Iran and COVID-19: A Bottom-up, Faith-Driven, Citizen-Supported Response

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic cast doubts on governments' traditional crisis responses and sparked a surge in citizen-led, participatory, bottom-up responses. Iran's experience is worth investigating because it relied significantly on citizen groups to manage the crisis despite long-term sanctions and extremely restricted resources. The authors undertook an exploratory case study using the grounded theory (GT) method and an online survey to explore Iran's confrontation. The central notion discovered was referred to as 'faith-driven civic engagement.' The response was characterized by adaptability, promptness, and comprehensiveness. The causes and strategic orientations included intrinsic motives, capability building, and leadership.

Keywords Bottom-up response to crisis · Crisis Management · Civic engagement · Citizen-driven governance · Faith-driven engagement · Disaster management

Introduction

Today, the globe is confronted by a rising number of global issues that are becoming more complicated. Local and national crises are currently fast spreading around the world (Farazmand, 2007). The COVID-19 epidemic was a global calamity that ushered in a New Normal, in which bottom-up disaster responses are just as critical as top-down crisis management, which dominates popular

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perceptions of crisis management (Haeffele & Storr, 2020). Individuals organize their bottom-up recovery efforts – or occasionally for others – because they know and trust their neighbors and community and can utilize the organizations, resources, and abilities that they already possess, just as they frequently do in normal times. Emerging governance theories, such as good governance and sound governance, as well as crisis management theories, such as surprise management theory, are born in this fashion to help comprehend citizens' and non-governmental organizations' participative and bottom-up practices (see Farazmand, 2009, 2012; Graham et al., 2003).

Iran was one of the first countries to be hit with COVID-19. Iran's confrontation approach to crisis was unique in that many operations were carried out by popular (jihadi) groups or non-governmental entities, making it an intriguing subject for investigation. When many people around the world wore their masks and quarantined themselves at home, many students, retired doctors, housewives, and ordinary people offered to aid public servants in hospitals, cemeteries, mosques, and streets, as well as laypeople (e.g., see Khanzadeh et al., 2021a, b; "Who is the smallest bathing volunteer for corpses infected with the new Coronavirus?," 2020). Additionally, panic buying was largely absent from society (UK Envoy Highlights Good Supply of Commodities in Iran, 2020). A pivotal role for jihadi (civic) groups enabled a substantial increase in hand hygiene, face masks, and disinfection (e.g., see *Women in Urmia Are Sewing Face Masks and Gowns to Help Frontline Medical Workers in Iran | UNDP in Iran*, 2020). They campaigned for 'No Rent' and 'Stay at Home to Save Lives,' and converted mosques into factories producing face masks and protective apparel (e.g., see "Forgiving rents of commercial buildings in the ownership of the mosques in Southern Khorasan province," 2020). Since the beginning, civic groups have also established and operated local distribution facilities for food packages, hot meals, and juice (e.g., see "Daily production of 4,000 bottles of juice by congregations for the COVID-19 hospitals' patients and nurses," 2020). Volunteer homemakers and housewives were also proactive in this effort.

Of course, the simple picture depicted above is not without complications. This bottom-up, citizen-driven response to crises is commonly thought to be rooted in the society's religious culture, notably the decades-old culture of martyrdom, as well as millennia-old Iranian altruism (Culture of Help). Second, people may envision a simplified explanation of government agencies' inactivity during times of crisis as the primary cause for such a response. Despite the criticisms leveled at governmental and quasi-governmental agencies for their inadequacies and incapacities, their allegedly supporting and complementary roles to civic groups complicate the research issue beyond government agencies' inactivity. Moreover, from a political standpoint, the crisis was arguably resolved through leadership, dialogue, social mobilization, and civic support systems rather than by top-down or coercive methods like strict lockdowns.

As such, the article's purpose is to begin unraveling why and how Iranian citizens participated in virtually all facets of the bottom-up response. To this end, the research question was defined as follows: What was the background, enablers, and characteristics of Iran's unusual bottom-up response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

The study used grounded theory (GT) methodology to perform an exploratory single-case study of Iran's encounter with the pandemic.

The following section discusses the theoretical foundations for bottom-up responses to crises, surprise management theory, and faith-driven civic engagement. The Method section describes the GT approach, survey and interviews, followed by the open, axial, and selective codes generated. The Findings section provides GT findings in terms of context, causes and strategic orientations, features, the axial category, and the survey findings. Finally, the conclusion, implications, and limitations are discussed.

