

Designing a framework for enhancing Iran's social resilience in the face of regional hybrid threats

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article</p> <p>Main Object: Politics Scope: Iran, West Asia</p> <p>Received: 30 September 2025 Revised: 07 October 2025 Accepted: 18 October 2025 Published online: 05 November 2025</p> <p>Keywords: citizen-centric participation, hybrid threats, network governance, social resilience.</p>	<p>In the complex security environment of West Asia, enhancing Iran's social resilience, has become a strategic imperative. This paper, transcending conventional approaches, designs a framework for enhancing social resilience capable of transforming these external shocks into an opportunity to bolster "systemic immunity" and achieve a "resilient ecosystem". The central research question is: What are the fundamental dimensions and components that underpin an effective framework for this goal, and how can it be operationalized? To address this question, a mixed-methods methodology was employed, combining the Delphi technique and Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA). First, the dimensions and components of the framework were identified and validated through the Delphi technique with a panel of experts. Subsequently, IPA was utilized to assess the current status of these components, which were then mapped onto a strategic matrix. The findings reveal that Iranian society, by leveraging its "indigenous strategic assets"—particularly in "self-reliance in strategic technologies" and a "culture of sacrifice and responsibility"—has achieved a high level of efficacy. Concurrently, the IPA identifies that the components of highest importance, namely "the realization of social justice" and "the capacity for people-centric participation", constitute the primary priorities for investment and enhancement. Accordingly, the primary contribution of this paper is the introduction of a diagnostic-strategic model. It posits that the pathway to enhancing resilience lies not so much in the allocation of new resources, but rather in mobilizing public capacities and focusing on "networked and participatory governance". This people-centric mechanism, while deepening social cohesion in the face of threats, facilitates the realization of a resilient ecosystem.</p>

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

In the contemporary geopolitical landscape of West Asia, nation-states are increasingly subjected to complex, non-conventional security challenges. These hostilities transcend conventional military threats, manifesting as a complex hybrid war that integrates economic sanctions, sophisticated cognitive and psychological operations, and disruptive cyber-attacks. This sustained necessitates a strategic shift from reactive defense to proactive resilience-building. Traditional resilience frameworks, often focused on merely bouncing back to a pre-crisis state, are inadequate for this context. This paper posits a transformative model of resilience, arguing that external shocks, rather than being solely destructive, can serve as catalysts for profound societal strengthening. It aims to design a comprehensive framework for enhancing Iran's social resilience, one capable of converting these external pressures into an opportunity to bolster "systemic immunity" and cultivate a "resilient ecosystem" founded on functional independence and social justice. The central research question guiding this study is: What are the fundamental dimensions and components that constitute an effective framework for enhancing social resilience against hybrid threats, and how can its key levers be operationalized for strategic priority?

2. Conceptual framework

The proposed conceptual model delineates a dynamic process where "external shocks and threats" (the independent variable) activate a "social resilience enhancement mechanism" (the mediating variable). This mechanism is not an abstract concept but is grounded in the mobilization and synergy of "indigenous strategic assets". These assets encompass four core dimensions: social capital (cohesion and trust), adaptive dynamics (institutional capacity and public participation), reliance on endogenous assets (self-sufficiency), and economic resilience. The activation of this mechanism is intended to produce two tiers of outcomes (the dependent variables). The first-order outcomes are functional: "maintaining core societal functions" and "enhancing systemic immunity" by reducing structural vulnerabilities. The ultimate, second-order outcome is the formation of a "resilient ecosystem"—a desired state where the society achieves "functional independence" and "social justice", ensuring the sustained, endogenous provision of human dignity and welfare even under severe external duress. This entire process is propelled by a "learning feedback loop", wherein successful navigation of crises reinforces the indigenous strategic assets, creating a virtuous cycle of ever-increasing resilience.

3. Methodology

To construct and validate this framework, a sequential mixed-methods approach was employed. The first phase utilized the Delphi technique,

a structured communication method designed to achieve expert consensus. A panel of academic, military, and policy experts was engaged over multiple rounds to identify, refine, and validate the core dimensions and key components of social resilience relevant to Iran's context. This qualitative phase ensured the theoretical robustness and contextual relevance of the framework. In the second phase, Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) was conducted. The same panel of experts was surveyed to rate each identified component on two distinct scales: its perceived "importance" for achieving national resilience and its current "performance" or state of affairs. The resulting data was then mapped onto a four-quadrant IPA matrix to diagnose strategic priorities, identifying areas of strength, critical weaknesses, low priorities, and potential over-investment.

4. Results

The findings present a nuanced picture of Iran's resilience posture. The Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) demonstrates that Iran possesses exceptional strengths, particularly within the dimension of "Reliance on Endogenous Assets." Components such as "self-reliance in strategic and defense technologies" (C1), "culture of sacrifice and social responsibility" (C3), "networks of popular mutual aid" (C4), and "food and drug security" (C2) were all prominently situated in the "Keep Up the Good Work" quadrant. This outcome signifies the successful crystallization of a resilient national character, built upon the proven "hardware" of indigenous technological capabilities and a deeply embedded socio-cultural fabric.

Building on this solid foundation, the analysis further illuminates the pathway toward creating a fully integrated "resilient ecosystem". It achieves this by identifying components with the highest potential for strategic leverage—areas where focused efforts can yield transformative results. These priority areas, located in the "Concentrate Here" quadrant, include "public perception of distributive justice" (A2), "capacity for people-centric participation" (D1), and "transparency and accountability" (D2).

It suggests that while the "hardware" of resilience (technological and social capital) is exceptionally strong, the next step lies in optimizing the "software" of governance to fully unlock its potential. In essence, the research highlights a significant latent capacity within society that can be fully activated by enhancing mechanisms for participatory governance and institutional responsiveness. This aligns perfectly with the model's "learning feedback loop", demonstrating how the system can further strengthen its strategic assets by refining the processes that connect the state and society, thereby transforming external challenges into catalysts for deeper integration and systemic excellence.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The study concludes that the most effective path to enhancing Iran's social resilience lies not primarily in the allocation of new material resources, but in the structural reform and activation of public capacities through a paradigm of "networked and participatory governance". The strategic imperative is to bridge the gap identified in the IPA matrix by focusing policy interventions on strengthening social justice, fostering genuine public participation, and ensuring institutional accountability. By prioritizing these governance-related components, the system can more effectively leverage its existing strengths (e.g., self-reliance and social cohesion). This people-centric approach not only deepens societal unity in the face of external threats but also operationalizes the learning feedback loop, transforming each challenge into a step toward the ultimate goal: a resilient ecosystem that is secure, just, and sovereign.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

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Data availability

The raw data used in this study (including responses from Delphi rounds and importance-performance analysis questionnaires) have not been published due to the principle of confidentiality of the identity of the participating experts. The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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