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# Trust in Iran and Türkiye: A Comparative Study of Interpersonal, Institutional, and Social Trust

Deena SALEH<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Human beings are social creatures in their nature, as Aristotle stated 2400 years ago. Society needs trust for economic and social development as it shapes interactions and relations among individuals and groups. Opinion surveys offer global comparisons of trust levels and show heterogeneity. For example, in countries such as Sweden and Norway, more than 60% of respondents reported that 'most people can be trusted.' On the other hand, in countries such as Türkiye, Iran, and other Middle East countries, less than 15% think this is the case. This study offers an overview of trust in Iran and Türkiye. It examines types of trust utilizing the World Values Survey data. Citizens in Iran and Türkiye have the highest trust in close groups such as their families. On the other hand, trust in outgroups such as people from another nationality or different religions could be higher to moderate. Moreover, the Iranian and Turkish public consider institutions such as the armed forces more trustworthy, whereas international institutions such as the IMF and WHO are less trusted.

**Key Words:** Türkiye, Iran, World Values Survey, Interpersonal Trust, Social Trust, Institutional Trust, Behavioral Economics.

## İran ve Türkiye'de Güven: Kişilerarası, Kurumsal ve Sosyal Güven Üzerine Karşılaştırmalı Bir Araştırma

### Öz

Aristoteles'in 2400 yıl önce belirttiği gibi, insanoğlu doğası gereği sosyal bir varlıktır. Bireyler ve gruplar arasındaki etkileşim ve ilişkileri şekillendirdiği için toplumun ekonomik ve sosyal gelişim için güvene ihtiyacı vardır. Kamuoyu araştırmaları, güven düzeyleri konusunda küresel karşılaştırmalar sunmakta ve heterojenlik göstermektedir. Örneğin İsveç ve Norveç gibi ülkelerde katılımcıların %60'ından fazlası 'çoğu insana güvenilebileceğini' belirtmiştir. Öte yandan, Türkiye, İran ve diğer Orta Doğu ülkeleri gibi ülkelerde bu oran %15'in altındadır. Bu çalışma İran ve Türkiye'de güven konusuna genel bir bakış sunmaktadır. Dünya Değerler Araştırması verilerinden yararlanarak güven türlerini incelemektedir. İran ve Türkiye vatandaşları en yüksek güveni aile gibi yakın gruplara duymaktadır. Öte yandan, başka milletten veya farklı dinden insanlar gibi dış gruplara duyulan güven daha yüksek veya orta düzeyde olabilmektedir. Ayrıca, İran ve Türk halkı silahlı kuvvetler gibi kurumları daha güvenilir bulurken, IMF ve WHO gibi uluslararası kurumlara daha az güvenmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye, İran, Dünya Değerler Anketi, Kişilerarası Güven, Sosyal Güven, Kurumsal Güven, Davranışsal İktisat.


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## Introduction

Trust is an essential element that each society needs for social and economic development. It motivates people to work together for mutual benefit (Putnam *et al.*, 1993), provides a solution to coordination problems that a society may face, and reflects a belief that people have good intentions and are trustworthy (Irwin, 2009). Additionally, trustworthy ties and connections between individuals help people be more tolerant of diversity and sensitive to the needs of the vulnerable (De Oliveira, 2002).

Previous studies discovered a link between trust and higher scores of government efficiency and infrastructure quality (La Porta *et al.*, 1997; Fukuyama, 1995). Communities with high trust levels are more successful in addressing social and economic problems such as externalities, imperfect information, and coordination failures (Whiteley, 2000). Trust facilitates economic activities such as borrowing and exchanging goods and services (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). People are less likely to rely on formal institutions in contract enforcement when trust levels are high. For example, trust among people becomes an imperfect substitute for a weak government or regulatory system if they fail to enforce contracts or protect property rights. Similarly, if the financial intermediation system needs higher efficiency, people tend to rely more on interpersonal trust to access bank credits or loans (Knack & Keefer, 1997).

In the last decades, social trust has been a focus of several studies owing to its importance as an economic and social issue in different societies. Global surveys such as the European Values Survey (EVS) and World Values Survey (WVS) provide measurements of trust in different societies. The World Values Survey (WVS) measures social trust, which shows that trust levels are remarkably low in regions such as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), compared to other countries, Europe. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) consist of Türkiye and Iran, both are non-Arab states, in addition to Arab states. For example, in Iran, social trust witnessed a drastic decline. About 65% of Iranian respondents to WVS in 1999-2004 stated that most people can be trusted, but this percentage dropped to 11% in 2005-2009 and 15% in 2017-2022. Unfortunately, Türkiye does not show bright scores, either. The highest percentage of Turkish respondents who mentioned that most people can be trusted was 14% in 2017-2022, whereas the lowest was 4% in 2005-2009. Institutional trust is another type of trust that is low as well in Türkiye and Iran. Additionally, citizens in both societies have low to medium trust toward outgroups, those belonging to another religion or a different nationality. On the other hand, groups such as the family are trusted by most respondents in both countries.

