



# A Content Analysis and Political Discourse in the Outflow of Iranian Talent

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**Abstract:** This paper examined “20 Year National Vision” as Iran’s general policies and the 5th 5-year Development Plan were approved by Iran’s Expediency Council in 2002. This document covers the future outlook of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the horizon of the next two decades, and it is a reliable source of evidence. Study also has political discourse analysis of Iranian authorities’ perspectives on the phenomenon with different political orientations during Pre and Post of Islamic Revolution (1975-2018), contributes to outflow of Iranian social capital.

**Keywords:** Brain drain, political perspectives, national plan, Western culture

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The implicit assumption in much of the social science literature on triangulation is about developing a more effective method for the capturing and fixing of social phenomenon in order to realize more accurate analyses and explanations (Kohlbacher, 2006). This research provides the content analysis of the Iranian National Macro Strategy for a development known as the “20-year National Vision” in the context of Iran’s brain drain. Study also examines and compares Iran’s brain drain and reverse brain in a political discourse relied on different political orientations in context outflow of Iranian social capital.

Iran is the second largest economy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions after Saudi Arabia, with an estimated Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of USD 439 billion in the fiscal year of 2017. It also has the second largest population in the region after Egypt, with an estimated 80.6 million individuals in 2017 (World Bank, 2017). The country has been under sanction for about 35 years. There are a variety of challenges associated with delivering economic relief to Iran through the lifting of international sanctions (Rosenberg, 2014). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts that the economy will expand in 2014 for the first time in three years, growing at 1.5 percent.

## 2. THE CONTENT ANALYSIS

Iran’s general administrative policies act as the intermediary between the Islamic Republic of Iran’s vision for the 2025 horizon and the practice discipline for establishing executive policies and laws. In 2002, Iran’s Expediency Council approved the “20-Year National Vision Plan” to promote the position of Islamic Republic of Iran in national, regional, and international levels where Iran becomes a developed country in the space of the next twenty years. Based on the document, Iran having the first economic, scientific and technical standings in the South West Asia region [including Mid-Asia, Caucasia, the Middle East, and neighbouring countries] (Vaezi, 2009).

The 5<sup>th</sup> 5-year Development Plan implemented essential steps to institute an Iranian Islamic model which is essential for human development based on truth and justice and the achievement of a society based on Islamic and revolutionary values which realizes the indicators of social and economic justice through the country’s three institutions (executive, legislature, and judiciary) – which is expected to emerge in the period of 2011-2015. These general policies have been taken within the framework of the Twenty Year Perspective document and from the attitude of pushing forward and justice.

Lack of attention to the brain drain phenomenon is evident in the macro and micro national plan. Therefore, this content analysis uncovers some points related to the human resource and education policies mentioned in the documents.

### **2.1. Iran's "20 year National Vision"**

In 1988, the Iran-Iraq war stopped and the Iranian authorities adopted a comprehensive strategy to focus again on its political and economic development. Iran's "20 year National Vision" [Persian; CheshmAndaz] produced the first official term for a long-term developmental macro strategy. The document designed covers the future outlook of the Islamic Republic of Iran in a horizon that comprises of the next two decades. Based on the "20 year National Vision", Iran will be a developed country holding the first place in the region in areas of economy, knowledge, and technology; with an Islamic and revolutionary identity, making it an inspiration for the world; and with productive and influential interactions in international relations.

In 2005, Iran's Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution declared their proposed general policies to President Mohammad Khatami. The Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution endowed the Supreme Leader with a wide-ranging authority. He could "determine the interests of Islam," "set general guidelines for the Islamic Republic," "supervise policy implementation," and "mediate between the executive, legislative, and judiciary arms." He could grant amnesty and dismiss presidents as well as vet candidates for that office (Abrahamian, 2008). The responsibility became clear in Article 110 of the Iranian Constitution in the context duties and powers of the Leadership. Section (1) of the Article states that: Delineation of the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran is after consultation with the Nation's Exigency Council.

