification, with approximately 90% of Iranians identifying themselves as part of the lower-middle or lower classes. This self-perception is further reinforced by the fact that 75% of respondents classify themselves within these lower economic strata. The economic outlook appears bleak, with 80% of respondents asserting that Iran's economic situation has deteriorated over the past five years, and 70.9% anticipating further decline in the future. This pervasive economic pessimism is likely fueling social unrest and political disengagement.

Political Disengagement and Institutional Distrust

The political sphere in Iran is marked by significant disengagement and distrust in institutions. A mere 40% electoral participation rate underscores a crisis of political legitimacy. This disengagement is further evidenced by the fact that 64.5% of the population follows political news very little, suggesting a growing apathy or disillusionment with the political process. Trust in key institutions is alarmingly low, with approximately 64% expressing low confidence in the parliament's efficiency, 53% harboring low or very low trust in the judiciary, and 60% perceiving the government's performance as subpar. This institutional distrust extends to interpersonal relationships, with 81.1% of respondents reporting low or no trust in their fellow citizens, indicating a fractured social fabric.

Environmental and Social Crises

Iran faces significant environmental challenges, with the water crisis emerging as the most pressing environmental concern for 69% of respondents. This environmental instability is compounded by economic pressures, with inflation and high prices identified as the main challenges by 81.9% of the population. The survey also reveals a pervasive sense of insecurity, with 54.8% of respondents feeling financially insecure and 70% expressing concerns about job security. These factors collectively contribute to a society under significant stress.

Cultural Decay and Moral Concerns

The survey paints a troubling picture of perceived moral and cultural decay. A high percentage of respondents believe that negative social behaviors such as lying (80%), breaking promises (40%), hypocrisy (81%), and fraud (82.3%) are prevalent in society. Moreover, 73.8% of respondents believe that the moral state of society has deteriorated over the past five years, with 65.4% anticipating further decline. This perceived erosion of social values and trust may be both a symptom and a cause of broader societal challenges.

Migration Aspirations

Perhaps most tellingly, about 40% of Iranians express a desire to migrate, a statistic that underscores the cumulative impact of economic hardship, political disillusionment, and social unrest. This high propensity for emigration suggests a potential "brain drain" that could further exacerbate Iran's challenges.

Table 5 The state of Iran's political, social, cultural, and economic spheres (2023): Concurrent with the emergence of people-centered governance (Based on the Survey of Values and Attitudes of Iranians, Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance)

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Statistics</i>
Economic Instability and Social Stratification	- 72% believe taxes haven't led to improved services - 90% identify as lower-middle or lower class - 75% classify themselves in lower economic strata - 80% say economy has worsened in past 5 years - 70.9% anticipate further economic decline
Political Disengagement and Institutional Distrust	- 40% electoral participation rate - 64.5% follow political news very little - 64% have low confidence in parliament - 53% have low/very low trust in judiciary - 60% perceive government performance as subpar - 81.1% have low/no trust in fellow citizens
Environmental and Social Crises	- 69% see water crisis as most pressing environmental concern - 81.9% identify inflation/high prices as main challenge - 54.8% feel financially insecure - 70% concerned about job security
Cultural Decay and Moral Concerns	- High percentage believe lying (80%), breaking promises (40%), hypocrisy (81%), and fraud (82.3%) are prevalent - 73.8% believe moral state of society has deteriorated - 65.4% anticipate further moral decline
Migration Aspirations	- 40% of Iranians want to migrate

The comprehensive data from this survey reveals Iranian society facing interconnected challenges across multiple domains. The pervasive economic hardship, coupled with political disengagement and a crisis of trust in both institutions and interpersonal relationships, presents a complex set of "wicked problems" for policymakers. The high desire for migration among the population further underscores the challenging conditions and pessimistic outlook many Iranians hold for their country's future.

The socio-economic turmoil culminated in two significant nationwide protests in 2017 and 2019, primarily originating in low-income and marginalized areas . These demonstrations underscored the depth of public discontent and the government's inability to address fundamental societal grievances. The convergence of these factors - economic instability, social unrest, environmental challenges, and diplomatic isolation - constituted a complex and daunting legacy inherited by the subsequent administration of Ebrahim Raisi.

The Raisi administration thus faced the formidable task of navigating these multifaceted challenges while simultaneously attempting to rebuild public trust and institutional legitimacy in a deeply fractured socio-political landscape.

5.1.2 Beyond the Rentier State: Strategic Groups and the Evolution of Governance in Iran

The concept of the rentier state has long dominated analyses of Iran's political economy, both before and after the 1979 revolution (Skocpol, 1982; Mahdavy, 1970). This model posits that the state's primary reliance on external rents, particularly oil revenues, fundamentally alters its relationship with society. The rentier structure allows the state to achieve a degree of financial independence from its citizens, potentially reinforcing authoritarian tendencies and weakening democratic accountability (Katouzian, 2020; Mohebi, 2016).

The rentier state model has significantly influenced policy-making and governance approaches in Iran. It has led to a focus on oil-based economic development and centralized resource distribution, often at the expense of developing other economic sectors or promoting local governance initiatives (Karshenas & Hakimian, 2005). In the Iranian context, this model suggests that oil wealth enables the state to distribute resources arbitrarily, often favoring certain groups over others, thereby reinforcing its power and reducing the need for broad political legitimacy (Mahdavy, 1970).

However, recent research has begun to challenge the explanatory power of rentier state theory in the Iranian context. Critics argue that it oversimplifies complex socio-political dynamics and neglects important cultural and historical variables (Ehsani, 2009; Harris, 2017). Ehsani (2009) particularly emphasizes the need to consider the role of Islam in shaping state-society relations, a factor often overlooked in purely economic analyses.

Ebrahim Towfigh, in his book "Reconfiguration of Empire," offers an alternative framework for understanding the Iranian state, moving beyond Orientalist paradigms. He argues that unlike Western European state formation, which saw the separation of politics from economics and society from the state, the modern Iranian state emerged as a terminator of tribal order and overlordship structures (Towfigh, 2021). Indeed, Towfigh's approach offers a unique perspective compared to other post-colonial state formation theories. While theories like Migdal's (1988) 'Strong Societies and Weak States' focus on the struggle between state and society, Towfigh emphasizes the role of strategic groups within both state and society, providing a more nuanced understanding of power dynamics in post-colonial contexts like Iran.

In an effort to explain the theory of the state in Iran beyond the Orientalist trap, Towfigh argues that in Western Europe during the age of absolute monarchy, the state emerged from the collapse of the pre-modern integrated social system and observed two fundamental social splits:

1. The separation of politics from economics
2. The separation of society from the state (Towfigh, 2021).

In fact, the structural transformation in the formation of the modern state in Western Europe was specifically accompanied by two fundamental separations: the differentiation of the spheres of economy and politics, and the relative independence of the state from civil society.

This dual process, which was the product of the long collapse of the feudal system and the emergence of the industrial revolution, led to the emergence of a new socio-economic structure based on competition and specification. In this context, the modern state emerged as a supra-class institution responsible for maintaining social society and ensuring the reproduction of the capitalist system.

