

An Examination of the Crime Prevention Act in Light of the Principle of Synergy Among Communal Institutions of the United Nations with a Focus on the Guidelines for Interaction and Participation of Civil Institutions with the Judiciary

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One of the eight foundational principles of the United Nations' crime prevention policies, ratified in 2002, is the principle of synergy among communal institutions, or in other words, the principle of civil society participation in crime prevention, the origins of which lie in participatory criminal policy. Participatory criminal policy refers to a form of criminal policy that emphasizes the involvement of civil society alongside state and official institutions in responding to criminal phenomena and in preventing crime, advocating for the joint intervention of both sectors. Today, criminal policy is no longer limited to formal (governmental) actions; rather, it encompasses public participation in the prevention of crime. In line with this, the guidelines for the interaction and participation of civil institutions with the judiciary have been formulated and issued with the purpose of facilitating cooperation and coordination among relevant institutions in the area of prevention, enhancing synergy between civil society and non-governmental institutions in this field, and improving intersectoral cooperation between the executive and judicial branches on this subject. This article, using a descriptive-analytical method and based on library research and data collection through the study of books, articles, and an analysis of laws, regulations, guidelines, and related procedures, reviews the provisions of the Law on Crime Prevention, ratified on August 29, 2015, in light of the United Nations' principle of synergy among communal institutions. Through a detailed examination of the content of the Guidelines for the Interaction and Participation of Civil Institutions with the Judiciary, the study concludes that despite existing efforts, participatory criminal policy in Iran appears to have remained at the level of academic discourse and, at times, at the level of sporadic or superficial and low-impact actions. It has not yet reached the stage of being codified and enacted in the form of a legal document that clearly defines a transparent, coherent, and enforceable structure for the normative participation of the public at various levels of formal and informal criminal justice systems.

Keywords: *Crime Prevention Act; Principle of Synergy Among Communal Institutions; United Nations; Guidelines for the Interaction and Participation of Civil Institutions with the Judiciary*

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1. Introduction

Although crime management and responding to criminal phenomena are considered inherent duties of governments, such responsibilities are not feasible without the cooperation and participation of the community. Accordingly, scientific studies and criminological data have proposed a new model of criminal policy referred to as *participatory criminal policy*. In this model, the government, in collaboration with the public, media, civil society, and essentially the entire social body, expresses sensitivity to criminal phenomena and organizes its responses to protect societal security and values (Vahidi et al., 2019). This human capacity encourages individuals to participate in political and social affairs. The noble religion of Islam also instructs people to cooperate in righteous and virtuous endeavors and to refrain from collaborating in wrongful matters. The guidance for this principle is found in Surah Al-Ma'idah, verse 2: "...and cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression; and fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty." This religious duty signals humanity's entry into the political and social spheres and the acceptance of responsibilities across various domains. The United Nations, as a manifestation of the collective will of states at the supranational level, has paid particular attention to the principles and foundations governing the process of crime prevention. One of its major efforts was the adoption of the *Guidelines for Crime Prevention* by the Economic and Social Council, attached to a Council resolution in 2002. These guidelines introduce eight principles as foundational to preventive policymaking:

1. Evidence- and human rights-based policy formulation;
2. Stability and evaluation of preventive policies;
3. Comprehensiveness of preventive policies;
4. Continuity and discontinuity in preventive policies;
5. Strategic and all-encompassing government presence in preventive policymaking;
6. Synergy of communal institutions in preventive policymaking;
7. Localization of preventive policies;
8. Community-based (local-level) adaptation of preventive policies.

Considering the United Nations' principle of synergy among communal institutions and examining the *Guidelines on the Interaction and Participation of Civil Institutions with the Judiciary*, as well as a comparative analysis of the relevant articles in the *Crime Prevention Act of 2015*, this study seeks to answer the primary question: *To what extent has participatory criminal policy—based on the principle of synergy among communal institutions (as one of the eight principles in the UN's preventive policy guidelines)—been realized in Iran's Crime Prevention Act?*

2. Related Concepts and Components

The *principle of synergy among communal institutions* is effectively the same as the principle of *civil society participation*, as set forth in the UN's preventive policymaking guidelines. Its essence and origin must be traced back to *participatory criminal policy*. In today's world, envisioning an effective criminal policy system without engaging civil society appears to be unfeasible. Participatory criminal policy, on the one hand, legitimizes state-level efforts in crime prevention and control, and on the other, fosters a sense of social responsibility among citizens—thereby enhancing the efficiency of the criminal justice system (Nobahar, 2008).