Theoretical Background

Bottom-up Response

Bottom-up recovery efforts provide goods, services, and information and coordinate and encourage recovery since they can access local knowledge, utilize and leverage social capital, and adapt to changing circumstances (L. E. Grube, 2020). Bottom-up initiatives can supply essential products and services and organize reconstruction and recovery efforts because they (1) have access to local knowledge, (2) can leverage social capital (i.e., social networks), and (3) are adaptable (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009a; Storr et al., 2016). Until the early twentieth century, disaster relief was primarily delivered at the community level. Even though governments now recognize and encourage public–private partnerships, business collaboration, and occasionally citizen participation (e.g., in the United States via the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) 2010 Whole Community doctrine), local emergency management is still argued to be constrained by their reliance on federal funding and command-and-control models (Horwitz, 2020).

The sociological lens has been used extensively to study the motivations, characteristics, and effects of bottom-up responses to and volunteerism in emergencies and crises. Kendra and Wachtendorf (2007) and Wachtendorf et al. (2018) examined community innovation in relation to disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery practices. Nelan et al. (2018) reviewed of the literature on the inflow of products and material gifts following catastrophe occurrences, which is sometimes referred to as a "second disaster," with non-essential and non-priority items posing transportation and storage problems for the community of survivors. They discovered that while agility—the timeliness, flexibility, and reaction time in the supply chain—was seen as essential to a healthy supply chain, there was no uniform understanding of how to accomplish it. Steffen and Fothergill (2009) discovered that, in addition to the apparent long-term benefits of personal recovery, the chance to volunteer had enduring effects on self-concept, resulting in substantial changes in life choices.

Why do people depend on bottom-up efforts? It all comes down to processes that work during mundane times and resources that are 'on-hand.' People turn to a civic organization, neighborhood group, or church for help when they need it, like last-minute child care. These same structures should be triggered in the event of a crisis

or emergency (Grube & Storr, 2014). 'Social bricolage' is a term used in entrepreneurial literature to describe these 'hands-on' resources. Bricolage concept points to resourcefulness and adaptability in an existing context (Di Domenico et al., 2010). Even when emergency preparations are in place, people depend on their social networks. The bottom-up reaction may also offer emotional support during times of stress by way of familiar faces and shared stories of persistence to inspire rebuilding and recovery (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009b). It is argued that bottom-up responses are more widespread in some civilizations, such as Iran's, due to a long tradition of altruism and charity (including the emphasis on bottom-up approaches in their religion), exposure to frequent natural or artificial calamities, and experience garnered from decades of practice (Farhadi, 2002; Hasani Nik & Mokhtarianpour, 2019).

Civic Engagement in Crisis

There is a growing corpus of literature in public administration on the twin domains of crisis and emergency management (Farazmand, 2007). However, there is no broadly recognized or validated crisis management theory because essential concepts lack generally accepted definitions. To understand crisis management, we must examine what the government does and the roles and perceptions of non-governmental actors, stakeholders, and citizens, particularly in bottom-up responses (Christensen et al., 2016). This article uses Christensen et al., (2016) definition of crisis management as the processes through which an organization tackles a crisis before, during, and after it happens. These processes comprise the identification, assessment, understanding, and resolution of a crisis. Crisis management is more than technical containment and logistics; it raises concerns of power, trust, and legitimacy.

The concept of citizen-driven response has just lately begun to make its appearance into the literature on crisis management (e.g., see Bodin & Nohrstedt, 2016; Bodin et al., 2019; Correia et al., 2020; French, 2011; Goulding et al., 2018; Kapucu, 2015; Kapucu & Ustun, 2018; McLennan, 2020). The concept of faith-driven civic engagement, which this paper identified as the core of Iran's pandemic response, has received significantly less attention (the only instances the authors found, see Greyling et al., 2016; Rivera & Nickels, 2014). However, Pratt et al. (2018) discovered that encouraging and maintaining faith is crucial for the trust under conditions of extreme uncertainty. Thus, re-reading earlier research on social capital and trust in crisis management and bottom-up responses can aid in comprehending the role of faith in civic engagement during emergencies, catastrophes, and crises.

Lastly, leadership is a vital component of crisis management, governance, and the overall response, especially for collaborative bottom-up approaches. Farazmand (2007) links the response to Hurricane Katrina's "grand failure" to leadership failure. Leadership in times of crisis can be discussed on a variety of levels. Leadership can be evaluated in terms of public administrators (e.g., Kapucu & Ustun, 2018), community leaders (e.g., Saja et al., 2018), senior political or military leaders (e.g.,

Kapucu, 2015), or more socially in terms of collaborative governance (e.g., see Kapucu, 2015; Kapucu & Ustun, 2018). The authors chose to focus on the function of Iran's political leadership (the Supreme Leader), although leadership is as essential at lower levels of crisis and catastrophe management.