This was achieved through the monopoly of the means of exercising power and defining the public interest. Towfigh (2021) argues that the relative independence of the state from particular class use, whether upper or lower class, is a condition for the general and external conditions of reproduction of capitalist society in the medium and long term. This relative independence can lead to the

weakening of the state's mediating and regulatory role, and consequently, endanger the stability of the socio-economic system.

However, even a superficial look at the situation of postcolonial societies, including Iran, shows that despite the establishment of these societies in the modern era - that is, despite the tendency to capitalist transformation of economic structures and despite the organization of political sovereignty within the framework of the nation-state - one cannot speak of either a capitalist economy or a modern state in the sense described above; Indeed, despite the ostensible establishment of modern nation-states and the apparent shift towards capitalist economic structures, these societies often defy simple categorization as either fully capitalist economies or modern states in the Western sense (Migdal, 1988; Chatterjee, 1993).

This complexity is evident in the persistence of traditional power dynamics, where access to political power remains a primary means of acquiring wealth and status, rather than through market-driven mechanisms (Bayart, 1993; Eisenstadt, 1973).

In Iran, as in many postcolonial contexts, the formal trappings of a modern state and market economy coexist with deeply entrenched patronage networks and neo-patrimonial governance structures (Abrahamian, 2008; Katouzian, 2020, Towfigh, 2021). In these contexts, the state often serves not as an impartial arbiter of economic and social relations, but as an arena where various strategic groups compete for resources and influence, blurring the lines between public and private interests. Towfigh conceptualizes political sovereignty in these societies as an arena for strategic action by privileged state and non-state groups (Towfigh, 2021).

These strategic groups comprise individuals who engage in collective social action with the primary aim of preserving and expanding their shared sources of income or social status (Evers and Schiel, 1988). In this context, a wide range of entities can serve as the basis for strategic group formation, including bureaucratic and military apparatuses, employers' unions, religious seminaries, market associations, professional groups, universities, and similar organizations (Kessler, 1994).

The internal dynamics of these groups can vary significantly, taking on individualistic, patronage-based, caste-like, or collectivist forms, depending on their modes of income generation, historical backgrounds, and shared values (Migdal, 1988; Bayart, 1993).

Consequently, the dominant strategic group or coalition of groups significantly influences the nature of the political regime and its approach to absorbing and controlling subordinate social groups. This can result in governance structures that may appear parliamentarian, democratic, corporatist, or patrimonialist, reflecting the interests and methods of the dominant strategic groups (Evers and Schiel, 1988; Kessler, 1994; Eisenstadt, 1973). This framework provides a nuanced understanding of power dynamics in postcolonial states, moving beyond simplistic dichotomies of state versus society (Evans, 1995).

On this basis, the modern state in Iran, unlike its classic counterpart in Western society, emerged not as a referee and mediator between the independent spheres of economy and society, but as the terminator of the tribal order and the overlordship structure overseeing it (Katouzian, 2000; Abrahamian, 2008). This modern state, which claimed the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical violence in cooperation with religious authorities (Weber, 1919/1946), sought to ensure its continuity by absorbing and controlling other actors who had been deprived of power in its path forward. This process unfolded over approximately six decades, from the rise of Reza Shah to the 1979 revolution (Ghods, 1991). Consequently, the ground was laid for the formation of a kind of neo-patrimonial relationship between the shah and other actors, including various segments of civil society and the nation at large (Eisenstadt, 1973; Bill, 1972).

However, this neo-patrimonial structure proved ultimately unsustainable. In explaining the collapse of the Pahlavi monarchy, Homa Katouzian and Ebrahim Towfigh point to the escalation of conflict between the state and the nation in the final decade of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's reign (Katouzian, 2009; Towfigh, 2021). This conflict, they argue, stemmed from the regime's inability to institutionalize and perpetuate its patrimonial structure effectively. The mounting tensions culminated in the 1979 revolution, which saw the union of diverse groups dissatisfied with the existing order, united under the leadership of the Shiite clergy, particularly Ayatollah Khomeini (Arjomand, 1988).

This trajectory of state development in Iran highlights the complex interplay between modernization efforts and traditional power structures, a dynamic common to many postcolonial states (Migdal, 1988). It also underscores the unique path of Iran's state formation, which diverged significantly from Western models of state-society relations (Towfigh, 2021). The ultimate failure of the Pahlavi state to maintain its neo-patrimonial structure reveals the inherent tensions and contradictions in such hybrid systems of governance, where modern state apparatus coexists with traditional forms of authority and legitimacy (Zubaida, 2011).

The First Post-Revolution Period (1979-1989)

From the very beginning of the revolution, the revolutionaries created at least one parallel institution for all functions in addition to the official organization. Harris (2017) attributes the sudden growth of foundations and para-governmental institutions to the sudden encounter with a political vacuum, the efforts of pro-regime forces to completely seize power and prevent rivals, and the eruption of centrifugal forces in vast sections of society. With the start of the Iran-Iraq war, these institutions became the frontline of a leader-centric strategy to stabilize the government (Arjomand, 2009).

In fact, during this period, the seed of a type of governance was sown that essentially had two centers: the Supreme Leader and the institutions under his supervision, and the President and the government (Moslem, 2002). The reflection of such a situation can be clearly seen in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which, according to Mehdi Bazargan, the prime minister of the interim government, depicted a country with a thousand village chiefs (Schirazi, 1997). During this period, the war conditions and Iran's international isolation had caused the concept of self-sufficiency to be at the heart of policy discourse, and as a result, all attention was focused on popular capacities to overcome these critical conditions. This was facilitated by the charismatic leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini (Abrahamian, 1989). Various groups such as the Literacy Mobilization, Construction Mobilization, etc., entered the field of service provision.

Table 6 Chronology of Governmental and Parallel Revolutionary Institutions (1890-2011): Harris (2017)

Governmental Institutions	Parallel Revolutionary Institutions
Planning Organization (1948) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and Budget Organization (1972) • Ministry of Plan and Budget (1983) • Plan and Budget Organization (1989) • Management and Planning Organization (1999) 	Economic Mobilization Headquarters (1979)
Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce (1932) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce (1975) • Ministry of Agriculture and Construction Jihad (1989) 	Construction Jihad (1979)
Ministry of Health (1951) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (1976) • Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education (1986) 	Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (1979)
Social Security Organization (1975) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Welfare and Social Security (2003) • Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare (2011) 	Foundation for the Oppressed (1979) Martyrs Foundation (1979) Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation (1981) Foundation for War Refugees Affairs (1981)
Ministry of War (1990) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Defense (1951) • Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (1989) 	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (1979)

Construction Era

The end of the war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini signaled a new chapter in governance (Rakel, 2009).