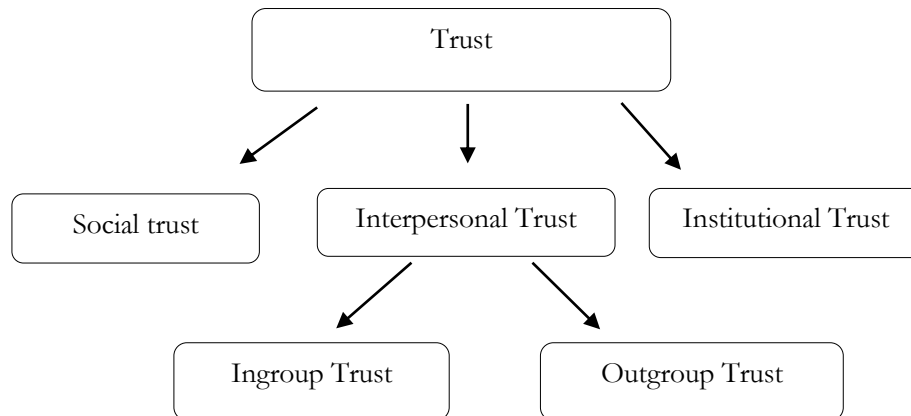
Türkiye and Iran were not a part of the Arab Uprisings in 2011, and both countries have different political and social systems. Although both are part of the MENA region, Iran and Türkiye exhibit a national cultural character different than Arab Middle Eastern countries. The Turkish culture is more modern when compared to conservative and patriarchal neighboring cultures in Middle Eastern countries (Afıouni, 2014). Similarly, Iran is seen as proximate to the culture of Arab countries in the Persian Gulf's West and South; the Iranian culture is less like Arab countries but more like the cultures of South Asian countries (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003). Türkiye has faced domestic pressures caused by national security concerns, economic welfare, social cohesion, the size and the recent refugee inflows, and high unemployment. Such challenges are affecting the levels of trust that citizens exhibit. Speaking of Iran, the country transformed from a country dependent on the West to a theocracy after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which changed Iran's political and social system (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003). Iran has suffered social and economic problems, such as problems managing its human capital and natural resources (Mohaddes & Pesaran, 2013).

Understanding low trust in Turkish and Iranian societies has serious consequences for economic and social development. This article discusses the concept of trust, its types, and its determinants. In this article, we focus on the non-Arab states of Iran and Türkiye by examining trust levels in both societies. Uncovering types and levels of trust exhibited by the public in Iran and Türkiye is vital since low trust has severe implications for society and the economy. In this theoretical study, we use the World Values Survey's data to help us understand how different trust levels are exhibited in both societies. We aim to analyze trust types in both societies taking into consideration the socio-economic and cultural contexts. This study checks how Iranian and Turkish citizens trust ingroups, foreigners, and outgroups, and political trust in institutions. The article will discuss the implications and policy recommendations based on insights from the WVS data. Overall, the article aims to provide insights into trust within the Iranian and Turkish societies and how it affects the society and the country.

## Conceptual Framework

For Fukuyama (1995), trust is a right-hand-side variable describing transaction costs. On the other hand, Putnam et al. (1993) explain it as a left-side variable that social interactions can explain. It is an intermediate variable resulting from social interaction and reducing transaction costs. Trust, therefore, is a function of social interactions, and transaction costs are a function of trust (Collier, 2002). This reflects that trust is a multidimensional concept, and literature views it differently.

Figure 1 shows that there are diverse types of trust, such as general trust, interpersonal trust, and institutional trust. Social trust is the type of trust measuring whether people have an abstract trust or tend to act cautiously. Yamagishi and Yamagishi (1994:131) define social trust as "taking reality for granted" or "expecting the persistence and gratification of genuine and ethical order." Because it enables a thicker flow of information, social trust shows the degree to which people value mutual learning experiences (Cáceres-Carrasco *et al.*, 2020). Social trust between two random people in the country is the kind of trust that matters for a country's economic performance. When individuals trust strangers to behave in their best interests, effective economic measures are more likely to be approved and require less monitoring. Suppose community members show only trust that does not extend beyond the family. In that case, it may limit capital supply, diminish the scale of private enterprises (Knack, 2002), limit transaction scope, create segmented markets, and reduce profits from economies of scale (Greif, 1994).



**Figure 1.** *A Conceptual Illustration of Different Trust Types.*

Social trust has gained wide attention due to its role in understanding societal dynamics, and its influence on social, political, and economic outcomes (Hassan, 2005). Banfield (1958) argued that a modern economy cannot thrive without trust, owing to its ability to create a civil society. Banfield studied determinants of poverty in a village in Southern Italy and found that absence of trust among villagers was a main factor behind the economic underdevelopment. In a similar argument, Arrow (1972:35) emphasizes the importance of trustfulness in economic life, arguing that *'Virtually, every commercial transaction has within itself an element of trust, certainly, any transaction conducted over a period. It can be argued that much of the economic backwardness in the world can be explained by the lack of confidence.'* In the political sphere, Hooghe and Marien (2013) found that general trust influenced political participation by helping citizens engage in collective action.

In addition to generalized trust, the literature defines interpersonal/particularized trust. Yamagishi and Yamagishi (1994:135) define particularized trust *'as our tendency to trust our kind and people we know, as an attempt to reduce our social uncertainty.'* According to Kwon (2019), interpersonal trust refers to expectations people hold that other society members to act in a way that benefits them or at least does not harm them. We hold a subjective view of other society members' reliability without any legal commitment, which entails a component of risk. There are, therefore, two components of trust: our expectations, and willingness to take risks based on these expectations.

Interpersonal trust measures our tendency to trust those whom we know. Two subcategories of interpersonal trust exist ingroup and outgroup (Delhey & Welzel, 2012). Ingroup trust includes people we know, such as family, friends, and neighbors. Outgroup trust describes our trust in outsiders such as people from another religion nationality, or people that one meets for the first time. Interpersonal trust

fosters economic activity without institutional equivalents, such as effective domestic institutions. However, interpersonal trust such as intra-ethnic trust might undermine generalized trust in strangers. For example, if an ethnically heterogeneous society has strong intra-ethnic trust, it may limit transactions and create segmented markets, which reduce gains from economies of scale and specialization (Greif, 1994). Higher generalized trust facilitates casual acquaintances and inter-group contacts between heterogeneous groups, which generate useful structural holes and weak ties in social networks (Sedeh *et al.*, 2021). Put differently, if people limit their trust to ingroups and limit themselves to certain group identities, they might reduce their interactions with outsiders or lack the need to do so (Kwon, 2019).

