Zero-sum game beliefs and patriotism among Iranians

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Article Info	Abstract
	This research examined whether there was a correlation between belief in a zero-sum game and patriotism in an Iranian sample of 406 survey participants. The international literature suggests that belief in a zero-sum game is relatively high among Iranians. International studies differentiate patriotism from nationalism on the basis that only the former includes a comparative valuation of one's own country as being better than any other. However, there is little research differentiating forms of nationalism among Iranians. In order to maximize comparability, a survey based on existing international scales measuring belief in a zero-sum game, nationalism and patriotism was developed and distributed online to Iranians in 2019. Parametric statistical analysis of the results did not identify a relationship between belief in a zero-sum game and patriotism. In contrast to the existing literature, respondents displayed a tendency not to believe in a zero-sum game. The respondents showed strong affiliation with their country. However, rather than respondents displaying either nationalism or patriotism, there was a clear correlation between responses to the nationalism and patriotism survey questions. Parametric statistical analysis was employed to offer some hypotheses about different forms of nationalism indicated by the survey results. However, as a completely random sample was not obtained, the results cannot be applied to the general Iranian population with the certainly level of 95 percent anticipated. Further research is needed to develop a valid and widely applicable method of differentiating forms of Iranian nationalism.

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Extended Abstract

Background

In a TEDx talk in 2019, then Iranian foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, discussed four mistakes that Iranians make in negotiations (TEDx, 2019). One of them was zero-sum thinking, which holds that however much one side gains, the other side loses. Iranian public and media commentary on international affairs certainly includes zero-sum statements. Further, the existing international literature suggests that belief in a zero-sum game is relatively prominent among Iranian respondents compared to respondents in other countries (Różycka-Tran et al., 2018a; 2019b). But do Iranians actually believe in zero-sum games, and do they apply zero-sum thinking to international negotiations?

Another issue that could inhibit constructive dialogue in the international arena could be patriotism. Patriotism is differentiated from nationalism on the basis that it includes a sense that one's own country is superior to other countries (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989: 263). The love of one's country (nationalism) has been compared with the love of one's country *and* the belief it is superior to other nations (patriotism) using established scales in several countries. Although Iranian nationalism has been subject to much qualitative research in recent decades, there is little quantitative research differentiating Iranians' love of their country into the recognized scales of patriotism and nationalism (cf. Hasanzadeh et al., 2017).

Aim

This research examined whether there is a correlation between belief in a zero-sum game and patriotism among a sample of 406 Iranian survey respondents.

Method

In order to maximize research comparability, the Persian survey was developed based on existing international scales measuring belief in a zero-sum game (Różycka-Tran et al., 2015), nationalism and patriotism (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989: 264-268). The survey was distributed online to Iranians in 2019, and parametric statistical tests were applied to analyze the results. While respondents had varying demographic characteristics, a significant cluster of responses came from young (born 1986-1995), university educated, employed Iranians. The statistical tests were repeated for this cluster only, which yielded similar results to the overall sample.

Results

The findings of this study indicated that there was no relationship between respondents' belief in a zero-sum game and patriotism. In contrast to the international studies, the median response to the zero-sum statements in this research lay between "disagree" and "neither agree nor disagree". A similar median was obtained when respondents

were asked directly whether they believe international negotiations are win-lose situations. As indicated in other research (Smithson & Shou, 2016), responses to zero-sum statements may have varied based on the content of the statement. The results of this research suggested that Iranians may be more likely to agree with zero-sum statements that refer to win-lose situations related to financial wealth than other zero-sum statements.

The respondents showed strong affiliation with their country. However, rather than responses indicating an either/or pattern between nationalism and patriotism, there was a clear correlation between responses to the nationalism and patriotism questions. In other words, respondents tended to be about as nationalist as they were patriotic. This means that at least in the case of this survey sample, the international scales differentiating nationalism from patriotism seem to have little application in Iran.

Parametric testing was employed to detect possible patterns in responses to the nationalism and patriotism questions combined, and four Pearson correlation coefficients were identified. The researchers speculated that these could possibly indicate: (1) a form of nationalism that is similar to that defined in the international literature; (2) a form of nationalism with a civic focus; (3) a form of patriotism based on Iran's historical and civilizational achievements; and (4) a form of nationalism that includes both civic and government elements. This differentiation is purely speculative and further research is needed to develop a valid and widely applicable method of differentiating between forms of Iranians' love for their country.

Limitations of the present study included general limitations relating to all survey research (accuracy of self-reporting, validity of Likert scales, etc.), the format of the survey (Google Forms) which could not be opened on android phones, meaning that respondents needed to use a computer or iPhone to participate, and the clustered nature of the sample.

Conclusions

In conclusion, in contrast to the existing literature, this research indicated that Iranians have no particular inclination towards belief in a zero-sum game nor apply such thinking to international negotiations. Perhaps this result could offer reassurance to Iranian negotiators that despite the media rhetoric, the Iranian population does not believe that international negotiations are win-lose situations. This research did not detect any correlation between belief in a zero-sum game and patriotism as it is defined in the literature. Its results further indicated that international scales measuring patriotism and nationalism may have limited application in Iran and that further research is needed in this regard.

Conflict of interest
The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions
All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

Ethical considerations
The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

Data availability
The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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