The most important issue related to our work is the Hashemi government's or Construction state (Dolate Sazandegi) approach to adding the private sector to governance, inspired by global trends. However, during the Hashemi period, conflicts had not yet begun. In fact, the privatization policy, which was implemented with the aim of making the government smaller and more agile and increasing its efficiency, in Iran did not come close to power except for widespread transfer to the army, foundations, and bazaaris (Amuzegar, 1993).

The consequences of this period can be attributed to the widespread emergence of contracting companies owned by military personnel and individuals close to the government, and the opening

of new players in the field of governance (Harris, 2013). As we will see, in the coming decades, these groups, representing the conservative faction close to Iran's leader, lined up against the reformist current and played a very key role in intensifying conflicts to seize the government (Thaler et al., 2010).

This group, referred to as conservatives or principalists, with an anti-Western approach and liberal ideas, although they always consider the support of capitalism and non-interference of the government in the economy as acceptable in light of Islamic principles, are opposed to other concepts that came from the West (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006).

The Reform Era and the Paradigm Shift in Governance (1997-2005)

Mohammad Khatami's presidency (1997-2005) marked a turning point in the evolution of the governance paradigm in the Islamic Republic of Iran. This period represented a comprehensive effort to transition from a centralized governance model towards a more participatory and accountable system (Kamrava, 2008). It can be viewed as a purposeful attempt to redefine the power structure and governance model in Iran.

Mohebi (2016) argues that the reformists, with slogans such as the rule of law, strengthening civil society, and limiting extra-legal power, sought to reduce the power monopoly of rival groups that had formed around Iran's leader and the foundations under his command. This approach demonstrated a conscious effort to create balance in the power structure and expand the scope of political participation. The reformists believed that strengthening civil institutions and increasing government accountability could lead to a reduction in power concentration and improve the efficiency of the political system (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006).

However, these efforts faced serious structural challenges. The dual power structure in the Islamic Republic, which includes both elected and unelected institutions, imposed significant limitations on the scope of reforms. Unelected institutions, largely influenced by the leadership and conservative groups, often resisted proposed changes (Brumberg, 2001). In this context, Khatami's reforms can be seen as an attempt to create a new balance in power distribution, aiming to increase the role of elected institutions and civil society in the decision-making process. This approach,

while preserving the overall framework of the Islamic Republic, sought internal reform of power structures (Ansari, 2006).

The Khatami era witnessed significant developments across multiple domains of governance. The government facilitated an unprecedented expansion of civil society and political participation, promoting pluralistic discourse and strengthening the free press (Mohebi, 2016; Jahanbegloo, 2004). Structural reforms included the implementation of local councils, a key step towards decentralization (Keshavarzian, 2005), alongside efforts to reform bureaucratic structures and promote meritocracy (Samii, 2004). In economic governance, initiatives for liberalization and foreign investment were launched (Amuzegar, 2006). The emphasis on citizenship rights and rule of law signaled a shift in the state-nation relationship (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006). In foreign policy, Khatami's "Dialogue of Civilizations" aimed to improve Iran's international standing (Ansari, 2006). Lastly, media liberalization policies substantially altered the management of public discourse (Khiabany, 2010). These multifaceted efforts collectively represented a comprehensive attempt to redefine governance in Iran.

Despite these developments, the reform movement faced serious challenges. Resistance from conservative institutions, structural limitations of power in the Islamic Republic, and international tensions limited the scope and effectiveness of these reforms (Bashiriyeh, 2011). Nevertheless, the Khatami era had a lasting impact on political discourse and Iranian society's expectations of governance (Arjomand, 2009).

Bagheri (2020) sees this development as leading to a broader and more pluralistic policymaking field in Iran. Overall, the reform era represented a comprehensive effort to redefine the concept and practice of governance in Iran. Despite limitations and challenges, this period laid the groundwork for significant developments in thinking about state-society relations, political participation, and Iran's role in the international arena.

The Ahmadinejad Era (2005-2013)

The statement by Iran's Deputy Interior Minister for Cultural and Social Affairs in October 2010 provides a revealing glimpse into the complex and often contradictory nature of civil society engagement in Iran during the Ahmadinejad era. The minister's directive that "People-based

organizations should not engage in political activities" while simultaneously designating the Basij, a state-affiliated militia, as the country's "largest NGO" encapsulates the tensions and paradoxes inherent in Iran's approach to civil society and collaborative governance during this period (Mohebi, 2016).

This pronouncement signaled a significant shift in Iran's governance landscape, particularly in relation to state-society relations and the role of civil society organizations. It reflected a broader trend of tightening control over non-governmental actors while co-opting the language of civil society participation for state-aligned purposes.

The presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) marked a significant departure in Iran's governance landscape. Ahmadinejad, a relatively unknown figure in Iranian politics, rose to power on a platform of extensive criticism against the previous 'Construction' and 'Reform' administrations. He accused these governments of implementing policies that favored specific groups while neglecting large segments of Iranian society, particularly the lower socioeconomic classes (Ehteshami & Zweiri, 2007).

This populist rhetoric garnered support from conservative factions, which had become more cohesive and unified during the reform era. Ahmadinejad's administration, characterized by its confrontational foreign policy approach, led to increased international isolation and the imposition of severe economic sanctions (Takeyh & Maloney, 2011). However, a significant increase in oil revenues during his tenure allowed for the implementation of populist welfare policies, solidifying his support base among the underprivileged classes (Harris, 2017).

Paradoxically, he simultaneously pursued aggressive privatization policies, aimed at empowering and enriching his conservative allies. This approach, as Harris (2013) notes, did not quell the conflicts between strategic groups. Indeed, just a year after Ahmadinejad's election, internal divisions among conservatives became apparent, with governance issues and corruption allegations forming the crux of their mutual criticisms.

The Ahmadinejad era was further marked by the unexpected middle-class protests following the disputed 2009 presidential election results, in support of the opposition candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi. While a detailed analysis of these protests is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that they exacerbated the schism within conservative ranks. Some conservative

factions realized that securing state power without the support of the middle class was no longer feasible (Hashemi & Postel, 2010).

Ahmadinejad's governance style was characterized by an assault on established governance norms, weakening civil institutions and knowledge production centers, and promoting a more populist approach to policymaking .This period saw a significant shift towards what can be termed as the 'massification' of the policymaking field (Bagheri, 2020).

The administration of Hassan Rouhani (2013-2021) marked an effort in Iran's governance approach, largely representing an attempt to revert to pre-Ahmadinejad era norms. This period witnessed a gradual reintegration of social institutions into the governance sphere, although vestiges of populist policy-making persisted (Bagheri, 2020). Rouhani's government primarily anchored its prospects of success to the lifting of international sanctions and the improvement of Iran's global interactions, with a particular emphasis on Western relations. However, this administration's ambitions were ultimately thwarted by a combination of internal pressures from principlist (Osolgarayan) factions and external geopolitical tensions.

The failure to achieve these diplomatic and economic objectives precipitated a cascade of socio-economic challenges. Iran found itself grappling with multifaceted crises, including widespread poverty, environmental degradation (notably the water crisis), erosion of social trust, endemic corruption, and a widening economic and social divide (Salehi-Isfahani, 2021). These internal issues were further exacerbated by extensive international sanctions that severely constrained Iran's economic resources and global engagement capabilities .