Iran's "20 year National Vision" outlined a road map for the country's cultural, political, and economic developments during the next two decades. According to the perspective, Iran is a country, which has the first standing in terms of economic development, science and technology in the region; also with an Islamic identity and revolutionary ideas, inspiring and effective interactions with the Muslim world, and good international relations. The macro strategies estimated were designed to attain the first position in the fields of economy, science, and technology in the Western South Asia region. In November 2003, the full text of the twenty-year National Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran was delivered by the Leader of the heads of the three governing branches [executive, legislature, and judiciary] (Office, 2013).

Iran's "20-Year National Vision" consists of 8 main parts. The foremost section of the plan emphasizes on religious democracy, social justice, legitimate freedoms, protection of human rights and dignity, and gains from social and legal justice. The second part discusses endowments of modern knowledge; capabilities in scientific discipline and technology, and reliance on a heavier share of human resources and social capital in national output. A secure, independent, and powerful defence system based on multilateral deterrence and alliance between the government and the population is designed into third part. The fourth part of the plan explains in context health, social security, equal opportunities that are distanced from discrimination, and benefits from a favourable natural environment. Discussions on cooperative and collaborative social mentality were devoted to the revolution in the fifth part. In the sixth section of the plan, it estimated that Iran will achieve the first position in the fields of economy, science, and technology in the Western South Asia region. A new model of democracy in the Islamic World based on the teachings of Islam and the thoughts of Imam Khomeini is the base of hope for the future in 2025. The final piece of the plan emphasises that the country is ready for interactions with the remainder of the cosmos based on the principles of respect, wisdom, and grace.

Presently, based on the "20-Year National Vision Plan", the administration has prepared documents for the 5<sup>th</sup> 5-year Development Plan that is effective for the period of 2011-2015.

### **2.2. Iran's National Strategy for Development Plan (2011-2015)**

The General Policies of the 5<sup>th</sup> 5- year Development Plan has 4 main chapters that include: cultural affairs, scientific and technical affairs, social affairs, and economic affairs with some elements in context politics, defence, and security affairs which are divided into 45 levels. The declaration text by the Supreme Leader to the President was sent simultaneously to the Majlis President, the Chief of the Judiciary, and the President of the Expediency Council (Portal, 2014). In October 2009, the Supreme Leader declared the general policies of the 5<sup>th</sup> 5-year Development Plan to President Ahmadinejad.

The document generally highlighted stepped up efforts to promote social justice and equal opportunities. Moreover, the document enlightened the steps to be taken in order to realize the

indicators of social and economic justice through the country's three institutions (executive, legislative, and judiciary). According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), social justice is the sentiment which believes that everyone deserves equal economic, political and societal rights and opportunities.

Point 14.g of the national strategy has an issue on "Preventing administrative corruption and struggling against it". According to the World Bank, "Corruption is a complex phenomenon. Its origins lie deep in bureaucratic and political foundations, and its effect on development varies with country conditions". Despite the fact, in the period of 2005-2013, Ahmadinejad's State Iranian Para-governmental Organization had influenced the cognitive performance of research grants and fellowships. Therefore, a number of undergrad students with a GPA of below 14 and graduate students with a GPA of below 16 were sent to universities abroad. In October 2014 during the Rouhani Government, Iran's Ministry of Sciences reported "illegal scholars" and cancelled 863 doctoral fellowships, and had faced a conservative reaction. The people believe that the government and media had hushed the issue at the time of the Ministry's publication, and the political objectives have been exaggerated. In recent years, a large number of government-financed fellowship students abroad decided not to return home, adding to the brain drain problem (Amuzegar, 2009).

Part B of the chapter on economic affairs has a particular focus on the "Spread of social justice". In relation to brain drain topic studied by Salmani *et al.* (2011), they had analysed the impacts of social justice and concluded that the Iranian brain drain is a social problem and elaborated a five dimensional social justice model as the main cause of brain drain. The results exhibited significant reverse effects of distributional justice, emotional justice, procedural justice, transactional justice, and informational justice on brain drain intention.