2.1. Criminal Policy

The term *criminal policy*, which has existed for nearly a century, represents a macro-level approach to criminal phenomena and underpins various legal responses and interactions between legal branches and civil society in addressing crime. Its fundamental task in any country is to control delinquency. Criminal policy has both a narrow and broad conceptual scope: narrowly defined, it is synonymous with *penal policy*; broadly defined, it includes not only penal measures but also social, cultural, economic, and other interventions. Therefore, it encompasses all state and societal measures taken to combat crime and deviance and thus falls within the realm of a nation's public policy.

2.1.1. Branches of Criminal Policy

Experts classify the branches of criminal policy into four domains, each reflecting a specific implementation field or general manifestation of criminal policy:

- *Legislative criminal policy*, reflected in the drafting and enactment of laws by the legislature;
- *Judicial criminal policy*, reflected in judicial decisions and rulings of judges and judiciary officials;
- *Executive criminal policy*, implemented by the executive branch and the government within society;
- *Participatory criminal policy*, functioning as the fourth pillar, alongside the aforementioned approaches, which is elaborated below.

2.1.2. *The Participatory Dimension*

Participatory criminal policy refers to the designation and integration of *effective and active civil society participation* in criminal policymaking (Azimzadeh Ardebili & Hesabi, 2011). In other words, it denotes a type of policy that emphasizes the joint involvement of civil society and state institutions in responding to and preventing criminal phenomena. Therefore, civil society's participation is the focal point of participatory criminal policy. Undoubtedly, public participation in criminal policymaking can enhance the quality of adopted principles and strategies. Moreover, when civil society is actively engaged, it increases public satisfaction with such policies and improves monitoring and community involvement in criminal response and prevention efforts. This process contributes significantly to the dynamism of the adopted strategies (Koonani et al., 2012). Generally, criminal policy—with a focus on non-penal preventive discourse—prioritizes multi-institutional or inter-institutional prevention strategies, which require a supportive social infrastructure to encourage the participation of both formal and informal institutions in cleansing society of crime and deviance. Among all components, prevention most clearly reflects the requirements of a cohesive and dynamic criminal policy, encapsulated in the participation of all elements of the social system. Today, the extensive participation of the public and social institutions in crime prevention programs—within the framework of participatory criminal policy—has emerged as a crucial topic in response to the growing wave of social disorders and crimes and the inefficacy of traditional punitive

approaches. Preventive strategies are widely recognized as significantly contributing to personal and social security (Koonani et al., 2012).

2.2. *Foundations of Participatory Criminal Policy*

Foundations refer to the justifying reasons that explain the necessity of a particular phenomenon. In other words, they answer the question: *Why should this exist?* Examining the foundations of participatory criminal policy thus entails identifying the essential justifications and empirical or normative reasons that validate its existence and necessity.

2.2.1. *Collective Responsibility*

Human responsibility is deeply rooted in religious teachings. God has assigned responsibilities to humans alongside the blessings and resources He has provided. Humans were not created aimlessly to live detached from accountability. In the Qur'an, Surah Al-Mu'minun, verse 115 states: *"Did you think that We created you in vain?"* Similarly, Surah Al-Qiyamah, verse 36 asserts: *"Does man think he will be left neglected?"* These verses demonstrate that human life is purposeful, and responsibility is integral to that purpose—whether toward oneself, one's family, fellow believers, humanity, the order of existence, or the Creator. Hence, individuals must nurture a sense of responsibility and recognize their role in societal well-being. Moreover, as inherently social beings, humans derive their identity from the collective, making social obligations and collective responsibilities even more pronounced. Crimes and deviance, therefore, become areas where human responsibility is acutely tested. Without engagement in social matters, the sense of responsibility toward society cannot bear fruit. Such responsibility must be organized because individualistic responsibility alone is ineffective. Thus, attention to this ethical imperative necessitates collective engagement in addressing social phenomena (Vahidi et al., 2019).