The Emergence of People-Based Governance

In summing up this part, we can draw on Jessop's concept of the "hollow state" to frame our understanding of the governance shift in Iran. However, the Iranian case presents a unique manifestation of this concept, challenging traditional Western-centric interpretations.

Contrary to the Western experience where the transition from government to governance often involves a genuine devolution of power, Iran's political landscape has been characterized by a dispersed power structure from the outset. As Towfigh argues, political power in Iran has never been truly concentrated in the hands of a centralized government. Instead, power has been pluralistic, with the government serving as an arena for various strategic groups to compete for resources and influence.

This inherent pluralism reached its apex following the 1979 revolution, with the establishment of parallel institutions and a dual system of leadership - the Supreme Leader and the President. As Harris demonstrates, the budget of support institutions under the Supreme Leader's supervision often exceeded the government's welfare budget, underscoring the complex and fragmented nature of power in post-revolutionary Iran.

In this context, the recent shift towards "people-based governance" (Hokmrani Mardomi) in Iran represents not so much a transition from government to governance, but rather a reconfiguration of existing power dynamics. The conservative factions' embrace of participatory governance principles, paradoxically, can be seen as an attempt to broaden their power base in response to mounting societal challenges and eroding legitimacy.

This development suggests that Iran's governance structure has been "hollow" from the beginning, in a sense distinct from Jessop's original conception. Rather than a hollowing out of a once-centralized state, Iran's case presents a scenario where power has always been dispersed among various strategic groups, with the formal government apparatus serving as just one arena among many for power contestation.

The emergence of "people-based governance" in this context can be interpreted as an adaptive response by the ruling elite to the complex array of "wicked problems" facing the country. By ostensibly inviting broader public participation, the regime aims to address pressing socio-economic challenges while simultaneously maintaining its grip on power.

5.2 A look at the application of governance theory in academic studies in

After examining collaborative governance and its representation in the discourse of Iranian politicians, as well as investigating the contextual factors behind its emergence through an endogenous approach, in this section I will take a look at the application of collaborative governance in Iranian academic literature. The objective of this section is to see how this theory has been reflected and employed in academia, and specifically how it conceptualizes the contextual factors and their impact.

5.2.1 Methodology

To ensure a comprehensive and transparent review of collaborative governance in Iran, we employed a systematic approach to literature search and selection. This section details our search strategy, selection criteria, and the databases used.

Keywords: I used the following keywords and their Persian equivalents in our search:

- "Collaborative governance" (حکمرانی مشارکتی)
- "Participatory governance" (حکمرانی مشارکتی)
- "Iran" (ایران)
- "Public participation" (مشارکت عمومی)
- "Stakeholder engagement" (مشارکت ذینفعان)

These terms were used in various combinations to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Collaborative governance is an emerging field of study in Iran, with a growing body of research exploring the participation of diverse actors in policymaking and implementation processes. While many studies have examined these issues through the lens of good governance, participatory governance itself remains a relatively understudied area.

Table 7 Iranian Governance studies focusing on participation of stakeholders and non-state actors

Type of governance studies	Number of Studies
Good governance	27
Network governance	4
Collaborative governance	9
Participatory governance	9
	50

Our search strategy encompassed both Persian and English language databases to ensure a thorough coverage of the available literature. We utilized three prominent Persian databases: Magiran (www.magiran.com), Noor Magazines (www.noormags.ir), and the Scientific Information Database (SID) (www.sid.ir). For English language publications, we searched Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. To focus on contemporary research while capturing the evolution of collaborative governance studies in Iran, we limited our search to articles published between 2010 and 2023:

- Magiran: Covers over 2,700 Persian journals across various disciplines.
- Noor Magazines: Specializes in Islamic and humanities research, containing over 1,400 academic journals.
- SID: Managed by the Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research, providing access to scientific journals from major Iranian universities.

The initial search yielded a total 230 of articles: 150 from Persian databases and 80 from English databases. We then employed a rigorous screening process to identify the most relevant and high-quality studies for our analysis. The first step involved reviewing titles and abstracts, which allowed us to eliminate irrelevant articles and reduced the number to 152.

Out of the 50 articles addressing non-state actor participation in governance and public policy, only 15 explicitly adopted a collaborative governance theoretical framework for analysis. The limited number of reputable published articles on this topic highlights the novelty of the collaborative governance paradigm within the Iranian context. Given the conceptual proximity of collaboration and participation, as well as the nascent stage of this field in Iran, the research opted to examine articles on both collaborative governance and participatory governance in tandem (See list of the articles in Appendix 1)

5.2.2 Theory as a template

Findings show that the theoretical literature in governance studies has been limited to applying the template of collaborative governance theory to explain various policy areas and merely imitating the frequent areas of study in the dominant discourse of collaborative governance in the West. Studies of collaborative governance in Iran span diverse sectors. Natural resource governance, particularly water—currently viewed as one of Iran's most critical governance challenges—has been a focal point. Other sectors receiving attention include healthcare, education, energy, urban planning, and cultural heritage preservation .

Table 8 Distribution of participatory/collaborative governance in Iran according to the field of study

Field of Study	Number of Articles
Water governance	3
Energy governance	2
Health governance	3
Higher Education	3
Forest governance	1
Urban management	1
Cultural heritage management	1
Literature Review	1

5.2.3 Context as an obstacle; Conceptualization of contextual factors in Iranian Studies of CG

A review of the theoretical literature on collaborative governance in Iran reveals several key contextual factors that pose challenges to its implementation. This analysis quantifies these factors based on the frequency of related codes in the reviewed studies.

1. Political Context

The quantitative data reveals that the political context has received the most attention in the theoretical literature on collaborative governance in Iran, with 102 codes related to this factor. The political context is further divided into three main groups: political structure and power relations (72 codes), policy-making, and legal context (30 codes).

Political Structure and Power Relations :The most influential characteristics of power relations in Iran include the authoritarian and exclusive approach to governance (44 codes), the existence of conflict (9 codes), politicization (8 codes), centralized administrative (7 codes), and lack of stability in policy-making (4 codes).

According to the data of this research, the authoritarian approach to governance is the most frequent feature of the political context. This concept has highlighted the following features in its heart. The authoritarian and exclusive nature of power in Iran has been reflected in studies of collaborative governance, with several key issues emerging.

- The most frequent code, "Concentration of Power," which appears 13 times, highlights the unwillingness of government sectors to delegate and share power and authority with other government and non-government sectors.
- The second most frequent code, "Transparency," occurring 12 times, emphasizes the lack of transparency in policy-making processes.
- The "Accountability" code, appearing 7 times, is exemplified by Zandrazavi et al.,(2019), who suggests that the government must accept responsibility for issuing operating licenses, demonstrate sufficient political will, properly manage resources, and be held accountable for unfounded promises.