Point 7e of the chapter on scientific and technical affairs emphasizes on "gaining access to needed advanced technologies". Educated and talented people are a main source of advance technology. The government is faced with a great dilemma where the brain drain phenomenon has negatively influenced growth in this area, including the development of S&T. Reverse brain drain will involve transferring modern technology, new experiences and accumulated knowledge of expatriates into the country, which will then contribute to the nation's economic growth and development. Alas, there was no mention at any point in context on how to bring back talents from abroad.

At the same time, the annual exodus of more than 100, 000 educated men and women in search of better and safer opportunities placed Iran near the top of the list for nations experiencing brain drains (Amuzegar, 2009). In addition, UNESCO reported that Iran has made such progress in the provision of basic education, such that a new challenge has emerged with the increase in youth unemployment rates. The scarcity of job opportunities has led to a significant brain drain in recent years, with young people leaving the country in search of opportunities abroad (UNESCO, 2013).

Despite the "20 year National Vision" first chapter's emphasis on religious democracy, social justice, legitimate freedoms, protection of human rights and dignity, and benefits from social and legal justice, UNESCO in the Country Programing Document had reported that in the period of 2011-213. According to the report, a focus on ensuring civic rights and accountability, a spirit of cooperation and law-abidance, and strengthened legal guarantees for the activities of public oversight bodies can directly contribute to an enhanced social consciousness and an attitude of responsibility, and help prevent brain drain from the country (UNESCO, 2013).

### 3. POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN THE OUTFLOW OF IRANIAN SOCIAL CAPITAL

In the last section, the study reviewed and analysed constitution documents. There was not even a point in the plan that mentioned Iran's brain drain phenomenon. In this section, the study has critically analysed and compared the political orientations of the brain drain and its reversal in relation to the topics brought up during the time of four presidents who had different political orientations.

In March 1975, the government dissolved all existing political parties and established a single party called the Iranian People's Resurgence Party (in Farsi; Rastakhiz). The Shah mentioned in a speech that whoever did not agree with the party should leave the country. As a result, a number of politically active individuals and university professors left the country. The first phase, which is also very significant, pertains to the migration of talented people from Iran to developed industrialized countries; it began in 1975, and lasted until the Islamic Revolution in 1979. However, some previous

studies had shown that before the Islamic Revolution, Iran witnessed an overflow of a large pool of professionals. Hence, during the Islamic Revolution, the country and the region as a whole could not counter the 'brain drain' phenomenon. Nevertheless, in the 1970s, there were more Iranian doctors in New York than in any city outside Tehran. The term "brain drain" was first attached to Iran.

In 1998, after the Iran-Iraq war, Iran had installed a new constitution. According to the new constitution, Iran is governed by a president and the post of prime minister is abolished. In the period of 1989-1997, Hashmi Rafsanjani served as the President of Iran. Pragmatist President Rafsanjani's attempt to sell the nationalized industrial units to their ex-owners and other capitalists was criticized by Ayatollah Khamenei and the conservatives, so the government then decided to offer the industries to religious and loyal parties at better terms (Amirahmadi, 1995). Rafsanjani enhanced the system's performance and legitimacy, as it was imperative to generate a sustained expansion of the economy. His planned reforms included attracting foreign and expatriate investment, reversing brain drain, rationalizing the subsidy system, and integrating Iran into the global economy in terms of human resources. This construction of political orientation encouraged expatriate Iranians to come back, and the country witnessed a significant return of its people.

In 1989, Mohammad Khatami with a Reformist orientation won the presidential elections. Khatami raised policy reform slogans advocating freedom of speech, share of political and civil rights, gender equality, and meritocracy in domestic policies as well as improved international relationships with dialogues among civilisations in terms of foreign policy. In the period of 1989-2005 under Mohammad Khatami, due to Iran's economic growth and new political orientation as Reformists, the brain drain trend reversed and the country witnessed a significant wave of educated Iranians returning to Iran. President Khatami managed to moderately reverse the brain drain, as skilled Iranian expatriates gradually began to return.

