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Original Research

Investigating the Relationship Between Language, Location, Cognition and Awareness, Social Cohesion, and Beliefs with Attitudes Toward Democracy in Iran

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The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between language, location, cognition and awareness, social cohesion, and beliefs with attitudes toward democracy in Iran. This research employed a survey methodology, and the statistical population consisted of individuals over the age of 18 in the city of Bushehr. Respondents were selected through a cluster random sampling method using the block design by the Iranian Statistical Center, and a total of 450 participants were chosen based on the research criteria. The research instruments included a researcher-developed Democracy Questionnaire and a researcher-developed Collective Identity Questionnaire. For statistical analysis, Pearson's correlation coefficient and SPSS24 software were utilized. The findings of the study indicated a significant relationship between place of residence and attitudes toward democracy. Additionally, there was a significant relationship between components of collective identity and belief and attitudes toward democracy. It can be concluded that serious efforts should be made to create conditions that encourage participation from both governmental and non-governmental sectors, such as non-governmental organizations and civil society activists, mosques, and religious centers. Freedom and equality are two dimensions of attitudes toward a democratic culture. These dimensions are often discussed in political debates, whereas freedom and equality, as social phenomena, should be considered within the context of family culture.
Keywords: Collective Identity, Attitude, Democracy.

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1. Introduction

Iran, with one of the oldest civilizations in the world, has a long history of absolute and autocratic governments. This situation has caused the concept of democracy and popular governance to remain unfamiliar and foreign to Iranians for a long time. However, throughout history, various movements and

ideas have emerged in pursuit of freedom and civil rights in this country. The Constitutional Revolution in the early 20th century was a turning point in Iran's political history and introduced democratic ideas to society for the first time. The goal of this revolution was to limit the power of the Shah and establish a parliamentary system. However, this process was not successful due to various

reasons, including foreign interventions and the lack of societal preparedness (Bashiriyeh, 2005).

After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the concept of democracy in Iran faced new challenges. The Islamic Republic of Iran presented itself as a form of religious democracy, with laws based on Islamic Sharia. This situation led some groups to view democracy as incompatible with Islamic values, while others considered it a step toward realizing the ideals of the revolution. In the city of Bushehr, located in southern Iran and along the Persian Gulf, attitudes toward democracy have been shaped by various factors. This city, due to its unique geographical location and trade and cultural relations with other countries, has long been familiar with various political and social concepts. Many people in Bushehr, especially the youth, seek the expansion of civil liberties and democratic rights. They believe that democracy is a path toward the country's development and the resolution of economic, social, and political issues. However, some groups are concerned about the cultural impacts of Western democracy on the society's traditional and Islamic values (Omidpour & Delavari, 2022).

Attitudes toward democracy in Bushehr are also influenced by factors such as education level, economic status, and even gender. Educated individuals and the middle and upper classes of society typically support the expansion of civil liberties, while rural and disadvantaged groups tend to adhere more to traditional and religious values. The historical examination of collective identity in Iran, focusing on individuals over the age of 18 in Bushehr, requires attention to the historical, cultural, social, and political trends of this ancient country. Iran has a complex collective identity rooted in its distant past. The Persian language is recognized as one of the most important elements shaping the collective identity of Iranians. This language, in addition to being a tool of communication, carries Iranian culture, literature, art, and ideas, and has successfully transmitted national identity from one generation to the next (Hoseini et al., 2021).

Islam has also played a significant role in shaping the collective identity of Iranians. With the advent of Islam in Iran, this religion blended with the local culture and traditions of this land, creating a unique form of Islamic-Iranian identity. Iran's tumultuous history, with its various governments, wars, foreign invasions, and national resistance, has influenced the formation of the collective identity of Iranians. National pride, the preservation of independence, and resistance against foreign forces are among the values ingrained in the collective identity of Iranians (Ensandoost et al., 2021).