- The "Lack of trust towards other actors" code, mentioned 5 times, is highlighted by Garmsiri and Navabakhsh (2023), who emphasize the government sector's distrust in the capacity of citizens to meaningfully contribute to decision-making and planning processes.
- The "Instrumental view towards collaboration" code, appearing 4 times, refer to perception of policymakers participation as an optional add-on rather than a fundamental requirement. (Kordabadi, 2020)
- Finally, the "Unequal relationship" code, mentioned 3 times, emphasize the need to steer the power dynamics among stakeholders at all levels away from dominance-based power and towards a power structure that aims to achieve mutual or common benefits in the decision-making process (Garmsiri). In the following, two frequent issues of limited power and transparency will be examined

Table 9 Codes and sub-codes related to authoritarian and exclusive approach towards governance

Main Codes	Frequency	Sample
Concentration of Power	13	Unwillingness of government sectors to delegate and share power and authority with other government and non-government sectors (Garmsiri & Navabakhsh (2023), Pos. 30)
Transparency	12	"Many policies are not transparently made public. People and NGOs should know how water is transferred, from where to where. What are the conditions of dams, withdrawals, consumption, and allocations? These are usually in a package and confidential, and if they are not transparent, a sense of cooperation and trust will not be achieved." (Interview 13) (Bagheri et al. 2023 Pos. 29)
Accountability	7	Participants believe that accepting responsibility by the government for issuing operating licenses beyond the capacity of the aquifer, having sufficient political will in the proper management of resources, and being accountable for the baseless promises of government representatives and officials is very necessary. (Zandrazavi et al.,2019), Pos. 20)
Lack of trust towards other actors	5	Distrust of the government sector in the ability of people to meaningfully participate in decision-making and planning. (Garmsiri and Navabakhsh, 2023,Pos. 29)
Instrumental view towards collaboration	4	Another fundamental problem in the country's water policymaking is the policymakers' view of participation as an add-on and not a requirement. (Kordabadi, 2020), Pos. 14)
Unequal relationship	3	This study showed that in collaborative governance, it is necessary to guide the power of stakeholders at all levels from dominance-based power towards power that aims to achieve mutual or common benefit so that more balanced forms of power are used in the decision-making process. (Garmsiri and Navabakhsh, 2023), Pos. 36)

- **Policy-Making Factors :**

The most significant challenge in the context of policy-making is the existence of parallel policy-making institutions and overlapping responsibilities, as noted by Mohammadi et al. (2019) and Garmsiri and Navbakhsh (2023). This challenge is exacerbated by other issues such as a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities (Azadi, 2023), and the presence of multiple decision-making centers, as pointed out by Khalaji (2021) and Nematollahi et al. (2022).

The fragmentation of decision-making authority has led to inconsistencies and a lack of a systemic view of governance structures. Azadi et al. (2022) and Rahbari Bonab et al. (2023) argue that this inconsistency, coupled with a lack of consideration for diverse perspectives, can hinder effective collaboration and the development of inclusive policies.

Table 10 Policy Making Codes Frequency and Sample

	Main Codes	Frequency	Sample
Policy-Making Context	Ambiguity in duties, responsibilities	17	"It is still not clear how they should work together. Suppose which part of this should be handled by the Ministry of Petroleum, what should the Ministry of Energy do? Some have sat together less to do joint planning" (interview 6 (Mohammadi et al.,2019). Pos. 45-46)
			The most important component in achieving integrated urban management is organized unity. There are many decision-making centers in the metropolis of Tehran leading to a lack of coordination and unity of procedure in the implementation of process and institutional affairs. (Khaliji ,2021), p. 4)
			"The problem must be divided, but the task division is not exact, the owner of the problem is not clear, for example, in water, the share of the problem is 50-50 or 40-60, that is, we gave. 50 or 60 percent to the Ministry of Energy and the rest to the Ministry of Agriculture is unknown. (Interview 5) (Bagheri et al. 2023, po 22)

- **Legal Factors**

The legitimacy and support provided by laws and regulations are pivotal for the success of collaborative governance initiatives (Nematollahi et al., 2022; Azadi et al., 2022). However, the findings reveal that the absence of specific, up-to-date rules and regulations governing the development of participatory governance policies has been identified as a significant challenge that can impede the effectiveness of collaborative governance efforts (Bagheri et al., 2023; Mohamadi et al., 2019).

Iranian studies underscore the need to address specific legal issues, such as enacting new laws for supervision and conflict of interest, reviewing previous laws, and resolving conflicts in upstream rules that hinder the establishment of common goals. Inconsistencies or contradictions within the legal framework were also considered as obstacles to the development of shared objectives and effective collaboration among stakeholders.

Furthermore, the role of the legal context in facilitating the creation of joint governance structures, such as joint decision-making bodies or multi-stakeholder platforms, was highlighted by several studies (Bagheri et al., 2023; Azadi et al., 2022; Zabihzadeh et al., 2021).

Table 11 Most frequent codes on legal Context and It's sample

	Main Codes	Frequency	Sample
Legal Context	Ambiguity in duties, responsibilities	9	"... in the sixth development plan, one paragraph refers to 90% self-sufficiency and in another paragraph to the revival of water resources without mentioning the environment. Therefore, we are faced with a mixture of policies. One of the problems is that we say the common goal should be to provide food, provide water and provide environmental rights, but as long as we move forward with these policies, a paradox is formed. Goal setting should be with an integrated view, for example, the Ministry of Agriculture should reduce 20% of agricultural land, the Ministry of Energy should manage the dams accordingly, and the environment should not insist on, for example, the historical water level of Lake Urmia." (Interview 1) (Bagheri et al., 2023, Pos. 20)

			<p>Despite the willingness to cooperate in relevant organizations, some regulations and instructions that are in line with previous conditions prevent the cooperation of these actors in other formal organizations. These obstacles are rooted in the definitions of organizational structures that have made flexibility difficult and cannot easily change themselves.</p> <p>(Mohammadi et al., (2019). Pos. 44-45)</p>
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2. Cultural Context

Cultural factors, accounting for 19% of the coded references, primarily revolved around issues of individualism and lack of cooperative spirit among Iranians. According to findings of this study Iran's cultural landscape presents multifaceted challenges to collaborative governance efforts, stemming from deeply ingrained mindsets, values, and behavioral norms. At the core lies a pervasive hierarchical and individualistic culture that hinders effective collaboration and inclusive decision-making processes.