2.2.2. *The Primacy of Non-Penal and Participatory Responses over Penal Approaches in Islamic Teachings*

In every legal and jurisprudential system, preventive strategies vary depending on the theoretical foundations and definitions of crime and delinquency. Among the

prevention models, religion and its proposed strategies—known as *religious prevention*—stand out. In the divine system, based on monotheism and God-centeredness, since Islam is considered the only true religion, its rulings have manifested from the creation of Adam to the present day through the doctrinal, ethical, and legal instructions of the Qur'an (Reshadati, 2008). One of the critical points emphasized in Islamic criminal policy is the adoption of methods that yield minimal harm and maximum benefit for individual and social life. This principle also applies to the combat against criminal phenomena. Hence, Islam consistently aims to avoid punitive responses. In fact, Islamic criminal policy views penal intervention as a *last resort*. As stated in Surah Al-Mu'minun, verse 6: "*Repel evil with that which is best. We are most knowing of what they describe.*" Based on this and other teachings, concepts such as concealment of crime, penal reduction, dejudicialization, and overall preventive and non-penal strategies are considered both important and prioritized over punitive measures. Penal policy is thus treated as the final mechanism of response (Mirkhalili, 2008).

Today, criminal policy is no longer limited to formal (governmental) actions; it also incorporates public participation in crime prevention. Rooted in Islamic teachings, this principle is manifested through *commanding right and forbidding wrong*, which outlines a framework for informal social control and participatory criminal policy (Lashni Parsa, 2008). Naturally, the enforcement of penal sanctions remains the state's duty, as the state is responsible for defending the security of its citizens and combating crime. However, official penal policies have frequently failed in practice. The phenomenon of *penal inflation* in various societies points to the inability of states to effectively respond to criminality. Crime is a *social phenomenon*, and addressing it without the presence and participation of the public and various social institutions is neither feasible nor advisable. The most effective approach involves the participation and collaboration of the public and influential social groups—not only in designing but also in implementing strategies. Since an exclusive reliance on punitive measures and formal control systems cannot sustainably resolve the criminal phenomenon, the discussion now turns to the theory of people-centered criminal policy.

2.2.3. *The Theory of People-Centered Criminal Policy*

The theory of *people-centeredness* or *democratization of criminal law and policy* is a moderate and balanced concept within criminal sciences. It views public presence and involvement in all criminal processes as essential for achieving excellence and success. When criminal law claims to ensure public security, it cannot disregard the perspectives and expectations of the people it seeks to protect. This notion is the core of the theory advocating for the democratization of criminal policy and law. The development of *participatory criminal policy*, and consequently, the decline of authoritarian penal strategies and abandonment of punishment-based prevention, form the foundational basis for establishing a participatory strategy in crime prevention and criminal justice systems (Mohebbi, 2014).

The rise of participatory criminal policy reflects the emerging role of civil society and non-governmental institutions in the criminal justice process. In this approach, the formal criminal justice system is no longer the sole authority for dispute resolution; rather, it draws support from the capabilities of civil and community institutions. With public involvement in the criminal process, we witness increased respect for popular will, which leads to greater public trust in the criminal justice system and a reduction in crime rates. In fact, widespread public and social institutional participation in crime prevention programs—within the participatory criminal policy framework—has become a pressing issue in light of rising social disorders and crime and the inefficacy of traditional punitive methods. Given that the participatory model of crime prevention is still emerging in Iran, the government can promote and expand this model as part of a national initiative, adding new dimensions to it. The first step in participatory criminal policy is to foster conditions that enable public involvement in reducing social crimes.

Some scholars emphasize the value of a participatory approach in addressing social crimes due to its *community-based and grassroots nature*. According to them, one of the primary goals of community-based sanctions—as the name implies—is to enforce punishment within the social context, relying on two critical elements: *trust* and *social participation* (Zeinali, 2008). Nonetheless, despite these recommendations and

frameworks, a review of existing legislation—such as the *Crime Prevention Act of 2015*—reveals that Iran’s criminal policy has yet to formally adopt a comprehensive participatory crime prevention model. Apart from a few exceptional provisions, there is little explicit recognition of the potential role of civil and community institutions in combating crime.