The city of Bushehr, due to its geographical location and cultural and trade connections with other countries, has a unique collective identity. The collective identity of the people of Bushehr is a blend of local culture, ancient traditions, and foreign influences. The local Bushehri language, rooted in Persian, is one of the important elements of this identity. Handicrafts, customs, architecture, and Bushehri cuisine also contribute to the collective identity of the city's people. However, as mentioned, Bushehr has been a hub of trade and cultural interaction with other countries. This has led to the collective identity of the people of Bushehr being influenced by various cultures. Interaction with the countries of the Persian Gulf, India, and even European countries has introduced new cultural elements into the collective identity of the people of Bushehr.

Attitudes toward democracy in Iran are generally influenced by the long history of absolute and autocratic governments. This situation has caused the concept of democracy and popular governance to remain foreign for a long time; however, throughout history, various movements and ideas have emerged in pursuit of freedom and civil rights (Ensandoost et al., 2021). In Bushehr, attitudes toward democracy are influenced by education level, economic status, and gender. Educated individuals and the middle and upper classes typically support the expansion of civil liberties, while rural and disadvantaged groups tend to adhere more to traditional and religious values. These differences demonstrate that attitudes toward democracy in Bushehr are multi-faceted and complex.

In summary, collective identity and attitudes toward democracy in Iran and the city of Bushehr are complex phenomena influenced by various historical, cultural, social, and political factors. These issues remain some of the primary challenges facing Iranian society and require dialogue, education, and efforts to create mutual understanding among different groups. Cultural and ethnic diversity in Iran is another factor contributing to the complexity of these issues. In Bushehr, in addition to the Persian-speaking majority, ethnic minorities such as Arabs, Lors, and Bakhtiaris also reside. This ethnic

diversity affects the collective identity of the people and can also play an important role in attitudes toward democracy. Media and education also influence the formation of attitudes toward democracy in Bushehr. Access to information and proper education can increase public awareness of democratic concepts and citizenship rights. On the other hand, political and cultural restrictions on freedom of speech and media can hinder the spread of democracy and public awareness. Ultimately, it can be said that collective identity and attitudes toward democracy in Iran and Bushehr are dynamic and evolving phenomena influenced by various historical, cultural, social, political, and economic factors. A deep understanding of these issues and efforts to foster dialogue and convergence among different groups can pave the way toward a more democratic society and a more unified collective identity (Ensandoost et al., 2021). This research, focusing on individuals over the age of 18 in Bushehr, can fill the scientific gaps in the field of collective identity and attitudes toward democracy and contribute to the enrichment of the existing literature in these areas.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present research employs a quantitative method and utilizes the survey technique. Given the investigation of the relationship between identity and democracy, this research is of a correlational nature. The statistical population includes all individuals over the age of 18 in the city of Bushehr. In this study, individuals were examined in terms of age, education, employment, economic status, and marital status. Respondents were selected through systematic random sampling using the block design of the Iranian Statistical Center, with a total of 450 participants chosen based on the research criteria. Due to the presence of several groups in the research, systematic random sampling was used, and members from each section were represented proportionally in the research sample.

All participants were informed about the research, and it was ensured that all information would remain confidential and be used solely for research purposes. To maintain privacy, the participants' details were not recorded.

2.2. Data Collection

Attitudes Toward Democracy: In this research, a researcher-developed questionnaire was used to measure attitudes toward democracy. It was designed based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with values from 1 to 5 assigned accordingly. The scales in this questionnaire were structured ordinally and converted to interval scales to allow for parametric testing. The instrument's validity was confirmed through face and construct validity. In face validity, after pre-testing, some items were revised and rewritten. For construct validity, exploratory factor analysis was conducted using principal axis factoring (PAF) and varimax rotation. The results of the factor analysis indicated that three main factors were extracted from a total of 22 items, with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of 0.710, and Bartlett's test was reported as significant, enabling the possibility of factor analysis. Factor analysis revealed that the three factors with eigenvalues above 1 explained 71.527% of the variance of the variables. Ultimately, confirmatory factor analysis also confirmed the reliability and validity of the model, with all factor loadings exceeding 0.5 and composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha above 0.7 for all dimensions.