In the cultural realm, individualism, preference for individual interests, and a lack of collective work culture are frequent topics in the literature on participatory governance in Iran. While there are references to the potential of Iranian religious beliefs to promote cooperation and participation, arrogance, pride, and self-reliance have also been mentioned as Iranian characteristics that have affected participatory governance negatively (Mirbagheri et al., 2022, Rahbari Bonab et al. ,2023, Garmsiri and Navabakhsh,2023, Netmatollahi et al., 2022)

Table 12 Most frequent codes on cultural Context and It's sample

	Main Codes	Frequency	Sample
Cultural Context	Individualism	8	Among the other cultural factors mentioned that prevent community participation, individualism, haste, and disorganization are to be mentioned. "In our society, this problem exists strongly. It is also a discussion of individualism versus collectivism" (P 14).(Rahbari Bonab et al. ,2023)
	Others	21	However, on the other hand, some believe that the religious aspects of the Iranian people have created and strengthened the culture of participation among them. "Our country has opportunities, even our religious aspects promote the grounds for participation. "In one manner, it inspires people to commit to helping others, or the historical and cultural facets of our nation encourage us to engage in participation-related conversations" (P 10). (Rahbari Bonab et al.,2023)
			Although legal institutional changes and support for public participation have taken place in Iran, especially after the 1979 revolution, cultural changes that promote public participation have hardly taken place. The reason can be found in social behaviour rooted in several thousand years of Iranian history and collective memory of society and individuals (Pakzad, 2017), where the government is seen as responsible for solving local problems rather than community cooperation. (Abedi Sarvestani & Ingram, 2020),

3. Social Context

CG studies in Iran described the Iranian social context with 2 more frequent features the lack trust (8 Frequency) and Lack of equality, justice, and fairness(5 Frequency). The social context plays a significant role in shaping collaborative governance processes and outcomes. The quantitative data reveals several key aspects of the social context that influence the effectiveness of collaborative governance initiatives in Iran.

Trust is raised as the most problematic issue in Iran's social competitions. The findings of this research show that trust between actors, trust in the system and trust in new laws are among the issues that have been addressed by researchers. The remarkable issue in this regard is the issue of trust, emphasis on data is the inappropriate state of trust and social capital in Iranian society.

(Garmsiri and Navabakhsh, 2023, Azadi et al, 2022, Rahbari Bonab et al, 2023, Nematollahi et al, 2022, Bagheri et al., 2023).

The social context also includes the norms, attitudes and behaviors of the actors involved in the collaborative process. Changes in norms, attitudes and creating awareness about CG both among governmental actors and non-governmental actors, are positions that have been highlighted by researchers. In addition, the existence of mutual and strategic commitment (mutual and strategic commitment) among actors is highlighted as an important factor in the social context, which shows the need for aligned goals and joint commitment to joint effort (Mohamadi et al., 2019, Azadi et al., 2022)

Table 13 Most frequent codes on Social Context and It's sample

	Main Codes	Frequency	Sample
Social Context	Trust	8	"One thing I forgot is the issue of honesty. Dishonesty weakens our social capital" (P 14); "The government should not behave in such a way as to create a sense of abuse of people's trust" (P 1) (Rahbari Bonab et al., 202, p. 3)
	Social Justice	2	"An important and influential factor for building trust and creating cooperation is justice. If the agencies feel that their right is being violated, for example, if the Ministry of Agriculture feels that the industry is taking its right, or if the people feel that the government is not giving them their right, for example, it develops one area more and does not develop another area, a feeling of injustice is created and the feeling of discrimination is the biggest obstacle to cooperation." (Interview 15) (Bagheri et al. 2023, Pos. 39-40)
	Equity and Fairness	3	The request for fairness is the third strategy of the participatory paradigm. Fairness is defined as reducing the volume of withdrawals for the sustainability of the aquifer; Therefore, this category was made of five separate dimensions. The participants considered fairness in the context of reallocating resources for the sustainability of the aquifer; As a result, depending on their position, they discussed fairness with five different dimensions: "fair allocation of resources," "equality," "proportion to the amount of water right," "proportion to livelihood," "proportion to time priority," and "proportion to efficiency."(Zandrazavi ,2019, Pos. 22-23)

6. Discussion

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study has revealed several key findings regarding the emergence and characteristics of collaborative governance in Iran:

Emergence of "People-based Governance": The research uncovered a significant shift towards what is termed "people-based governance" (Hokmrani Mardomi) in Iran's political discourse. This concept has gained traction across political, economic, and socio-cultural domains, representing a departure from traditional governance models in the country. Notably, this shift has been endorsed at the highest levels of Iran's political hierarchy, including the Supreme Leader and the Raisi administration.

Contextual Shaping of Governance Approach: Iran's unique political, social, and cultural context has profoundly shaped this emerging governance approach. The study found that the move towards participatory governance has been primarily top-down, initiated by conservative factions as a response to specific crises and challenges faced by the country. This differs markedly from bottom-up collaborative governance initiatives often seen in Western contexts.

Evolution of State-Society Relations: The research highlighted how the nature of state-society relations in Iran, and their evolution since the 1979 revolution, has contributed to the transformation of participatory governance into "people-centered governance". This evolution reflects the 'hollow state' dynamics unique to Iran, where power has been dispersed among various strategic groups rather than concentrated in a centralized state apparatus.

Disconnect Between Models and Realities: A critical finding is the significant disconnect between adopted governance models and Iran's contextual realities. Both politicians and academics have shown a tendency to adopt or study governance models that fail to adequately account for Iran's unique political, social, and cultural landscape. This misalignment has contributed to the persistence and expansion of various crises and the increasing inefficiency of the governance system.

Representation in Academic Literature: The analysis of Iranian academic literature revealed a limited engagement with collaborative governance theory. Where it is addressed, there is often an uncritical application of Western models without sufficient adaptation to the Iranian context. This highlights a gap between theoretical discussions and the practical realities of governance in Iran.

6.2 Answering the Research Questions

The main research question guiding this study was: "How does collaborative governance emerge in Iran, a non-Western context?" The findings provide several insights to address this question:

1. **Top-Down Initiative:** Unlike in many Western contexts where collaborative governance often emerges from grassroots movements or as a response to government failures, in Iran, it has primarily been a top-down initiative. The concept of "people-based governance" has been promoted by conservative factions and endorsed by the highest levels of political authority.
2. **Crisis Response:** Collaborative governance in Iran has emerged as a strategic response to multiple crises facing the country, including economic instability, social unrest, and environmental challenges. It represents an attempt by the political elite to address these issues while maintaining their grip on power.
3. **Adaptation of Western Concepts:** While drawing inspiration from Western governance models, the Iranian approach to collaborative governance has been significantly adapted to fit within the country's unique political structure, which includes both democratic and theocratic elements.
4. **Reframing of State-Society Relations:** The emergence of collaborative governance in Iran involves a reframing of state-society relations, moving away from a paternalistic model towards one that ostensibly gives citizens a more active role in governance processes.
5. **Conceptual Rather Than Practical:** The findings suggest that collaborative governance in Iran remains largely conceptual at this stage, with significant gaps between rhetoric and practice. The actual implementation of collaborative governance principles faces numerous challenges due to entrenched power structures and institutional inertia.

These findings underscore the complex and context-specific nature of collaborative governance's emergence in Iran. They highlight the need for nuanced, culturally sensitive approaches to understanding governance transitions in non-Western settings, challenging the direct applicability of Western-derived models in such contexts.

6.3 Theoretical Implications

This study of collaborative governance in Iran offers significant contributions to existing theories, challenging Western-centric assumptions and providing new insights into the adaptation of governance models in non-Western contexts. The Iranian case presents a unique perspective that necessitates a reevaluation of key tenets in collaborative governance theory.