3. Legal Foundations of Participatory Prevention in Iran

There is no comprehensive codified law on participatory crime prevention in Iran, and existing institutions are generally not receptive to the expansion of such discourse. Nevertheless, several important legal foundations can be identified as follows:

3.1. The Constitution

In the preamble of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, when addressing the methods of governance, emphasis is placed on the necessity of public participation in various affairs and in determining their own destiny. In fact, the *advancement and development of human potential* and the movement toward divine teachings are considered dependent on the active involvement of all societal elements. This reflects the Constitution’s commitment to harnessing public capacity in shaping social policy. Furthermore, *Clause 8 of Article 3* of the Constitution explicitly highlights the public’s role in social policymaking. One concrete manifestation of this commitment to civic empowerment is the domain of crime prevention, which, in alignment with the broader policy direction of the Constitution, underscores the importance of inclusive, people-centered strategies.

3.2. General Policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Among Iran’s supra-legislative documents, *General Policies of the System* hold a status below the Constitution but above ordinary laws and regulations. One such policy document is the *General Policies for Combating Narcotics*, ratified by the Expediency Council in 2006. This document explicitly affirms the public’s role in addressing social harm. Clauses 4 and 8 of this policy clearly designate crime prevention measures—through both governmental and non-governmental strategies—as essential. Undoubtedly, non-governmental prevention aligns with the concept of participatory crime

prevention, which is affirmed and legitimized in this national-level document using precise and unambiguous language (Arab et al., 2021).

3.3. Ordinary Laws and Regulations

Among the most significant sub-legislative or ordinary laws relevant to participatory crime prevention and the privatization of the crime prevention system in Iran are the *Economic, Social, and Cultural Development Plans of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. These plans have repeatedly emphasized the utilization of civil and non-governmental capacities in addressing and preventing social harms and crimes. For instance, *Article 97 of the Fourth Five-Year Development Plan* mandated the government to design a comprehensive plan for social harm control, which specifically referenced the mobilization of public and non-governmental resources. Similarly, *Clause “V” of Article 98* required the development of a comprehensive strategy for public monitoring and participation in social affairs.

The concept of *participatory crime prevention and justice* is closely aligned with these legal mandates. Though it may remain unfamiliar in Iran’s legal lexicon, it is theoretically robust and well-grounded in legal and social theory. Another pivotal law in this context is the *Crime Prevention Act*, which in its early articles clearly emphasizes the necessity of supporting the public and civil institutions in shaping criminal policies and implementing macro-level prevention programs. The law highlights the need to create the necessary conditions for the involvement of grassroots and community organizations. However, it falls short in articulating a clear methodology or operational model for realizing this participation.

In essence, while the law affirms the general principle of encouraging public participation, it neglects the specifics: how to attract participation, how to divide responsibility between the state and non-governmental or informal sectors, and how to operationalize these duties. This gap has caused the *Crime Prevention Act* to diverge from the core requirements of a participatory crime prevention and justice approach. Fundamentally, the effectiveness of public engagement hinges on the commitment of government officials to creating inclusive opportunities for citizens. This issue is further complicated by frequent policy shifts caused by changes

in political leadership, which have often led to inconsistencies in public involvement strategies. Nevertheless, this challenge should not be interpreted as a barrier to strategic public participation; instead, continuous efforts must be made to create and improve participatory platforms (Jamshidi, 2011). Ultimately, such action is a manifestation of the civil society's role in shaping participatory criminal policy, which can alleviate the burden on the government and pave the way for delegating preventive responsibilities to the broader public.

3.4. Laws and Regulations Related to the Judiciary

The core premise of participatory crime prevention is the belief that the most effective method for combating crime and improving quality of life is the deliberate engagement of citizens in prevention efforts (Jamshidi, 2011). In this regard, several robust legal instruments are available to Iran's governing institutions—especially the Judiciary—including:

- Clause 5 of Article 156 of the Constitution, which defines the judiciary's duty to “take appropriate action to prevent crime and reform offenders.”
- Part 19 of the Sixth Economic, Social, and Cultural Development Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Articles 106, and 113–119), which addresses a variety of issues such as: strategic planning to reduce crime; utilization of all executive agencies; and the promotion of public participation and NGO involvement in prevention efforts.
- The Law on Promoting the Health of the Administrative System and Combating Corruption, ratified on October 29, 2011, by the Expediency Council—particularly in provisions supporting whistleblowers.
- The Crime Prevention Act, which stipulates:
 - *Clause 3 of Article 3*: the need to “formulate and approve macro-level programs for cultural promotion, creating conditions for public and governmental/non-governmental institutional participation in crime prevention, and supporting them.”
 - *Clause 3 of Article 5*: the requirement to “identify methods for attracting public

participation and supporting NGOs and civil institutions in crime prevention, in accordance with laws, regulations, and resolutions of the High Council for Crime Prevention.”