Collective Identity Questionnaire: The collective identity questionnaire in this study was validated through face validity and reliability. The face validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by three expert professors and revised based on feedback from experimental students. To assess reliability, Cronbach's alpha was used, and the results for the different dimensions of the questionnaire are as follows: cognition and awareness (0.81), location (0.79), social cohesion (0.85), beliefs (0.78), language (0.82), and overall collective identity (0.81). The overall average Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the collective identity questionnaire was reported as 0.847, indicating the instrument's appropriate reliability. In the end, all Cronbach's alpha coefficients were above 0.7, confirming the high validity of the measurement instrument.

2.3. Data Analysis

The statistical analyses used included tables, relative and cumulative percentages, frequencies, means, standard

deviations, and Pearson's correlation coefficient, analyzed with SPSS24 statistical software.

3. Results

Demographic findings showed that 47.56% of the respondents were female, and 52.44% were male. The majority of the respondents (41.78%) were aged between 31 to 40 years, while the smallest proportion (12.89%) were over 50 years old. Among the respondents, 33.11% were single, and 66.89% were married. The economic status of most respondents (51.11%) was average, while the least proportion (20.67%) reported good economic status. Furthermore, 29.78% of the respondents were unemployed, and 70.22% were employed. Descriptive statistics of the research components are further examined according to the questionnaires.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Democracy Attitude Questionnaire Components

Component	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Behavioral Dimension	30.47	7.494	-0.509	-0.307	12	44
Affective Dimension	14.26	3.776	-0.678	-0.292	4	20
Cognitive Dimension	32.65	8.202	-0.764	0.048	12	44
Attitude toward Democracy	77.40	15.757	-0.234	-1.088	43	104

The significance level of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for all research indices is greater than 0.05. As a result, all research indices have a normal distribution. To examine the relationship between cognition and awareness and attitudes toward democracy, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used, given the normality of the data according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results. The results of this test are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlation Test Results Between All Factors and Attitude Toward Democracy

Component	Cognition and Awareness	Location	Social Cohesion	Beliefs	Language
Behavioral Dimension	0.470**	0.387**	0.370**	0.420**	0.377**
Affective Dimension	0.376**	0.294**	0.286**	0.335**	0.288**
Cognitive Dimension	0.466**	0.339**	0.364**	0.416**	0.350**
Attitude toward Democracy	0.556**	0.431**	0.434**	0.497**	0.430**

**p<0.01

The results from Table 2 indicate significant positive correlations between various factors (Cognition and Awareness, Location, Social Cohesion, Beliefs, and Language) and the components of attitude toward democracy (Behavioral Dimension, Affective Dimension, Cognitive Dimension, and overall Attitude toward Democracy). All correlations are significant at p < 0.001. Cognition and Awareness shows a strong positive correlation with the overall attitude toward democracy (r = 0.556). It also has significant positive correlations with the Behavioral Dimension (r = 0.470), Affective Dimension (r = 0.376), and Cognitive Dimension (r = 0.466).

Location also demonstrates a positive correlation with the overall attitude toward democracy (r = 0.431) and shows significant correlations with the Behavioral Dimension (r = 0.387), Affective Dimension (r = 0.294), and Cognitive Dimension (r = 0.339).

Social Cohesion is positively correlated with the overall attitude toward democracy (r = 0.434), and with the Behavioral Dimension (r = 0.370), Affective Dimension (r = 0.286), and Cognitive Dimension (r = 0.364).

Beliefs have a significant positive correlation with the overall attitude toward democracy (r = 0.497) and show correlations with the Behavioral Dimension (r = 0.420), Affective Dimension (r = 0.335), and Cognitive Dimension (r = 0.416).

Language exhibits a positive correlation with the overall attitude toward democracy (r = 0.430) and shows significant correlations with the Behavioral Dimension (r = 0.377), Affective Dimension (r = 0.288), and Cognitive Dimension (r = 0.350).