Some even repatriated a part of their assets, although their preferred mode of investment was speculation in real estate, rather than committing funds to the more complicated and cumbersome manufacturing sector (ICHI, 2013). So, the political orientation of that time (Reformist) brought in investments from international companies, together with expanding job opportunities and a small group of returning Iranian talents to the country.

In the period of 2005-2013 under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the United Nations Security Council added two additional resolutions against Iran, which are Resolution 1803 passed in March 2008, and Resolution 1929 adopted in June 2010. Ahmadinejad had often downplayed Iran's brain drain. The fact that Ahmadinejad and his supporters did not want to address Iran's brain drain problem caused more divisions within the Iranian government. This was because more moderate politicians see this phenomenon as severely damaging, and they were right. If remained unchecked, this phenomenon could contribute to factors that could cause the eventual downfall of a country (Javedanfar, 2008).

President Ahmadinejad ignored the issue while Kamran Daneshjou, the Science Minister during his administration had argued that the fears of brain drain were overblown. But some attempts were nonetheless made to persuade Iranian professionals to come back; in 2009, the Sharif University of Technology invited all Iranian students with scholarships to the world's top universities to continue their education at the school without an entrance test (Mohammadi, 2014b).

On 14 Jun 2013, Dr. Hasan Rouhani won the presidential election with promises of "a government of prudence and hope" as his political slogan. President Rouhani declared that the current conditions of the country had contributed to brain drain. He asserted, "to attain development, we need innovation, invention, and scientific discovery". Moreover, he demanded, "we should support and save our elites and foreign elites and talented individuals willing to come to Iran as well as allowing a bit more tolerance". Dr. Rouhani believed that the brilliant talents and elites require an environment and milieu that is conducive to flourish. He says, "the developed countries attract elites from any geography and ethnicity; the very nature of being elite is license for countries to attract them, and the elites' birthplace and ethnicity are quite irrelevant here" (Presidency, 2014).

On 18 May 2014, around the time for the ceremony to commemorate national elites and artists, President Rouhani said, "Development of each country requires benefits from scholars, scientists, and creative people. He asserted, "Any country that is moving towards progress and growth has taken proper advantage of its scientists and creative people and meanwhile attached great significance to engineering science, expertise and knowledge." (Peresidency, 2014).

President Rouhani rightly pointed out that educated talents have a big significance to development and economic growth. Yet current socio-cultural, political, and economic conditions in Iran encourage talents to migrate. He didn't mention what are the conditions that will be provided to returning Iranian expatriates. Today, Rouhani's government can hope that, similar to the Construction State in the period of 1989-97 and Reformist State in the late of 1990s, an improvement in socio-political conditions and more tolerance will lead to the return of Iran's talented people and an eventual brain gain for the economy. There is no evidence that attracts and encourages Iranian expatriates returning to date.

A comparison between the two main political approaches in the Islamic Republic of Iran indicates that reforms, liberal approaches, and Islamic principles have taken over the political power in the last sixteen years. Reformists criticized the regime's principles and policies, arguing that institutionalized religious domination was wrong. Islamic principles who dominated the government and parliament during the second period gave place to the reformed opponents. They supported the supreme leaders and wanted to preserve the system of guardianship. Both of the political approaches disclaimed any responsibility regarding the brain drain issue (Karimi and Garaati, 2013). Moreover, starting from the 1970s to the present different political forces, the ideology began with a vantage point close to secularism, to the current administration that is governed by Islamic principles and positions. Both points of view hold that talented people do not play a significant role in the sustainable development of the country.

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Iran has a strong foundation for rapid growth and development, with the world's second largest petroleum reserve, a young, well-educated population and a well-developed industrial and commercial infrastructure (Maloney, 2015). But revolution, war, mismanagement and factional feuds over economic policies have undercut the country's potential since the Islamic Republic's birth in 1978. Moreover, international sanctions due to Iran's nuclear programme and current policies combine to bring about a severe deterioration in the ability of Iranian people to pursue their economic and social rights (ICHI, 2013). On top of this, has brought many challenges for the development of S&T (Kober, 2011).