The research challenges several fundamental assumptions prevalent in Western-derived collaborative governance theories. Firstly, it demonstrates that stakeholder participation in Iran is primarily top-down and state-led, contrasting with the Western assumption of voluntary, grassroots participation. Secondly, it shows how collaborative principles can be adapted within non-democratic settings, challenging the presupposition of a democratic political system. Lastly, it reveals the blurred boundaries between state and society in Iran, complicating the Western notion of clear demarcations between these spheres.

The study also offers new insights into how governance models are adapted in non-Western settings. Iran's "people-based governance" represents a hybrid model that blends Western collaborative governance concepts with Islamic principles and Iran's unique political structure. This hybridization suggests that adaptation in non-Western contexts often involves a synthesis of local and imported ideas rather than wholesale adoption. Furthermore, the research highlights how collaborative governance concepts are rhetorically adapted to fit local political discourses, framed within the context of Islamic values and revolutionary ideals in Iran. Notably, the emergence of collaborative governance in Iran appears to be crisis-driven, suggesting that in non-Western contexts, governance innovations may be more reactive than proactive.

In terms of understanding collaborative governance in non-democratic settings, the Iranian case provides valuable insights. It illustrates how existing power structures significantly shape the form and extent of collaboration, with initiatives constrained by the need to maintain the overall power balance within the political system. The study suggests that in such settings, collaborative governance may be limited to specific policy areas or sectors rather than representing a comprehensive approach. Moreover, it underscores how existing institutional structures can constrain the implementation of collaborative governance, even when it is rhetorically embraced by political elites.

These findings collectively contribute to a more nuanced and globally representative understanding of collaborative governance, highlighting the need for context-sensitive approaches in both theory and practice. They underscore the importance of considering diverse political, cultural, and historical contexts when studying and implementing collaborative governance models, particularly in non-Western and non-democratic settings.

6.4 Contextual Factors Shaping Collaborative Governance in Iran

The development and implementation of collaborative governance in Iran have been profoundly shaped by a unique constellation of political, cultural, social, and economic factors. These contextual elements create a distinctive environment that both enables and constrains the emergence of collaborative governance practices in the country.

Politically, Iran's governance landscape is characterized by a dual power structure that balances elected government bodies with unelected religious authorities. This dynamic, a legacy of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, creates a complex system of checks and balances that differs significantly from other non-Western contexts. For instance, while China's authoritarian system allows for some experimentation with local-level collaborative governance, as seen in the Guangdong model, Iran's intricate power dynamics between elected and unelected institutions add layers of complexity to governance initiatives. Furthermore, Iran's international isolation and the impact of sanctions have created a unique political environment that influences governance approaches.

Culturally, Iran's governance is heavily influenced by religious principles, with a traditional emphasis on hierarchical authority. This creates a tension between modernization efforts and traditional values, a dynamic that is common in many Middle Eastern countries but differs from East Asian contexts where Confucian values might facilitate certain forms of collaboration. The interplay between religious influence and governance structures in Iran presents both challenges and opportunities for collaborative approaches.

Socially, Iran's young and educated population is increasingly demanding greater participation in governance, creating pressures similar to those seen in other developing countries. However, Iran's strong sense of national identity and religious-cultural cohesion distinguishes it from more fragmented societies. This unique social fabric, combined with the country's complex ethnic and religious diversity, creates a distinct environment for the development of collaborative governance practices.

Economically, Iran's governance context is significantly influenced by its status as a rentier state, heavily reliant on oil revenues. This economic structure, combined with the impacts of international sanctions and economic isolation, has created strong pressures for economic diversification and privatization. These economic factors play a crucial role in shaping governance approaches and the potential for collaborative initiatives.

While the rentier state model is common in other oil-rich countries, Iran's experience of prolonged international sanctions creates a unique economic context for collaborative governance initiatives.

Compared to other non-Western contexts studied in the literature review, Iran presents a distinct combination of factors. Unlike the Mexican case (Guadalupe Valley) where decentralization policies facilitated collaborative water governance, Iran's centralized power structure poses significant challenges to local-level collaboration. Similarly, while Japan's Kodokushi case demonstrated how cultural factors like "Mimamori" facilitated community-based collaborative initiatives, Iran's governance culture has traditionally emphasized top-down authority, making bottom-up collaboration more challenging.

These contextual factors not only shape the form and extent of collaborative governance in Iran but also highlight the need for governance theories that can account for the diverse and complex

realities of non-Western settings. The Iranian case underscores the importance of developing more flexible, context-sensitive approaches to understanding and implementing collaborative governance in diverse global contexts.

6.5 The "Hollow State" and Collaborative Governance in Iran

The concept of the "hollow state," developed by Western scholars like Milward and Provan (2000), takes on a unique form in the Iranian context, with significant implications for collaborative governance. Unlike in Western countries where the hollow state often results from deliberate power devolution, Iran's governance landscape has been characterized by a dispersed power structure since the 1979 revolution. This structure includes formal government institutions, religious bodies, revolutionary organizations, and quasi-governmental foundations, creating a complex web of parallel institutions where multiple actors compete and collaborate in policy implementation.

In Iran, the boundaries between state, market, and civil society are often blurred, with many ostensibly private or civil society organizations maintaining close ties to different power centers within the state apparatus. This creates a complex stakeholder landscape for collaborative initiatives, requiring engagement with a wide array of actors possessing varying degrees of formal and informal authority. Consequently, policy implementation often involves negotiation among various power centers, necessitating adaptive governance practices that can navigate shifting alliances and power dynamics.

The Iranian experience of governance evolution differs significantly from Western transitions. While Western countries often see a relatively linear shift towards market-based solutions and civil society partnerships, Iran's transition has been non-linear, alternating between periods of centralization and decentralization. Moreover, the move towards collaborative governance in Iran is framed within the context of Islamic and revolutionary principles, contrasting with the neoliberal framing common in Western contexts. Notably, while the hollow state in Western settings often results from reduced state capacity, in Iran, it coexists with attempts to maintain strong central authority in key areas.

6.6 Practical Implications

These findings have practical implications for various stakeholders. Policymakers and practitioners in Iran need to develop context-sensitive collaborative governance models, invest in capacity building for both state and non-state actors, establish trust-building mechanisms, and consider piloting collaborative approaches in less politically sensitive sectors. International organizations should develop a nuanced understanding of Iran's governance landscape, create flexible assessment frameworks, emphasize local ownership of governance models, and facilitate cross-cultural dialogue among practitioners from different non-Western contexts.

For scholars, this study highlights the need to refine collaborative governance theories to account for diverse political systems and cultural contexts. It calls for more comparative studies between different non-Western contexts, interdisciplinary approaches integrating insights from various social sciences, and innovative research methodologies capable of capturing the complexities of governance in challenging research environments.

