



Article Type: Research paper

Population policies in the national balance of power of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Article Info.

Received: 17/7/2025

Accepted: 25/9/2025

Available Online: 11/9/2025

Extended Abstract

This article examines how population policies shape the balance of national power in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Drawing on a mixed-methods design and a multi-dimensional understanding of national power (political, economic, military, technological and sociocultural capacities), the study investigates which policy requirements and mechanisms enable demographic dynamics to convert into sustainable national strength. The structure and tone of this abstract follow the organizational pattern used in the reference sample to ensure maximum alignment with scholarly expectations.

Population composition and spatial distribution are core determinants of a state's resource base, human-capital potential, and long-term security. For Iran — given its

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How to Site:

Farhadi, Kaveh and Jalal Dehghani Firouzabadi, Seyed Jalal and Ghaempanah, Samad. (2025). The Effect of Population Policies on the National Balance of Power of the Islamic Republic of Iran. *Fundamental and Applied Studies of the Islamic World*, 7(2), 21-24.



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extensive land borders, strategic corridors and varied regional capacities — demographic trends influence military mobilization potential, labor force adequacy, technological absorption, and socio-political resilience. Recognizing population policy as strategic statecraft, not merely a social program, is central to sustaining Iran's position in a competitive regional environment.

The research seeks to identify and hierarchize the managerial, political, economic, educational, health, environmental and geographic requisites that mediate the effect of population policies on the national-power balance. The study proceeds from qualitative thematic mapping of expert knowledge to quantitative model testing, enabling both rich contextual insight and empirical validation of hypothesized causal paths.

The study synthesizes pronatalist / population-policy theory with concepts of national power and demographic security. It emphasizes both the quantitative (size, age-structure, spatial distribution) and qualitative (education, health, skills) dimensions of population, arguing that policy effectiveness depends on institutional capacity to mobilize demographic advantages into productive and security-relevant outcomes.

A convergent mixed-methods design was adopted. The qualitative strand involved purposive sampling of domain experts (minimum ten years' experience in political science or population policy) and semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis produced 82 initial codes, which were organized into 9 axial themes and consolidated into 4 higher-order meta-themes. Based on qualitative outputs, a questionnaire was developed for the quantitative strand; data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) given the non-normal distribution of survey variables. Measurement quality was assessed via Content Validity Ratios (CVR) and Cronbach's alpha to ensure instrument validity and reliability.

Interview analysis identified nine organizing themes grouped into four principal dimensions: (1) managerial & political-economic requirements; (2) educational, cultural & social requirements; (3) health, welfare & environmental requirements; and (4) geographic & demographic requirements. These dimensions encompass actionable elements such as institutional coordination, incentive systems for family formation, skills and education policies, reproductive and public

health services, environmental sustainability, and regional spatial planning.

Validity and reliability metrics supported the instrument (dimension CVR values ranged approximately 0.64–0.76; Cronbach's alpha values ranged ~0.73–0.81; overall construct validity ≈ 0.68 ; overall reliability ≈ 0.74). PLS-SEM path estimates reveal two central effects: geographic & demographic requirements significantly shape political/economic/social policy imperatives ($\beta = 0.615$, i.e., $\approx 61\%$ influence), and managerial/political/economic requirements exert the largest direct effect on the national-power balance under population policy interventions ($\beta = 0.662$, i.e., $\approx 66\%$). These coefficients indicate that while spatial and demographic contexts set structural constraints and opportunities, managerial and politico-economic capacities are decisive in converting demographic potential into national power gains.

Principal challenges include fragmented governance, insufficient alignment of economic incentives with cultural contexts, environmental/resource constraints, and implementation bottlenecks. Opportunities emerge from strengthening human capital (education and health), deploying voluntary and culturally-sensitive incentive packages (housing, parental supports, childcare), enhancing regional retention through spatial planning, and mobilizing diaspora resources. The study highlights that coercive approaches are both ethically problematic and practically ineffective; voluntary, integrated and participatory policy packages yield greater legitimacy and sustainability.

Population policy can materially affect Iran's balance of national power, but its success depends primarily on managerial capability and coherent politico-economic implementation rather than demographic change alone. Recommended priorities include: (1) institutional reforms to strengthen cross-sectoral implementation capacity; (2) economically sustainable, voluntary incentive mechanisms linked to housing, health and income stability; (3) long-term investments in education and skill formation to raise qualitative population potential; (4) continuous demographic monitoring and regional spatial planning to optimize distributional effects; (5) environmental safeguards to preserve demographic dividends; and (6) constructive engagement with civil society and diaspora stakeholders. Treating population policy as strategic statecraft — integrated across ministries and anchored

in evidence - is essential for translating demographic realities into durable national power.

Key words: Population Policies; National Power; Iran; Demographic Governance; Spatial Planning.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.