Another type of trust is institutional trust, which reflects the degree of trust in political institutions such as the police, the government, the legal system, and the parliament, or social institutions such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), charity institutions, and educational institutions. Institutional trust entails the presence and integrity of essential institutions, such as contracts, formal laws, and punishments for incorrect actions (Irwin, 2009). Institutional trust is the result of an ongoing interaction between the government and its people. Some degree of reciprocity between the parties is necessary for this interaction to be cooperative. People will only trust institutions and refrain from deceiving them if they believe they will do so fairly and efficiently (Andriani & Sabatini, 2013). Hooghe and Marien (2013) consider political trust as one form of institutional trust, and they found that political participation and voting behaviors are influenced by the degree of political trust people have. People can have trust in local institutions (the government, political parties, banks, schools, T.V.) and international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

### ***Are Trust Types Related?***

All types of trust are interrelated, meaning that a community needs a balanced level of trust to overcome social and economic problems. In societies with low social and outgroup trust, people can apply various standards and laws to various situations and groups. This in turn leads to double standards, such as close networks of family and friends, which can create and facilitate illegal transactions as well as encourage corruption (Seleim & Bontis, 2009)

The level of institutional trust in domestic institutions such as the government is strongly affected by social trust prevalent among people (Knack & Keefer, 1997). Also, if people lose trust in the institutions responsible for upholding the law, such as the legal system, they begin to doubt the commitment of other parties to their agreements and decide to back out. As a result, people tend to rely more on ingroup trust for day-to-day activities (Newton, 2007). This can lead to social exclusion and social intolerance toward outgroups. Similarly, low social trust can result in undesirable social and economic outcomes, such as low levels of respect for the public interest and citizen rights, higher levels of corruption, a propensity for tax evasion, and weak-performing governments.

Some studies examined the relationship among trust types. For example, Hadarics (2016) and Newton and Zmerli (2011) found a positive association between institutional trust and individual-level social trust. Similarly, interpersonal trust positively influenced institutional trust (Mishler & Rose, 2001; Godefroidt *et al.* 2017). Additionally, Van Oorschot *et al.* (2006) emphasize the importance of institutional trust in state institutions, as people are more likely to interact socially when they trust state institutions.

### **Why Does Trust Matter?**

The literature describes low-trust societies as those having primary groups with low interconnections and distrusting citizens to witness phenomena such as social polarization and violence. Trust levels influence the economic and social development of nations in society. At the microeconomic level, trust reduces transaction costs, enforces contracts, and increases investors' access to credit. Fukuyama (1995) found that high trust among citizens can positively affect all social institutions. At the macro-political level, trust can increase social cohesion, enhance democratic governance, and increase the efficiency of public administration and quality of economic policies, which promote economic growth through increased investments (Knack, 2002). For example, Fukuyama (1995) found that the level of trust in society is highly correlated with economic performance. Knack and Keefer (1997) discovered a relationship between trust levels and economic growth in poorer countries. They reached a conclusion that economic growth increased by more than 0.5 standard deviations for every 1 standard deviation increase in country-level trust. The authors attribute this relationship to insecure property rights, the less-



developed financial sector, and the absence of contract enforceability. When formal substitutes are absent, citizens depend on interpersonal trust to facilitate economic activity (Knack & Keefer, 1997).

Problems such as coordination failures and imperfect information are solved by social capital, which shall improve information exchange among and within various social networks through strengthening group identity. La Porta et al. (1997) found that trust had an association with better scores on some indicators of government efficiency and infrastructure quality. Furthermore, societies with high trust are more likely to deal successfully with issues related to the distribution of common resources or externalities. Therefore, the effect of interpersonal trust on economic growth is at least as important as that of education or human capital (Whiteley 2000).

In addition to trust's effects on economic development and growth, previous studies found that trust plays a crucial role in social and political progress. Trust can help explain phenomena such as judicial system efficiency, voting behavior, and public policy (La Porta *et al.*, 1997; Tabellini, 2010). Kasmaoui and Errami (2017) found that social trust significantly affects how well institutions can function. Put differently, promoting the social contract can help to create trust among institutions. Social trust helps enhance collaboration and cooperation levels (Putnam, 2000) and reduce vulnerabilities and risks associated with trusting others (Irwin, 2009). Therefore, it is a prerequisite for successful civic actions since it entails trust among random citizens (Uslaner, 2002).

According to Newton and Deth (2005), building democracy is challenging when the country is poor without social trust and effective social institutions. Therefore, a well-performing democratic government is not normally associated with low social trust. Putnam et al. (1993) emphasized that cooperation is enhanced by trust. Cooperation is more likely to occur when there is a higher level of trust among community members. Trust is also fostered by cooperation (Putnam *et al.*, 1993). Also, Putnam (2000) states that people enjoy economic and social equality in countries with high interpersonal trust. Sedeh *et al.* (2021) find that in high-trust societies, individuals are happier, enjoy higher literacy, and can better serve public interests. Similarly, Helliwell and Wang (2011) and Han et al. (2011) concluded that subjective well-being and life satisfaction were positively affected by interpersonal trust.