Surprise Management Theory

Farazmand (2007, 2009, 2014) proposed 'surprise management theory' based on chaos and complexity theories to address the non-linearity, hyper-uncertainties, complexities, and surprise of crisis actors and citizens in contemporary crises. The theory was initially conceived after Hurricane Katrina's 2005 "grand failure" in crisis management. Citizen engagement, capacity development, and professional training all play a critical role in this approach. Accepting shocks rather than rationalizing them and attempting to train surprise managers are its key recommendations (Farazmand, 2009). managers are its key recommendations (Farazmand, 2009). It argues for flexible, collaborative, and citizen-engaging approaches to crisis management (Farazmand, 2007).

Method

Grounded Theory (GT)

This study employed a qualitative 'grounded theory' (GT) methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to examine the 'context, causes, strategies, features … and the axial concept' (Bryman, 2012) that underpin Iran's bottom-up response. GT is a frequently utilized method for generating theoretical frameworks since it enables the investigation of social phenomena and the development of notions and constructs based on data (Bryman, 2012; Oni et al., 2016). GT is a creative process in which the researcher 'invents' and imposes ideas on the data. While these ideas may be existing or be created for a specific purpose, there seems to be no effort to derive them from lay concepts. It attempts to generate categories or, more importantly, a theory that is primarily devoid of theoretical preconceptions (Blaikie, 2000). Theoretical sampling, coding, theoretical saturation, and constant comparison are all GT tools. Coding is frequently classified into three types: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, as used here (Bryman, 2012).

Data Collection and Participants

The data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and attending related webinars on Iran's bottom-up reaction to crises, emphasizing the COVID-19 pandemic's resurgence. Newspaper articles, civic group publications, and prominent webinars in Iran were all part of the material examined. Twenty-six interviews were done in all. Table 1 listed the interviews arranged during four months and lasted between 15 and 120 min each. All interviewees gave

Table 1 Interviewees

Interview No	Education	Position	Organization by function
1	Hawzah Master of Islam History	Chairman of Trustees	Imamzadeh mosque
2	Master student in Electrical Eng	CEO	Charity
3	Bachelor of Electrical Eng	Secretariat	University student Heyat
4	Master of Electrical Eng	Founder; CEO	Medical device company
5	Diploma	CEO	Charity
6	MBA	CEO	Charity
7	Hawzah Bachelor	Manager	Education institute
8	PhD of Political Science	Faculty member	Research institute
9	Doctor of Medicine	Faculty member	University faculty
10	Master of Crisis Management	Instructor; Volunteer	Iranian Red Crescent
11	PhD of Technology Management	Founder; CEO	Medical device company
12	Hawzah Master of Religion	Public Manager	Provincial Hawzah (Public religious education institute)
13	High School Diploma	Founder; CEO	Heyat
14	Master of Industrial Eng	Manager	Jihadi group
15	MBA	Co-founder and CEO	Charity
16	Master	Founder and manager	High school
17	Master of Economics	Business consultant; Charity owner and manager	Charity; Jihadi group
18	High School Diploma	Founder	Home-made herbal medicine shop
19	Master	Co-founder	Heyat; Charity
20	Master of Industrial Eng	Activist	-
21	Hawzah Bachelor	Clergy volunteer	Cemetery
22	PhD of Economics	Policy analyst	Think tank
23	Master of Industrial Eng	Public servant	Public investment company
24	High School Diploma	Founder and CEO	Jihadi group
25	Master of Industrial Eng	Executive officer	Private company
26	Master of Religion Studies	Manager	University student organization

their approval to be recorded on audio. All notes and audio recordings were combined to form the 'raw data'.

Interviewees served in various capacities during the COVDI-19 crisis, mostly during earlier natural catastrophes around the country, including practitioner, volunteer citizen, public administrator, NGO leader or manager, jihadi group activist, clergy, student volunteer, faculty member, or public policy expert. They were chosen through snowball sampling until a theoretical saturation point was reached. The authors were looking for individuals who had significant experience managing a popular group during a crisis, were well acquainted with the network of popular

groups, or held a public position associated with such groups. Half of them held prominent positions at the national or provincial level throughout the pandemic and prior crises in Iran. Interviewees 1, 8, 9, 10, 12, and 23 were government employees or public servants (6 out of 26 interviews), which seems reasonable to account for public servant perspectives in a study focusing on bottom-up crisis response. Apart from these six public organizations, four were private enterprises, and the remaining sixteen were non-governmental organizations. Additionally, Interviewees 10, 11, 15, 16, 22, and 23 did not consider themselves or their organization to be religious (6 out of 26 interviews), which seems reasonable to account for the perspectives of non-religious institutions and individuals in an environment where religious faith is prevalent.