- The Executive Directive on Countering and Preventing Neglect of Legal Duties by Managers and Employees, which functions as a legal enforcement mechanism supporting the realization of participatory prevention programs.

4. Directive on the Participation and Interaction of Civil Institutions with the Judiciary

The participatory approach to crime prevention is a necessity rooted in the theoretical foundations of criminological science. The success of preventive actions depends, on the one hand, on coordination among relevant institutions, and on the other, on the legally mandated involvement of civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which should be anticipated and implemented across all domains through legislation and administrative directives by the legislative and executive branches. In this context, it is essential to underscore the distinct and strategic role of civil society and NGOs in promoting collective efforts toward crime prevention. Without the collaboration of the three branches of power, civil society, and the implementation of a multi-institutional participatory approach, this national imperative cannot be adequately realized.

To this end, the *Directive on the Participation and Interaction of Civil Institutions with the Judiciary* was formulated and issued. In its preamble, the directive states:

“In light of the Supreme Leader's emphasis on the people-centered nature of judicial reform programs, and with reference to constitutional principles—especially Articles 3 and 8—and the importance of public participation and the broad capacity of civil institutions in implementing Article 156 of the Constitution and the laws and regulations referenced herein, this directive aims to establish a systematic, sustainable, and evidence-based framework for utilizing civil institutions in policymaking, crime prevention, victim support, mediation, oversight, legal processing, and reintegration of offenders...”

The implementation of this directive is primarily assigned to the Deputy for Social Affairs and Crime Prevention of the Judiciary, particularly under the section on *management of civil and community participation*. In essence, the directive serves as a mechanism to strengthen the participatory criminal policy strategy, by increasing the utilization of civil society institutions, particularly NGOs, in controlling deviance and criminal behavior.

According to the *UN Guidelines for Crime Prevention (2002)*, the activation of civil society capacities for crime prevention is a recognized principle. This principle has matured through evolving criminological and penal discourse, manifesting in concepts such as the “*right not to be punished*” and “*restorative justice*” (Arab et al., 2021).

Iran’s legislative criminal policy includes relevant legal frameworks. For example, *Clause 1 of Paragraph T of Article 113 of the Sixth Five-Year Development Plan (2016)* requires the Judiciary to prepare a comprehensive crime prevention plan that incorporates public and NGO participation. Despite this mandate, weaknesses in legislative, judicial, and executive measures have limited the optimal use of these capacities. As such, participatory criminal policy in Iran has remained at the level of academic discourse and sporadic social initiatives, and has not yet evolved into a robust legal framework that precisely defines a comprehensive participatory structure across all levels of formal and informal justice.

The engagement of civil institutions in criminal policy can be considered one of the most significant actions toward inclusive justice. The directive—consisting of five chapters, 54 articles, and 18 notes—particularly in Chapter IV, elaborates on communal institutions’ roles in both proactive (prevention) and reactive (penal policy) strategies. These contributions are designed to enhance the judiciary’s social and civic identity and to better integrate social actors into criminal justice processes.

According to *Article 16* of the directive, the Judiciary’s Deputy for Crime Prevention is obligated to utilize the “...specialized scientific and executive capacities of civil institutions...” in preparing the comprehensive crime prevention plan. Offenses against the family—especially domestic violence—are crimes for which reliance on formal justice systems alone is insufficient. Restricting the response to filing complaints, trials, and

punishments may further traumatize victims, especially in vulnerable families. Thus, participatory criminal policy is essential for protecting family integrity.

This directive offers a non-penal support mechanism through the judiciary for families confronting crimes against their identity and stability. *Clause 1 of Article 19* mandates provincial judiciaries to coordinate with the Deputy for Crime Prevention in enabling civil institutions to “collect and analyze data and statistics on delinquency across various regions.” Thus, the directive creates a platform for community participation in crime data collection and analysis.

Clauses 2 and 3 of Article 19 require judiciaries to coordinate with the Deputy for Crime Prevention in facilitating communal participation for:

- Identifying priority areas for crime prevention, based on factors such as preventability, causality, frequency, severity, and public sensitivity.
- Identifying at-risk individuals and vulnerable groups (children, women, mentally and physically disabled) to prevent repeat victimization and recidivism.