A general lack of trust can discourage individuals from exhibiting reciprocity or cooperation. As a result, low social trust results in negative phenomena such as activities of rent-seeking and low trust in institutions (Ahmad & Hall, 2017). These socially excluded groups can cause latent conflicts, and governance deteriorates in such societies (Narayan, 1999). All these negative aspects can harm countries' economic development and social progress. Similarly, Seleim and Bontis (2009) found that low social and outgroup trust may motivate people to set diverse standards and laws for various situations and groups. This, in turn, leads to double standards, particularly regarding close groups such as family and friends. As a result, corruption rates and illegal transactions increase

In summary, all the arguments highlight the positive effects that trust types have on social progress and economic development. This suggests that low trust is a fundamental problem for which governments must seek solutions. One solution is to provide education programs, which can be an effective method to foster trust levels in low-trust societies. Uslaner (2006) suggests that increasing interpersonal interactions among different social groups can enhance trust among individuals from different ethnic groups.

Putnam et al. (1993) suggest voluntary activity as a significant tool to help increase trust levels in society. Suppose governments encourage citizens to engage in public policy decision-making and regulatory processes. This can facilitate information breadth and enhance citizens' confidence in legal and executive institutions and governance quality (Sedeh *et al.*, 2021). Individuals must be encouraged to work toward a mutually beneficial goal out of mutual trust despite their awareness of their power inequalities (Van Oorschot *et al.*, 2006).

### **Determinants of Trust**

All trust types need time to build up and develop. The formation of trust depends on several factors. As a result, we must understand the factors shaping its formation to understand trust in one society.

Some researchers attribute trust levels to individual-level characteristics such as education level, age, marital status, employment status, and income level (Newton, 2007; Delhey & Newton, 2003). Newton (1999) argues that individuals who are more satisfied with life tend to be more trusting, due to their satisfaction with their income, social position, and status encouraging them to be trusting. For example,

Kiani (2012) studied social trust in Iranian society and found that social trust is influenced by socioeconomic status, type of job, and education. He discovered that significant differences exist between gender and social trust, with women exhibiting higher levels of social trust compared to men. Other researchers, on the other hand, argue that social and contextual factors such as national wealth, income inequality, public policy, and governance quality shape trust levels (Deneulin & Bano, 2009), in addition to the historical and cultural heritage and domestic events, such as wars and civic unrest affect the degree of trust prevalent in society (Putnam *et al.*, 1993; Tabellini, 2010). For Collier (2002), trust results from social interaction, meaning that trust is a function of social interactions.

Knack and Keefer (1997) mention factors that can weaken or enhance trust, such as religious, linguistic, and ethnic homogeneity, the country's formal institutional structure, and social polarization. Also, countries with more equal incomes, high education levels, and ethnically homogeneous populations, have higher trust levels (Knack & Keefer, 1997).

### **National culture**

A primary factor affecting the types and degrees of trust citizens exhibit is the national culture and the cultural makeup of society. Culture is the foundation for group interaction and shared understanding. It shapes people's behaviors by building social norms and expectations (Beugelsdijk *et al.*, 2017). Trust results from previous interactions among actors, and history, and is attained by common culture (Collier, 2002). Culture is a major factor that shapes national institutions (Fukuyama, 1995). For example, Kaasa and Andriani (2022) argue that the way people perceive public institutions depends on the cultural context. Therefore, they recommend considering the cultural aspects as determinants of people's institutional trust. This argument becomes useful when applying it to Türkiye and Iran, the historical and cultural background of both countries should be understood as they affect the tendency of citizens to trust or distrust each other.

Countries in the Middle East, whether Arab or non-Arab states are collectivist cultures that exhibit cultural values such as high ingroup collectivism and particularistic trust in one's family and friends as a valuable resource that one depends on (Cleaver, 2005). The WVS offers a cultural classification for countries, as societies with traditional or secular values, survival, or self-expression. Türkiye and Iran lie in a similar cultural zone, scoring similarly on both dimensions<sup>2</sup> (See Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map). They are thus regarded as traditional societies that prioritize national pride, ingroup collectivism, and distrust. The focus on traditional cultural values indicates a tendency to avoid uncertainty and risk, which is a component of trust as previously discussed. Citizens attempt to avoid risks in social interactions by sticking to ingroups they belong to rather than communicating with outsiders. Also, the collectivist nature of societies in Iran and Türkiye indicates a low tendency to trust outsiders, as individuals favor harmony and ingroup ties. In such collectivist cultures, people have strong ties to their group. Through reciprocal cooperation, people are expected to keep the ingroup at peace.

### **Religion**

Additionally, trust levels are affected by religion (Nahapiet & Ghosal, 1998) and religious affiliation, which shape people's orientation toward topics that affect personal behavior by either promoting or inhibiting specific values (Duriez, 2004; Hall, 1996). On the country level, Putnam *et al.* (1993) found a negative relation between hierarchical religions such as Catholicism and trust levels. The negative relationship between religion and social trust is explained by Uslaner (2002), who argued that religion strengthens bonds between members of one religious denomination and weakens bonds with non-members, which, in turn, functions as a barrier to trust.