In addition to the interviews, an online survey was performed to determine if people's perceptions of popular involvement in crisis responses differed from the interviews' results. It was distributed via various social networks to which the authors and their friends have access, allowing it to represent the community freely. As a result, the survey was not restricted to a particular profession, age group, gender, organizational type, or political ideology. It included ten questions about the context, axial category, and causes and strategic orientations of Iran's bottom-up response, in addition to demographic data. Over 120 individuals completed the online survey (Fig. 2).

Data Coding

This study used three coding stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding was used in conjunction with conducting interviews to find early keywords and phrases. During the second stage, i.e., axial coding, keywords, and expressions were aggregated, grouped, and analyzed to assign them to the context, causes, strategies, features, and the axial concept to narratively address the research question regarding the literature. Finally, the third stage involved identifying a core (axial) concept that would serve as a lens through which the Iranian bottom-up response could be comprehended. Table 2 illustrates the three stages of GT coding.

Findings

This section describes and explores the Iranian bottom-up approach to crises' axial categories and their evidence via context, causes, and strategic orientations, features, and the axial category. Finally, Fig. 1 combines and connects these notions schematically to be followed by the survey results. Due to the word constraint, the data was mainly confined to the interviews and survey.

Context

This section analyses the contextual and situational aspects affecting Iran's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, making it difficult to generalize to other

Table 2 Illustrated examples from GT coding

Open codes	Categories	Class of categories	Axial Category
Holy Defense Resilience Experience Sanctions Religious society Theocratic government Sanctions Frequent crises Incapable government	Context	Context	Faith-based civic engagement in crises
Legitimate leadership People-oriented leadership Final word of the leader Discourse-building by the leader	Leadership	Causes and strategic orientations	
Social capital Trust Sacrificing Religious faith Self-motivated Selfless Faithful help Engagement by actual action	Intrinsic motivation		
Capacity building of actors Capacity building of vulnerable groups Learning by doing	Capacity building		
Maintaining dignity Cultural issues	Maintaining dignity		
Quickness Flexibility Agility	Fast and flexible response	Features	
Lived experience Data from the ground	Field-driven response		
Comprehensiveness Rotating roles Problem-solving	Comprehensive response		

situations. Iran has a theocratic state with a religious society (Tajbakhsh, 2000). The deep religious ties between a sizable segment of society and the Islamic government are best evidenced by the fact that over 6000 Iranians have been martyred in less than two decades during the uprisings that preceded Iran's 1979
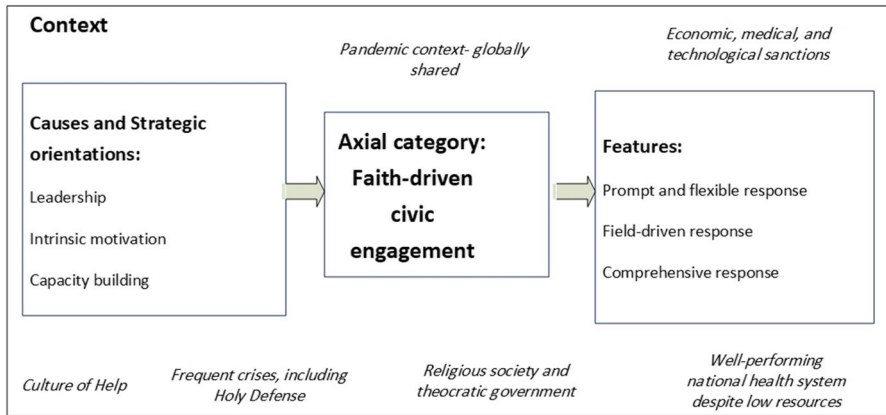
Fig. 1 Conceptual themes of Iran's bottom-up response to COVID-19 pandemic