Regarding domestic violence, a shift from purely punitive responses to developmental and community-based strategies—through education, public statistics, and informal processes—is essential for decriminalizing responses within the criminal justice system. This directive provides a broad framework for enhancing civil participation in preventing severe domestic violence (Azimian et al., 2017).

Moreover, *Clauses A and B of Article 17* charge the Judiciary’s social deputy and local courts with utilizing communal capacities to:

- “Promote legal awareness and civic education to foster respect for law.”
- “Develop judicial discourse on preventing and combating corruption and protecting public rights.”

In non-governmental structures, a major challenge is the judiciary’s lack of commitment to using these informal channels and granting them direct access to address issues before the courts. According to (Ghamami, 2018), engaging with these non-formal systems can remedy many shortcomings in the protection of public rights.

Article 20 also formally recognizes the participation of these civil institutions in supporting special victims of

domestic violence and family-related crimes throughout the criminal process. Judges and judicial officers are permitted to facilitate legal, counseling, and supportive services by civil institutions for these victims.

The effectiveness of legal aid systems depends on the number and accessibility of competent legal professionals, their training quality, the scope of their duties, cooperation with other justice actors, victims' legal awareness, and the financial resources of responsible institutions. Sustainable legal aid requires governments to strengthen responsible institutions and facilitate partnerships with non-governmental service providers, who may offer more tailored and effective legal support than traditional mechanisms.

Under *Clauses B of Article 20*, the directive allows NGOs to support victims in evidence collection and damage assessment, enabling them to more rapidly and accurately present their claims before law enforcement and judicial authorities. This provision allows victims of domestic violence—especially women and children trapped in oppressive households—to voice their suffering and seek intervention to prevent continued victimization.

This approach is further codified in *Clauses P, T, and Th of Article 21*, requiring judicial and quasi-judicial personnel to use civil society capacities to:

- Support children and adolescents exposed to exploitation or at risk of victimization.
- Collect evidence of child trafficking, exploitation, and criminal use.
- Identify and prosecute individuals and groups involved in trafficking women and children.

5. Explaining the Principle of Synergy Among Communal Institutions in the Preventive Policymaking of the United Nations

In its 2002 *Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime*, the United Nations explicitly refers to the participatory nature of crime prevention processes. It recognizes the presence and participation of civil society—including non-governmental and independent organizations—and urges UN member states to consider this principle in their preventive policymaking. The same emphasis has been echoed in the five-year United Nations Congresses on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

The following points reflect the practical embodiment of the *principle of synergy among communal institutions* in the UN's 2002 Guidelines for Preventive Policymaking:

- Government officials at all levels are required to create appropriate conditions that enable both state agencies and all segments of civil society, particularly the private sector, to fulfill their respective roles in crime prevention.
- The participation of groups and the development of cooperation among stakeholders are core elements of the concept of crime prevention. In these guidelines, participation primarily refers to local-level civil society engagement.
- Given the diversity of criminogenic causes and the need for multi-sectoral responses, participation must be regarded as the foundational basis of crime prevention. Such participation should take place across institutions, among authorities, state and non-state actors, the private sector, and individuals.
- Active engagement of civil society groups is deemed a key component of effective crime prevention. NGOs are expected to play central roles in defining priorities, implementing programs, and evaluating outcomes.
- The 2002 Guidelines encourage and strengthen cooperation between NGOs, workplaces, the private sector, and freelance professionals, while also calling for public sensitization and awareness-raising strategies to promote citizen participation in preventive programs where applicable.
- In the field of capacity building and education, governments are instructed to provide necessary materials and equipment to civil and grassroots organizations (i.e., associations and NGOs) to enable their participation.
- The guidelines further emphasize support for participants, stating that governments and all sectors of civil society should endorse the principle of participation. This includes: recognizing its importance, defining roles and responsibilities, training participants at all levels, and celebrating successful initiatives.
- To achieve sustainability and continuity in preventive programs, states are obliged to

ensure ongoing support for the involvement of NGOs and grassroots organizations in strategies that promote long-term engagement.

In summary, the United Nations, through its 2002 guidelines, views civil society and government agencies as the two primary arms of preventive policymaking—mutually reinforcing components of a comprehensive crime prevention framework.