In terms of religious domination, the dominant religion in Türkiye and Iran is Islam, which is considered by most Muslim countries as the basis of ethical and juridical attitudes people hold toward any social phenomenon. When respondents to the WVS Round 7 (2017-2022) were asked how religion was important in their lives, 60.1 of total respondents % in Türkiye and 70.6 % in Iran responded that religion was very important. Citizens in both countries show similarity in terms of the high importance they place on religion in their daily lives. However, both countries show differences in terms of how respondents define themselves as religious, non-religious, or atheist. A total of 84.2% of Iranian respondents defined themselves as religious, versus 72.1% in Türkiye. 26.8% of Turkish respondents described themselves as

<sup>2</sup> The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map - World Values Survey 7 (2022). Source: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

non-religious, compared to 14.5% in Iran. The proportion of those defining themselves as atheists is negligible in both countries, at 1% in Türkiye and 1.3% in Iran. These results show that Türkiye and Iran are examples of societies with traditional values, which focus on religiosity and traditional values, and have low social trust. Considering our previous discussions, it means that in two societies with a hierarchical religion, in this case, Islam, and high religiosity levels, it can be expected that religion has a negative relationship to social and outgroup trust, as highly religious people might be distrustful to others, and tend to trust only those like themselves (Kwon, 2019).

We can see from these results that both countries have similar tendencies among the public to show religiosity and the importance of religion, but Türkiye has a higher proportion of respondents considering themselves as non-religious, which is a phenomenon worth investigating.

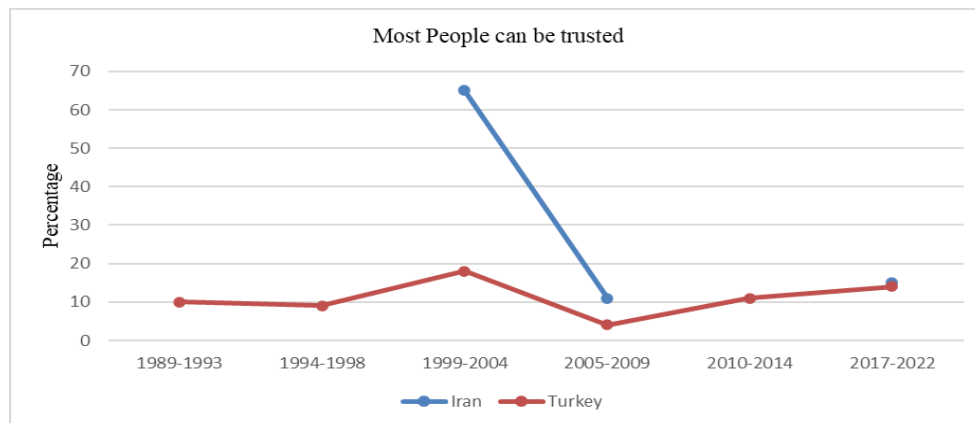
## Methods

In this article, we utilize a comparative research methodology to examine the different types of trust in Turkish and Iranian societies. We employ the World Values Survey (WVS) data from different waves according to the availability of data. The WVS is a global survey on cultural orientations and values of societies. Since 1981, the WVS has included different countries in each wave. The WVS data has been widely used by scholars to understand values and cultures in different societies.

### *The Absence of Social Trust in Iran and Türkiye*

Social (general) trust is measured using a WVS question: *'Would you say that most people can be trusted or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people.'* Respondents have two options: 'Most people can be trusted' or 'Need to be very careful.' The level of social (generalized) trust in society is indicated by the proportion of survey respondents selecting 'most people can be trusted' (Knack & Keefer, 1997). The single WVS question measuring social trust received criticism since it is unclear what is meant by most people, and the validity of this claim was questioned (Jong, 2009). However, it is still the most common measure of social capital most researchers use.

Figure 2 depicts the levels of social trust in Türkiye and Iran reported in each WVS wave. The data from the WVS shows that trust levels fluctuated in Türkiye over the years. On average, during the early 1990s, only 6.5% of respondents to WVS in Türkiye reported that most people can be trusted. While the percentage slightly increased in the early 2000s, it witnessed a decline reflected by the WVS data in 2005-2009. Since 2010, there has been a slight and steady increase in social trust, as reported by WVS data.



**Figure 2.** Social Trust: Percentage of Respondents Answering, 'Most people can be trusted.'

Moving to Iran, no data is available until Wave 4, which shows that about 65% of respondents reported that most people could be trusted. In contrast, only 35% reported that one needs to be careful. This shows the high social trust prevalent in Iranian society from 1999-2004. Although trust as a concept has deep roots in the Iranian culture and religious teachings (Talaei & Hashemi, 2021), a considerable drop in social trust is seen in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Waves, where only 11% and 15% of respondents, respectively, report they trusted most people, whereas 89% and 85%, respectively, reported the need to be careful. Iran witnessed significant events related to the local elections in 2004 and the presidential elections in 2005 and 2009. Domestic social and political events can influence citizens' trust levels in favorable and unfavorable ways.



The WVS data show both countries have general caution and low general trust. Both Turkish and Iranian citizens have below-average social trust levels. In societies with low social trust, unfavorable outcomes such as social exclusion, polarization, violence, corruption, and economic stagnation can emerge. When individuals and primary groups have weak connections, people turn to unofficial social systems to get by and ensure their safety, livelihoods, and insurance (Narayan, 1999).

Scholars attributed the phenomenon of low social trust to a variety of factors. For example, Wuthnow (2002) suggested that people's social trust is affected by their confidence in their local institutions. People who trust their government and domestic institutions must demonstrate better social trust. Tabellini (2010) argued that societies where individuals have cultural traits such as low social trust are more backward regions that historically have higher illiteracy rates and inefficient political institutions. In other words, poor institutional quality, and lack of trust in domestic institutions can reduce social trust. Well-functioning institutions encourage individuals to join groups and foster social trust, resulting in greater social cohesiveness.