Islamic Revolution (Izadi, 2018). Then, during Iraq's eight-year war against Iran, nearly 200 thousand Iranians were martyred (Bakhtiari, 2020). Throughout Iran's history, the holy defense served as a 'faith-driven civic engagement' (Interviews 17 and 18).
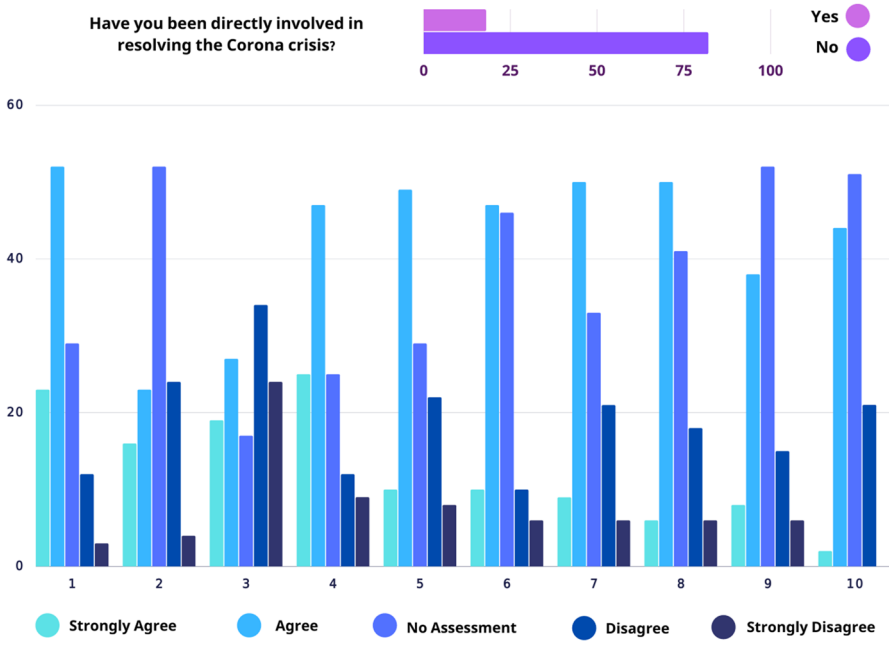
Furthermore, the valuable culture of altruism (Farhang-e Yarigari in Persian, which means Culture of Help) is well entrenched in Iran for millennia (Interview 8; for a recent study in Persian, see Farhadi, 2002) and has been resurrected in recent decades through the concepts of 'Jihadi management' and 'Jihadi approach' (For a recent study in Persian, see Hasani Nik & Mokhtarianpour, 2019). Apart from the Islamic Revolution and the Holy Defense, Iranian society has been plagued by natural calamities. All of these factors have strengthened and united the country's societal organization and the people's ability to assist one another during times of crisis (Interviews 4, 8, and 26). As a result, faith-driven civic engagement has become ingrained in the country's approach to crisis response through centuries, most notably the previous four decades (Interviews 4, 8, and 26).

Axial Category: Faith-driven Civic Engagement

The Theoretical Background section discussed how faith had been lately acknowledged as an underpinning of social capital (e.g., see Pratt et al., 2018) and hence as playing a central role in some types of crisis response (such as Greyling et al., 2016; Rivera & Nickels, 2014). The axial category for Iran's crisis response has been identified as 'faith-driven civic engagement,' implying an entanglement of faith-driven and bottom-up approaches to crises.

The interviews were replete with references to 'faith-driven civic engagement' and 'the central role of religious faith.' For instance, Interviewees 1 and 5 indicated that religious motive was a primary factor in citizen donations. Additionally,

A Summary of the Online Survey's Findings

Have you been directly involved in resolving the Corona crisis?

Yes
No

0   25   50   75   100

Strongly Agree   Agree   No Assessment   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

1–There is a valuable culture of altruism in Iranian society to engage in confronting the Corona crisis, as fostered by the people's participation in defending the country in the Iraq war against Iran and natural disasters such as the flood in Khuzestan.

2– Iranian people participated in greater numbers than citizens of other countries in confronting the Corona crisis.

3–Contrary to common belief, the sanctions had no discernible impact on the difficulty and complexity of Corona crisis management in Iran compared to other countries.

4–Throughout the Corona's early stages, the Supreme Leader's public appeal was effective in eliciting community support for aiding the people, distributing masks, and so forth.

5–Individuals in positions of social authority (local trustees, clergy, and social benefactors, for example) were effective in mobilizing public involvement during the early stages of the Corona crisis.

6–Fortunately, public and voluntary donations to the Corona victims were made in a dignified way.

7–Mosque activists, student activists, social philanthropists, and religious organizations were quick to recognize and address the Corona crisis's side effects, which included threatening the livelihoods of some families.

8–Volunteer involvement in confronting the Corona crisis was complementary to and generally compatible with the crisis management efforts of government agencies.