In this study, the researcher has critically analysed Iran's "20 year Nation Plan" on its macro strategies for development and its 5th 5-year Development Plan for the period of 2011-2015 on the topic of brain drain. In addition, the study has examined the political discourses during the time of four presidents with different political orientations in the context of Iranian brain drain from the 1989 to present. The brain drain problem creates a huge economic and social void in the country. According to government officials, the impact of the human resources movement each year is equivalent to \$150 billion in foreign aid annually.

By reviewing Iran's macro strategies plan and considering the major guidelines that are built in the document relevant to human capital and social capital, there is a lack of care in general policies to provide proper conditions for the return of educated and talented people to the land. Moreover, deficiencies in any current policies have further encouraged educated people to refrain from coming back to their homeland.

Talented people are a crucial source for R&D. The social capital contribution in the social economy is purported to be channelled to local economic growth. However, many internal and international organisations declared that Iran ranks first in the global brain drain list. In fact, a large-scale migration of talented Iranian people is seen as a one-way movement to industrialised democratic countries. Re-examining the development plan indicates that there are some sections and points in relation to human resources and social capital that do not address the issue. Simply put, there is not a point or subject that is related to the Iranian talent migration as well as any policy that encourages the expatriates to return. Lack of attention in Iran's "20-Year National Vision" does not only discourage educated and talented people to return, but also encourage the Iranian people to move overseas. In the few years back, there is no policy regarding the brain drain phenomenon and the reduction or reversal of brain drain. In other words, the brain drain issue is neglected in the nation's general policies and national development.

Although job opportunities and wage gaps continue to fuel the strong push and pull effects, talent migration is considered a consequence of the current political order in source nations. In other words,

the rate of brain drain contributes to a country's political status. Thus, it can be concluded that the Iranian talents' migrated to other modern countries due to the nation's own political events. The principal political issues leading to the people's migration to industrialized areas were:

- Dissolved all existing political parties (1975)
- Islamic Revolution (1979)
- Cultural Revolution (1980-83)
- Iran-Iraq War (1980-88)
- Presidential election due to fraud controversies and political instability (2009)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, both governments of Construction and Reformist orientations considered the gradual increase of political freedom, and liberalization was seen as central to building a solid relationship between civil society and state, which in turn had the potential to mobilize popular support behind the politics of change (Behraves, 2014). The Iranian brain drain contributes to the loss of social capital in the social economy and the local economic development. The two political orientations that have reduced brain drain and encourage Iranian expatriates to return were:

- Construction orientation under President Hashemi Rafsanjani's State in the period of 1989-1997
- Reformist orientation under President Mohammad Khatami's State in the period of 1997-2005

Regardless of the individuals' behavioural intention of the various people movements, the current constitutional document and policy issues discourage and have little effect on the reverse of brain drain in the period of 1989 to 2005. The outflow of Iranian talents needs more attention from both the constitution and policy makers.

The nature of Iranian brain drain is different from other nations due to political events from the 1970s to date. There are two different political perspectives between national authorities and talents, those who left the homeland and take place to overseas, particularly Post-Revolution. Pre-Revolution, Iranian authorities declared that talented and educated Iranian people who have migrated to industrialised democratic countries are influenced by Western culture, ignoring the fact that Iran has a long and honourable history as a highly cultured nation without the influence of Western culture.

Hence, the both mentioned political perspectives have reached a same conclusion that is a westernise definitions of democracy within the global political system. Conversely, the Iranian talent and elite are unsatisfied with existing policies and believe that the way out of the current political and economic constraints requires a move towards a democratic society. The struggle between the two ideas began in 1975 and the growth of this struggle has accelerated in recent times. The distinction is a major gap between two dissimilar ideas. These conflicting opinions have brought a social capital flight over the past few decades.

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**Citation:** *Iraj Roudgar. "A Content Analysis and Political Discourse in the Outflow of Iranian Talent". International Journal of Political Science (IJPS), vol4, no.4, 2018, pp.7-13. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2454-9452.0404002.*

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