6. The Crime Prevention Act's Approach to the Principle of Synergy Among Communal Institutions

The *Crime Prevention Act* was enacted by the Expediency Council on September 12, 2015, with extensive revisions comprising six articles and five notes. However, it appears that in forming the High Council for Crime Prevention, the legislator adopted an entirely government-centered structure, as all council members are affiliated with the state and no representative from civil society or NGOs is included in its composition.

This is particularly notable given that during the legislative process in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, two university professors had been proposed as permanent, voting members of the council. Similarly, at the provincial level, the proposed structure included university presidents and two faculty members—a clear nod to the scientific and academic community, which constitutes a vital segment of civil society. Yet these elements were excluded from the final enacted version of the law.

Clause 3 of *Article 3* of the Act identifies among the High Council's duties the task of "formulating and approving macro-level programs to facilitate participation of the public, government institutions, and NGOs in crime prevention and supporting them." However, beyond the council's entirely governmental structure and despite more than a decade since the law's passage, there is little evidence of any substantive or systematic effort to incorporate NGO and civil society capacities in line with the UN's principle of synergy among communal institutions (Arab et al., 2021).

Importantly, Note to Article 2 of the Act stipulates: "The Secretary of the High Council for Crime Prevention may, depending on the agenda, invite experts, specialists, and representatives of other institutions and organizations to attend meetings, without voting rights." Thus, even if civil society representatives are present, their

participation is advisory only, lacking formal decision-making power. Therefore, the law's structure does not reflect a genuine commitment to institutionalizing communal synergy in preventive policymaking.

Moreover, *Clause 3 of Article 5* assigns the High Council's secretariat the task of "identifying ways to encourage public participation and supporting NGOs and civil institutions in crime prevention, within the framework of applicable laws and council resolutions." Nevertheless, the law fails to provide specific procedures or operational mechanisms for fulfilling this duty. Given the implementation history of this law, it is clear that achieving this goal has been beyond the capacity of the secretariat.

Overall, it can be concluded that the *Crime Prevention Act* falls short of expectations in operationalizing the principle of synergy among communal institutions in line with international guidelines. The mechanisms for realizing this principle remain vague or unaddressed, reflecting a missed opportunity to align Iran's criminal policy with global best practices in participatory and community-based crime prevention.

7. Conclusion

The United Nations, in its 2002 Guidelines on Crime Prevention, places strong emphasis on the participatory nature of crime prevention processes. This emphasis is evident in no fewer than ten distinct sections of the document. For instance, in the opening portion titled "Framework for Action," the very first clause highlights the necessity for government authorities at all levels to create enabling conditions for relevant public institutions and all sectors of civil society—especially the private sector—to play their roles effectively in prevention efforts.

Despite this clear endorsement of civil society participation by the United Nations and the recognized potential of communal institutions in enhancing crime prevention, the practical implementation of participatory criminal policy in Iran has yet to achieve meaningful success. The Crime Prevention Act, enacted on September 12, 2015, by the Expediency Council and considered the primary legal framework for organizing and enforcing crime prevention in the country, has not adequately addressed this issue. Although the terms "non-governmental organizations" and "civil institutions" appear in the text, the law fails to outline

any clear and actionable mechanism for supporting, attracting, and utilizing the capacities of grassroots and civic entities.

To address this legal and operational gap, the *Directive on the Participation and Interaction of Civil Institutions with the Judiciary*, consisting of five chapters, 54 articles, and 18 notes, was ratified by the Head of the Judiciary on February 17, 2020. This directive aims to promote cooperation and coordination among relevant institutions, enhance synergy between civil society and non-governmental organizations, and foster inter-institutional collaboration between the executive and judicial branches. It expands public participation in both proactive (prevention) and reactive (penal policy) dimensions of the criminal justice system, thereby reinforcing the judiciary's social orientation.

In conclusion, despite various efforts, participatory criminal policy in Iran appears to remain at the level of academic discourse and occasional low-impact initiatives. It has not yet matured into a legally codified and enforceable framework with a clear, cohesive structure that guarantees meaningful public participation at different levels of formal and informal criminal justice. Given the undeniable role of community-based institutions in crime prevention, it is imperative to design and implement concrete mechanisms that operationalize their involvement in alignment with the principle of synergy among communal institutions in preventive policymaking. Only through such a structured approach can the positive impacts of participatory justice be effectively realized in society.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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