9–Due to their exposure to field realities, the societal communities and volunteers involved in confronting the Corona crisis were able to adapt rapidly to new needs.

10–In response to the Corona crisis, societal groups and volunteers focused exclusively on particular areas of assistance.

Fig. 2 A brief review of online survey's results

it was theorized that the religious faith of core members [of citizen groups] is a factor in determining the effectiveness of citizen-led crisis response (Interview 2). Thus, while the literature recognizes faith in its broadest sense as a component of

social capital and heterodox crisis response models, the respondents stressed a specific version of it in Iran, namely religious faith. This assertion was bolstered when Interviewee 10 repeatedly stated that most of the crisis assistance provided by the non-religious quasi-governmental groups he has worked with were double-tongued. According to him, "the employees and managers of such organizations spent the majority of their private gatherings discussing the materialist benefits and rewards of crisis work, the accompanying promotions, permanent employment, and salary increases while seeking for the best opportunities to exaggerate their activities in the media and reports to their managers and higher officials." He cited numerous examples to demonstrate that showing off is ingrained in their organizational culture.

Citizens of various political persuasions participated in bottom-up organizing actions, frequently cooperating inside a group or organization. According to Interviewee 3, the connecting thread between them is 'religious faith' and 'religious instruction (Ma'aref).' Interviewee 4 stressed that materialistic considerations and extrinsic motivation are insufficient to account for the risks volunteers accepted during this pandemic.

Causes and Strategic Orientations

Iran's bottom-up response has three strategic axes: intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic incentive and long-term capacity building in citizen groups through learning-by-doing.

Leadership

In Iran, faith-driven civic engagement in times of crisis has frequently been religious. The pandemic and past crises demonstrated that a socially acceptable leadership could mobilize using metaphors such as health martyrs, such as the Faithful Help Exercise, the Mouwasat campaign, or jihadi[1] groups, mainly through public speeches (Interviews 5 and 12). Additionally, the leadership facilitated cooperation among various community networks and jihadi groups (Interview 8). By defending and adhering to health rules, such as wearing a face mask and maintaining a safe distance during public gatherings, the Supreme Leader has bolstered the social standing of the National Headquarter for Administrating Coronavirus (COVID-19) (Interviews 5 and 12).

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[1] The terms 'Jihad' (the noun) and 'Jihadi' (the adjective) are frequently used in Western media to refer to terrorism and suicide bombing. However, when its etymological origins are explored more closely, it is interpreted in Iran and Islamic teachings as voluntarily peaceful (often community-based) actions and movements on behalf of God. The jihadi spirit is characterized by honesty, self-sacrifice, trust, indefatigability, a lack of attachment to the world, consistency, and uniformity in speech and behavior (Ahmadi, 2014).

Intrinsic Motivation

Almost every interviewee stated that they were self-motivated and that their endeavors were faith-driven. This points to the first strategic orientation, intrinsic motivation, as opposed to extrinsic motivating systems, and the GT axial category discovered, namely 'faith-driven civic engagement.'

Interviewee 12 referred to young clerics who volunteered to perform most of the bathing and burial preparation for sick bodies in Yazd province, which is a common practice in all provinces. They were not admired for it, but they should have opposed the established administration structure since state and municipal governments initially adopted the World Health Organization's (WHO) protocols. Thus, not only did funeral preparation employees refuse to prepare bodies under Islamic rites, but some were missing from work. The local authorities' reluctance for weeks complicated matters further, despite clerics volunteering with the assistance of their organization (Hawzah[2]), constant meetings with local governors and clerics' representatives, and the Supreme Leader's explicit support for Islamic burial practices (for data, see Yazdi et al., 2021).

Capacity Building

Capacity development was a strategic objective for both citizen groups and the government. Capacity building can be classified into two categories: vulnerable groups or citizen groups. Capacity building for vulnerable populations took the form of obtaining loans, working with them, and repaying them. What was novel was the emergence of vulnerable populations that were previously not in need and hence not easily recognized or verifiable. They are now jobless, underpaid, or facing tremendous economic hardship.

Capacity building was occasionally in the form of student participation for citizen groups (i.e., civic actors or jihadi groups). During the last decades, mosque- and university-based citizen groups with a student majority have developed a talent pipeline. The more experienced members of groups maintain alumni ties with the new members while trusting young students, transferring managerial skills, allowing them to learn via trial and error, and most crucially, channeling faith-driven motivations and jihadi aspirations (Interview 3). Additionally, these civic groups considered altering national pandemic policies based on local specificities. For instance, a student Heyat[3] was granted permission to prepare warm meals for Muharram's

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[2] "Hawzah is an Arabic word. It is technically applied to the traditional religious institution in the Shi'a world (Islamic seminary). The Hawzah seeks to attain two major missions: (1) training the clerics to preach the principles and practices of Islam; and (2) training the experts in religious sciences, ones who can deduce Islamic rules from the related sources. This institution works in Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, India, and Lebanon." ("Hawzah," 2021) However, as this article demonstrated, Hawzah has also taken on new social and civic duties in Iran.