Table 3

Summary of Simultaneous Multiple Regression Model for Examining the Impact of Collective Identity Components on Attitude Toward Democracy

Correlation Coefficient	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard Error of Estimate
0.585	0.343	0.335	12.845

The results in Table 3 show that the correlation coefficient of the collective identity components with attitude toward democracy is 0.585. Additionally, based on the R^2 value, it is determined that the collective identity components collectively predict 34.3% of the variance in attitude toward democracy.

Table 4

ANOVA Table for Examining the Adequacy of the Regression Model

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F-Statistic	Significance Level
Regression Model	38214.198	5	7642.840	46.315	0.001
Residual	73267.802	444	165.018		
Total	111482	449			

According to the data in Table 4, the significance level of the test is less than 0.05. As a result, the fitted regression model has adequate fitness.

Table 5

Regression Path Coefficients and Significance Tests

Model	B	Standard Error	β	t-Statistic	Significance Level
Constant	33.059	3.110	-	10.631	0.001
Cognition and Awareness	0.518	0.147	0.424	6.862	0.001
Location	0.253	0.429	0.234	2.508	0.016
Social Cohesion	0.278	0.331	0.241	2.540	0.013
Beliefs	0.247	0.420	0.283	3.489	0.001
Language	0.164	0.396	0.107	2.081	0.043

As shown in Table 5, the significance levels of all the collective identity components are less than 0.05. It is concluded that they significantly affect attitudes toward democracy. According to the B coefficient column, the "Cognition and Awareness" component, with a coefficient of β = 0.424, ranks first in terms of impact, followed by the "Beliefs" component with a coefficient of β = 0.283, the "Social Cohesion" component with a coefficient of β = 0.241, the "Location" component with a coefficient of β = 0.234, and finally, the "Language" component with a coefficient of β = 0.107. Given the positive B coefficient values, it is concluded that the relationship between collective identity components and attitudes toward democracy is direct.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In all societies, democracy is an ideal that is never fully realized. Today, most analysts believe that democracy is not merely the result of negotiations between intelligent elites but is also based on the orientations and attitudes of citizens. In fact, democracy is not a system that functions efficiently from the outset but rather one that is realized and grows through citizen participation. According to the findings of this study, it appears that democracy in Iranian society is not widely embraced by all social groups, and overall, there is not a strong inclination toward democracy. As this study sought to measure the inclination toward democracy in a way that reflects the real attitudes and behaviors of the

respondents, the level of inclination toward democracy is lower compared to some similar domestic studies. This is because the sample population of this study included various social groups, not just educated groups such as students. Additionally, similar studies have assessed democratic values such as political tolerance and equality, which often receive positive responses because these items carry positive value in society, and few people oppose them. The divergence becomes apparent when citizens are expected to act democratically themselves, to deeply oppose authoritarianism, and to not wait for democracy to be granted by the government. It seems that the general perception of democracy among the public is minimal political participation, such as voting.

Behavioral and democratic values in urban affairs are interdependent, and when integrated, they can create an environment conducive to a wide range of completely free actions, enhance diversity in activities, and strengthen constructive public interactions. Naturally, this increases environmental possibilities and leads to a broad spectrum of "voluntary and social" behaviors as opposed to merely "mandatory" ones. In this way, the desired urban spaces are shaped based on behavioral and democratic values. Therefore, the "democratic design of behavior-oriented urban spaces" provides a structured response to the needs and values of urban space users (Jahanshahi et al., 2024). More clearly, this approach allows the design process to become less ambiguous and complex, and through fostering cooperation, civil life is revived, potentially addressing challenging issues of social justice, democracy, and environmental responsiveness. A democratic orientation ensures that every final decision in urban affairs is open to discussion and not considered definitive (Mahdian et al., 2022). The realization of open spaces and grassroots institutions in the social dimension enables people to discuss their problems, question everything, reach understanding, and learn that they can truly solve their urban issues through debate and criticism. On the other hand, achieving the environmental dimension brings about a suitable and high-quality physical setting that enhances people's comfort and presence in urban spaces. However, questioning physical and environmental actions before implementation is necessary, and paying attention to undesirable outcomes after implementation is the most legitimate reason for