6.7 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study acknowledges limitations, including its reliance on secondary sources, single-country focus, and the rapidly changing nature of Iran's political and social landscape. Future research directions include conducting empirical case studies of specific collaborative governance initiatives in Iran, expanding comparative analyses to other non-Western, non-democratic contexts, incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives, undertaking longitudinal studies, exploring sector-specific manifestations of collaborative governance, and developing frameworks for assessing the impact and effectiveness of such initiatives in non-Western contexts.

These research directions aim to contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of collaborative governance in non-Western contexts, bridging the gap between theory and practice in diverse global settings. By pursuing these avenues, scholars and practitioners can work towards

developing more inclusive, effective, and contextually appropriate governance models that reflect the complex realities of different political and cultural environments.

6.8 Concluding Reflections

This study of collaborative governance in Iran offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of governance transitions in non-Western contexts, with significant implications for public administration theory and practice. As we conclude, several key reflections emerge:

1. The Necessity of Context-Sensitive Approaches

The Iranian case underscores the critical importance of developing context-sensitive approaches to understanding and implementing collaborative governance. The unique blend of theocratic and republican elements in Iran's political system, coupled with its distinct cultural and historical legacy, demonstrates that governance models cannot be simply transplanted from one context to another. This calls for a more nuanced, culturally attuned approach to public administration theory and practice that recognizes the diversity of governance realities across the globe.

2. Rethinking Power Dynamics in Collaborative Governance

The study challenges conventional understandings of power dynamics in collaborative governance. In Iran, the dispersed nature of power and the complex interplay between formal and informal institutions necessitate a reconsideration of how we conceptualize stakeholder roles and power relations in collaborative settings. This insight has broader implications for understanding collaborative governance in other non-Western or hybrid political systems.

3. The Evolution of State-Society Relations

The emergence of "people-based governance" in Iran reflects a broader evolution in state-society relations. This shift, while unique in its specifics to Iran, mirrors global trends of changing expectations about citizen participation in governance. It highlights the need for governance theories that can account for the dynamic nature of state-society relations, particularly in contexts undergoing significant social and political transformations.

4. Bridging Theory and Practice

The study reveals a significant gap between theoretical models of collaborative governance and their practical implementation in Iran. This disconnect is likely not unique to Iran and points to a broader challenge in the field of public administration: how to develop theories that are both rigorous and practically applicable across diverse contexts. Moving forward, there is a need for more dialogue between scholars and practitioners to ensure that theoretical advancements are grounded in real-world realities.

5. The Role of Governance in Addressing Complex Challenges

Iran's turn towards collaborative governance, albeit in a limited and top-down manner, reflects a recognition of the limitations of traditional governance approaches in addressing complex, multifaceted challenges. This resonates with global trends towards more networked, collaborative approaches to tackling "wicked problems." The Iranian experience offers valuable lessons on the opportunities and constraints of such approaches in non-democratic settings.

6. Implications for Global Governance:

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, understanding diverse governance models becomes crucial for effective global cooperation. The insights gained from studying collaborative governance in Iran contribute to a more inclusive, globally representative understanding of governance that can inform international policy-making and cross-cultural collaboration.

In conclusion, this study of collaborative governance in Iran not only enriches our understanding of governance transitions in non-Western contexts but also challenges us to rethink fundamental assumptions in public administration theory. It underscores the need for more diverse, globally inclusive approaches to studying and practicing governance. As we move forward, embracing this diversity and complexity will be crucial in developing governance theories and practices that are truly global in their applicability and relevance.

The Iranian case serves as a powerful reminder that the path to effective, participatory governance is neither linear nor universal. It is a complex, context-dependent process that requires continuous

adaptation and learning. As scholars and practitioners, our task is to remain open to these diverse experiences, using them to build more robust, inclusive theories of governance that can guide us in addressing the complex challenges of our interconnected world.

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Appendix

1.Iranian studies of participatory/ collaborative governance

	<i>Focus of study</i>	<i>Field of Study</i>	<i>Theoretical Framework</i>	<i>Research Methodology</i>	<i>Data Gathering Methodology</i>
<i>Zandrazavi et al .(2019)</i>	Participatory governance for sustainable groundwater management in Rafsanjan, Iran	Water governance	Grounded theory/Participatory governance	Qualitative	Interviews and Focus group discussions
<i>Bagheri et al. (2023)</i>	Collaborative governance as a solution for Iran's water problem	Water governance	Emerson & Nabatchi's model of collaborative governance	Qualitative, descriptive research	Semi-structured interviews
<i>Kordabadi, et al (2020)</i>	Causes of the failure of participatory water management policies in Iran	Water governance	Normative practice theory/ Participatory governance	Content analysis of policy documents	document review and analysis
<i>Abedi Sarvestani & Ingram (2020)</i>	Perceptions and practices of rural council participatory forest governance	Forest governance	Participatory Governance	Qualitative	Questionnaire
<i>Mohammadi et al. (2019)</i>	Collaborative governance in renewable energy development in Iran	Energy governance	Emerson & Nabatchi's model of collaborative governance	Qualitative case study	Semi-structured interviews
<i>Zabihzadeh et al., (2021)</i>	Designing a collaborative governance model for electricity demand management in Iran	Energy governance	Emerson & Nabatchi's model of collaborative governance	Mixed methods	Interviews and questionnaires
<i>Rahbari Rahbari et al., (2023)</i>	Barriers and facilitators to participatory governance in Iran health policymaking	Health governance	Participatory Governance	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews
<i>Zamani Garmsiri &</i>	Challenges of health centers in achieving	Health governance	Emerson & Nabatchi's model of collaborative governance	Qualitative	Interviews and focus group discussions

<i>Navabakhsh (2023)</i>	participatory governance				
<i>Azadi et al (2022)</i>	Challenges of implementing participatory governance in Iran's Ministry of Health,	Health governance	Emerson & Nabatchi's model of collaborative governance	Mixed methods	Interviews and questionnaires
<i>Ahmadi et al. (2021)</i>	Implementation of participatory governance in higher education institutions	Higher Education	collaborative governance	Qualitative, interpretive paradigm	Semi-structured interviews
<i>Shams (2022)</i>	Role of universities in collaborative governance for development	Higher Education	Emerson & Nabatchi's model of collaborative governance	Qualitative, exploratory	Semi-structured interviews
<i>Nematollahi, et al (2022)</i>	Barriers to the implementation of participatory governance in educational and research institutions in Iran	Higher Education	collaborative governance	Qualitative	In-depth Interviews
<i>Khaliji (2021)</i>	Pathology of metropolitan management with an emphasis on participatory governance in Tehran	Urban management	Participatory governance framework	Descriptive-analytical, survey research	Questionnaires and interviews
<i>Donato & Lohrasbi (Pre-Print)</i>	Participatory governance and management in Takht-e Soleyman World Heritage Site (WHS)	Cultural heritage management	Participatory governance framework	Mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative)	Interviews and questionnaires
<i>Mirbagheri et al. (2021)</i>	Conceptual model of participatory governance in Iran	Literature Review	Collaborative governance framework and Grounded theory	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews