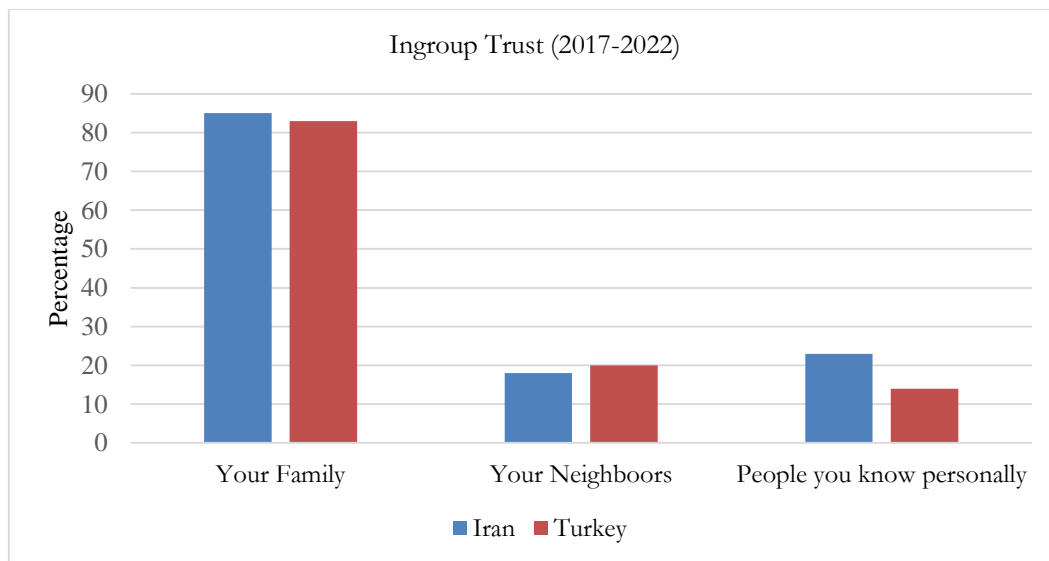
### ***Interpersonal Trust in Iran and Türkiye***

Delhey and Welzel (2012) divide interpersonal trust into ingroup and outgroup trust. First, an individual's ingroup trust includes family, neighbors, and people one knows. Second, outgroup trust comprises people not part of one's identity, such as people of different nationalities, religious backgrounds, or those who first met for the first time.

The WVS includes questions asking respondents to rate their trust in groups such as their family, neighbors, and people from another religion or nationality. The WVS asks respondents, *'How much do you trust your family, your neighborhood, people you know personally, people of another religion, people of another nationality, and people you meet for the first time.'*

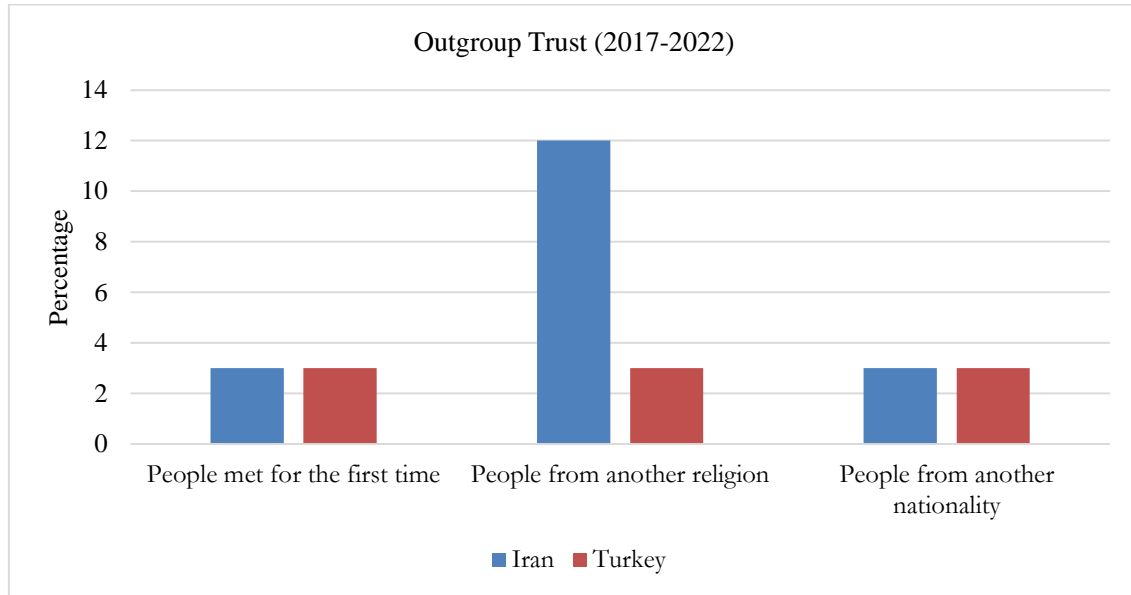
Respondents can answer as 'trust completely, trust somewhat, do not trust very much, and do not trust at all.' Such questions have been included in the recent four rounds of WVS to measure respondents' levels of trust in these six groups. The first three groups indicate ingroups that ingroup trust measures: the family, the neighborhood, and people one knows personally. On the other hand, outgroup trust shows trust in people of another religion, people of another nationality, and people one meets for the first time.

Figure 3 shows ingroup trust levels in Türkiye and Iran as shown by trust in family, neighbors, and people one knows. Data from the WVS Wave 7 shows that citizens in both countries exhibit similar levels of ingroup trust. The family is the most trusted institution by citizens in Iran and Türkiye. About 83% of Turkish respondents reported complete trust in their family versus 85% of Iranian respondents. Regarding trust in the neighborhood and people one knows, only 20% of Turkish respondents and 18% of Iranians reported complete trust in the neighborhood. The level of trust that citizens show in people they know is low in both countries. Only 23% of respondents in Iran and 14% in Türkiye reported complete trust in people they know.



**Figure 3.** *WVS Questions on Ingroup Trust in Iran and Türkiye*

Figure 4 depicts outgroup trust levels in Türkiye and Iran, using data from the WVS Wave 7. On average, citizens in Iran and Türkiye show low trust toward people they meet for the first time and people of another nationality. However, about 3.3% of Turkish respondents trusted people of different religions completely versus 12% of Iranian respondents. Only 3% of Turkish respondents reported fully trusting people from another nationality. Like Türkiye, participants in Iran also show insignificant trust in people from other nationalities. Türkiye has been a host and a transition destination for thousands of immigrants in the last few years. Such an inflow of immigrants can be a reason that explains the low trust Turkish citizens have toward immigrants as an outgroup.



**Figure 4.** WVS Questions on Outgroup Trust in Iran and Türkiye

WVS data show that trust toward outgroups is low in Iran and Türkiye. Such a phenomenon can result in social exclusion, less solidarity, intolerance, cronyism, and corruption. If such a lack of trust toward outgroups prevents them from freedom and access to opportunities, social and economic problems can escalate. Türkiye and Iran are like other Middle Eastern countries, where solid familial ties are the basis for economic and business interactions (Kasmaoui *et al.*, 2018). This is a unique feature common in most Middle Eastern and Islamic cultures. However, the overreliance on family and close networks is only sometimes praised regarding how it affects social interactions. For example, Fukuyama (1995) argues that in countries whose citizens have ingroup-collectivism, such as strong ties with family and in groups, levels of confidence in those beyond the family or close networks will be low. As a result, Fukuyama argues that as the internal links among people become stronger, the outgroup links deteriorate (Fukuyama, 1995). However, familial networks and family support are favorable in terms of high trust in the family. Said differently, besides ingroup trust that includes one's close friends and family, social networks should go beyond family members or kin. This enhances social and outgroup trust, which helps develop solidarity and cooperation among citizens. When people trust each other, they develop a commitment to and a willingness to sacrifice for the good of the larger group while also being charitable to others (Krishna & Uphoff, 2002).

Kayaoglu (2016) found that interpersonal trust levels in Turkey were below the OECD average and highlighted it as an obstacle to the socioeconomic development of the country and to cooperation initiatives among different groups in Turkish society, whether these groups are defined in terms of religious, political, or ethnic preferences.

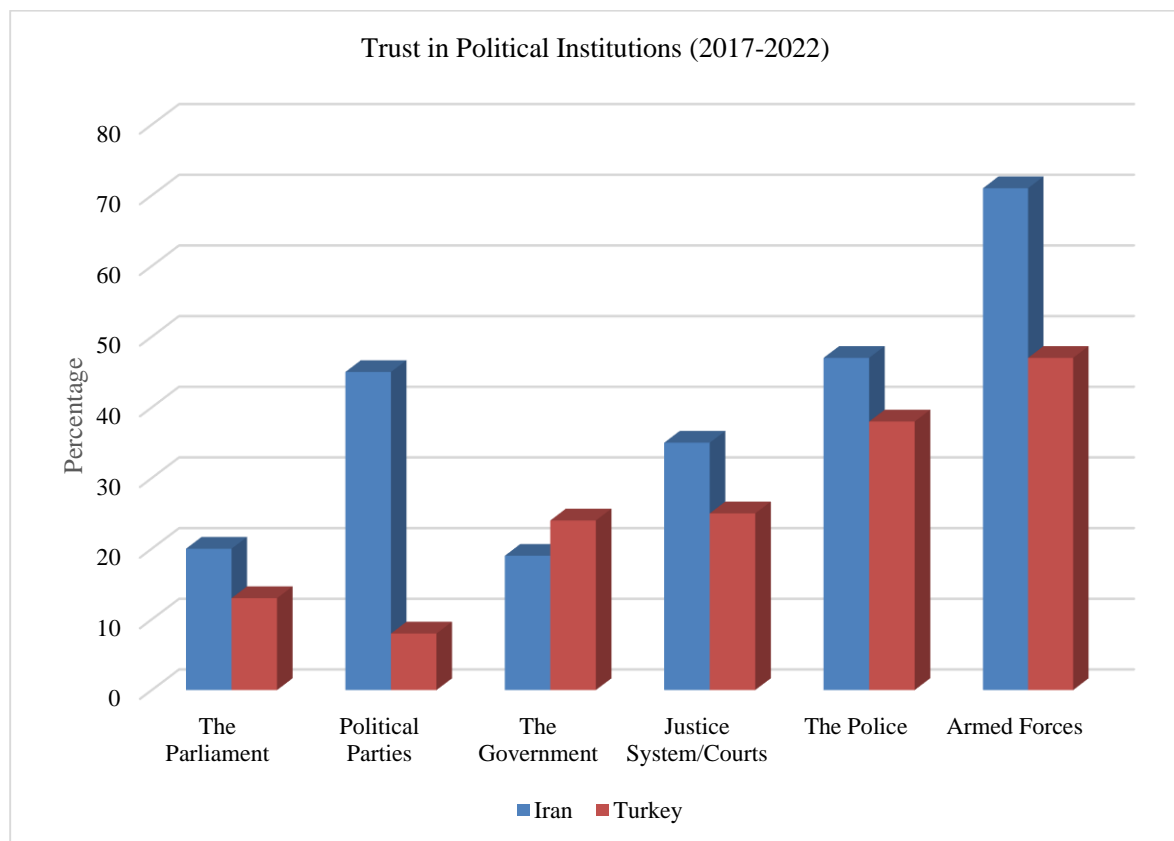
#### **Institutional Trust in Türkiye and Iran**

Institutional trust builds on expecting others to cooperate as institutions induce them to act cooperatively. It means that impersonal structures such as contracts, formal laws, and sanctions on inappropriate behaviors are present and intact (Irwin, 2009). Hassan (2005) defines institutional trust as the level of reliance and confidence people have in state agencies, civil society organizations, and religious institutions. Institutional trust is about optimistic experiences of effectiveness and fairness of state institutions, politicians, officials, and organizations (Cáceres-Carrasco *et al.*, 2020).