[3] "Heyat or Hey'at is essentially a self-funded social movement in each area. Each group of friends, relatives, neighbors, or neighborhood residents, young and old, establishes its own Tekyeh for processions and ceremonies during the month of Muharram [the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar year], literally a venue where mourners gather for the event (Rida, 2018), often standing close together, conversing, listening to religious songs, drinking free tea, water, juice, or milk, and occasionally eating traditional foods.

Mourning.[4] They could question the logic of prescribing cold food and show how they could reassure society and the government that health protocols were followed when cooking heated meals. Thus, they may unexpectedly open universities' kitchens during a pandemic (Interview 3).

Features

Prompt and Flexible Response

The COVID-19 pandemic and prior natural disasters demonstrated that one of the characteristics of volunteer civic groups responding to Iran's crises is their speed and adaptability. These groups are intrinsically motivated and have a flat organizational structure, contrary to bureaucratic organizational structures with extrinsic motivation systems. Faith-driven civic actors are less discouraged by others' carelessness or dire circumstances but instead seek out their roles in resolving the situation without fear of failing to achieve the intended result. Apart from these psychological consequences, the concentration of civic (jihadi) actors on duty results in increased response flexibility at both the micro and macro levels. As a result, a vast pool of self-motivated people is ready who are more concerned with the problems of others than with their own or with the tensions, anxieties, or hopelessness that accompany any crisis.

Field-Driven Response

Civic organizations are run by and for the people. At the neighborhood level, where a civic actor resides, he is intimately familiar with what is required, who can be trusted, which mechanisms function and which do not, and what resources and funding are accessible. In other words, civic involvement enables a flat structure to provide access to actual data collected on the ground. Additionally, if they are frequently confronted with crises and have a significant degree of authority, their tacit and practical knowledge will be consistently strengthened through learning-by-doing.

Iran desperately needs reliable, comprehensive, and up-to-date data on disadvantaged populations, such as their residence address, job status, source of income, and level of income. As a result, a recurring theme throughout the interviews was the need to accurately addressing the vulnerable. Numerous commentators underlined that the government's database and targeting procedures were, at best, out of date and inefficient. In recent years, civic organizations have begun to construct and distribute accurate cross-databases (Interviews 1, 2, 5, 6, 12, 13). Additionally, they

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[4] "For the Shiʿa, the first ten days of Muharram are a time to commemorate the martyrdom of the third Imam, Husayn ibn ʿAli, …. who was killed at the battle of Karbala, Iraq, in 680 CE. These days of mourning (ayyam-e ʿaza) are a time for the Shiʿa to remember and mourn Imam Husayn's sacrifice and martyrdom collectively and publicly affirm their loyalty to the family of the Prophet Muhammad (ahl al-bayt) and Islam… During Muharram, the Shiʿa attend mourning assemblies (majles), where they listen to discourses (rowzeh khwani) extolling the idealized qualities (fazaʾel) and tragic suffering (masaʾeb) of Imam Husayn and his family." (Ruffle, 2011).

established novel methods of contacting truly impoverished individuals through trustworthy school administrators and Help offices at hospitals (Interview 2).

Comprehensive Response

Civic groups responded comprehensively to the pandemic because they were focused on the challenges at hand rather than on a particular area of expertise or experience. They did not refer to a particular type of calamity, such as floods or earthquakes. Thus, the responses' comprehensiveness resulted from the problem-solving mindset. Additionally, they did not limit themselves to certain services during a single crisis (Interview 15). Civic actors previously searched for and provided services necessary to address root and priority problems together. The term 'rotating roles' may be used to characterize this dexterity.

Civic actors rotate their job areas in response to the issues and requirements of each crisis. Thus, a broad range of activities is dynamically covered, evolved, revolved, and modified. For instance, civic engagement focused on home construction (Interview 2), oxygen capsule filling (Interviews 2 and 15), first-aid services (Interview 10), blood donation station establishment (Interview 5), technology development (in producing Iran's first active-line ventilators) (Interview 4), and designing a comprehensive platform (hub) for charities to facilitate their coordination (Interview 2 and 21). The GT results in this section are summarized schematically in Fig. 1.