their correction. In conclusion, due to the dominance of quantitative approaches in our country (both in practice and theory), urban processes must move away from rigid and inflexible numerical approaches and instead focus on the quality of space production. People should be allowed to assign meaning to created spaces based on their needs and perspectives, transforming them into democratic spaces, once again affirming Josep Ramon's (2003) statement that "the identity of a city is, in fact, its lack of identity because only when people participate in it democratically can it reflect diversity." In doing so, they can get answers to their questions and act more fairly and constructively (the hallmark of the contemporary urban individual). This gives "freedom," "personality," and "autonomy," while fostering "cooperation," "respect," and "creativity." Therefore, it is essential to consider behavioral and democratic values more deeply in the process of urban planning so that it becomes clear that the primary concern in urban development should be to pave the way for decision-making by citizens and non-citizens alike, enabling a future for our cities that is brighter than their past (Filsinger et al., 2021; Hadian & Karimi, 2021).

Just as literature can be examined in relation to its historical and social context, the principle that a literary text is a direct translation of a particular idea can be regarded as reductionist and challenged. Therefore, our approach in the current study is not sociological or extratextual but entirely text-oriented and internal. If we accept that the concept of democracy encompasses, on one hand, ideas such as individualism, equality, and freedom, and, on the other hand, any attempt by the majority to challenge the principles, standards, and norms established by an elite minority, then the categorization of literature into elite and popular literature becomes relevant. This principle was particularly prominent in the classical literary school, where characters, themes, and linguistic levels in the genres of tragedy and comedy were entirely distinct, which naturally led to differences in the audiences of these genres. Romanticism in the 19th century sought to merge these domains and succeeded in establishing a form of democracy between characters and, especially, vocabulary. However, following this struggle against norms imposed by thinkers on literature and the establishment of equality, a new form of distinction between elite and popular literature emerged in the mid-

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19th century, in which writers and, consequently, critics played a role. Undoubtedly, the origin of such a distinction lies in the definition that each writer or literary critic provides of the concept of literature. Whether this independence is self-imposed due to the elevated view of literature or a result of the belief in the impotence of literature and thus imposed from the outside, the general readership could no longer relate to it, and only a small elite could comprehend it. The distinction between elite and popular literature progressed to the extent that perhaps even the difficulty of understanding a text became one of the criteria for distinguishing pure literature.

One of the limitations of this study was that it was conducted in the city of Bushehr, which limits the generalizability of the results. Another limitation is the self-reported nature of the research tools, which may have led participants to respond with bias or misunderstanding of the questions. It is recommended that this study be conducted in other geographic areas of Iran and compared with the results of this research. It is also suggested that other research tools, such as interviews, be used to examine these variables. Since one of the dimensions of attitudes toward democratic culture is the behavioral dimension, using qualitative methods alongside quantitative methods can help in better understanding and gaining a more accurate knowledge of this concept. One of the dimensions of attitudes toward democratic culture is civil participation. To strengthen this dimension, serious efforts should be made to create conditions for the participation of both governmental and non-governmental sectors, such as non-governmental organizations, civil society activists, mosques, and religious centers. Freedom and equality are two dimensions of attitudes toward democratic culture. These dimensions are often raised in political debates, whereas freedom and equality should be considered social phenomena originating from within family culture. Equal attention to sons and daughters in the family and the elimination of restrictive gender divisions should begin within the family and then extend to society. In this regard, media literacy has a direct and positive relationship with attitudes toward democratic culture. Given the increasing use of various media, especially virtual social networks, it is recommended that attention be paid to the level and manner of individuals' use of cyberspace, and necessary education

should be provided. The educational book "Thinking and Media Literacy," which is taught in the second phase of secondary education, is an important step that should be designed on a broader scale and for various age groups, with both theoretical and practical education, as many adults also need this training.

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.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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