Survey Results

51% of responders to the questionnaire were female, while 49% were male. The responder with the youngest age was 18 years old, while the respondent with the oldest age was 60. Three percent of respondents were aged under 20, 30% were aged 20–29, 50% were between the ages of 30–39, and 17% were over 40. In educational attainment, 7% held a high school diploma or less, 30% held a bachelor's degree, and 63% held a postgraduate degree (of which 15 percent had a doctorate). 17% of respondents said that they were directly involved in managing the pandemic. The summary of the online survey's findings is depicted in Fig. 2.

As evidenced by the responses to questions 1 and 2, faith-driven civic engagement was a critical component of the bottom-up response to the pandemic. The responses to question 3 indicated that most respondents dispute the claim that sanctions had no discernible effect on the difficulty and complexity of managing the situation in Iran. The fourth and fifth questions examine the effectiveness of leaders and social references in mobilizing public movements. The majority of respondents concur on their influential role.

Most respondents agree that preserving dignity is a top priority for societal organizations engaged in the initiatives. The responses to Question 6 demonstrate this. The majority of respondents to questions 7 and 9 approve of volunteer civic groups' prompt and flexible response to notice and address the side effects of the crisis. The responses to question 8 demonstrate that civic engagement in the fight

against the Corona crisis was compatible with and complementary to official efforts to manage the crisis. The responses to question 10 indicate that some societal groups concentrated mainly on specific areas of help while others reacted widely. In summary, the findings of the online survey corroborate the GT results. Finally, respondents directly involved in pandemic management produced much positive feedback in favor of the interview findings.

Conclusion and Implications

People turn to a church, neighborhood club, or civic organization for assistance when they need it. In a crisis, the same mechanisms should be engaged, referred to as a bottom-up strategy. Bottom-up approaches can provide critical goods and services and coordinate rebuilding and recovery activities because they (1) have access to indigenous knowledge, (2) can harness social capital and networks, and (3) are flexible. Iran's COVID-19 experience, as well as previous crises, suggested a highly bottom-up response. In this research, the ground theory (GT) method was used to investigate this bottom-up response's context, enablers, and characteristics. The literature on bottom-up responses to crises (Haeffele & Storr, 2020), as well as participatory, collaborative, and citizen-led approaches to crisis management (Cooper et al., 2006; Jamshidi et al., 2016; Kapucu & Ustun, 2018; Osti & Miyake, 2011), were consulted in this regard.

The first highlight was that jihadi groups work nationwide rather than focusing exclusively on their local neighborhoods. (Haeffele & Storr, 2020). The second consideration was the magnitude of sacrifices; the Corona crisis poses a risk of death for popular volunteers and their families, which could reasonably result in a decline in the scope and scale of bottom-up responses as people adhere to lockdowns and looking after themselves and their families. Meanwhile, Iranian jihadi groups were proactive in providing services to hospitals, elderly homes, cemeteries, and infected families. This relates to the central feature of Iran's response, namely faith-based civic engagement, which continued to remain responsive even in the face of the most severe medical, economic, and technological sanctions, as well as tough difficult economic conditions, a low government capacity, and severe state resource constraints. The findings were consistent with some of the traits and principles of surprise management theory (Farazmand, 2009), including its focus on leadership and flexibility. Simultaneously, it verified field-driven reaction as a critical characteristic of bottom-up response while prioritizing the dignity of vulnerable communities.

To conclude, this research paves the way for more bottom-up response models to crises that are more citizen-driven and based on community mobilization. In global crises such as pandemics, every government lacks enough financial and human resources, if not also informational resources, to compensate people's losses and provide the needed services. So, a response that builds from the bottom up, on the shoulders of citizens and civic groups, is desirable and necessary under such worldwide resource constraints. This research showed novel elements from Iran's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including faith-driven civic engagement as the axial concept, intrinsic motivation system, leadership

with close ties to laypeople and civic groups, field-driven response with local data from the ground, and capacity building in the form of learning by doing of proactive jihadi (popular) groups during crises. It should be highlighted that the authors cannot substantiate the criticisms leveled against the government and quasi-governmental agencies, which requires additional research. Although this study attempted to incorporate government employees' perspectives on their roles in crisis response by interviewing public managers and government officials, its primary objective was not to understand the perception gaps between popular and public actors but to provide an overall picture of the scene for the first time. Naturally, public actors constantly stated throughout interviews that the government and public institutions did the best they could in funding, supplying, exchanging information, and networking.

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