Like social and interpersonal trust, institutional trust is measured in value surveys such as the WVS by asking respondents to state their confidence in organizations and institutions. The question is, 'I am going to name some organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them?' Respondents select from 4 options: a great deal, quite a lot, not very much, and none at all.

WVS questions include political institutions such as parties, the legal system, the government, the parliament, and the police. Confidence levels in different domestic institutions are shown through the percentage of answers by respondents reporting they have 'A great deal of confidence.'

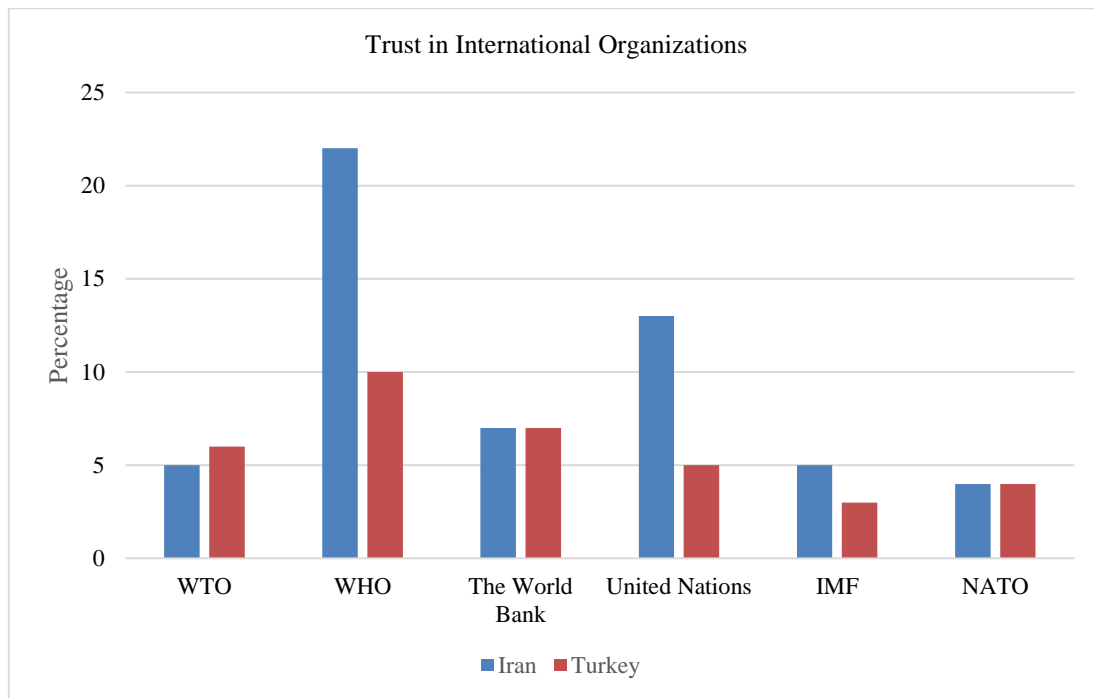
Figure 5 shows that citizens in Türkiye show the least trust in political parties, while they trust the armed forces the most. Like Türkiye, most Iranian respondents trusted the armed forces, as shown by 71% reporting great confidence. The public in both countries exhibits moderate trust in courts and the police. Levels of confidence in the government and the parliament are considered low, where the government is fully trusted by 20% in Iran and 24% in Türkiye, and the parliament is trusted by 20% in Iran and 13% in Türkiye. Talaei and Hashemi (2021) attribute Iranians' low trust to cultural and historical events.



**Figure 5.** *WVS Items Showing Trust in State Institutions*

The degree of trust that citizens have in state institutions is an important predictor of several outcomes such as engagement in formal political actions and institutionalized participation, such as contacting government officials, working in political groups, and party membership. Also, engagement in unconventional or informal political activities is affected by trust in state institutions. For example, Hooghe and Marien (2013) found a negative association between political trust and non-institutionalized participation such as boycotting products, signing petitions, and participating in demonstrations. Similarly, Hassan (2005) found the political legitimacy of the state and its related agencies is shaped by the degree of trust the public has in state, religious, and civil organizations.

We also check the confidence citizens in Türkiye and Iran have in international institutions. Figure 6 shows that institutions such as NATO, IMF, and WTO are less trusted by citizens in Iran and Türkiye, as shown by similar confidence levels in both countries. However, the WVS data show a higher tendency among Iranians to trust the WHO and U.N. than respondents from Türkiye. About 22% of Iranian respondents versus 10% in Türkiye trusted WHO. Similarly, 13% of Iranian respondents reported having high confidence in the U.N. versus only 5% of Turkish respondents.



**Figure 6.** *WVS Items Showing Trust in International Organizations*

Figures 5 and 6 show that institutional trust in Türkiye and Iran is low to medium for international organizations such as the IMF, NATO, WTO, and the World Bank. Moving to political institutions, except for confidence in the government, Iranians have higher political trust in institutions such as armed forces and political parties, relative to Turkish participants. This phenomenon is interesting and worth further investigation by future studies. The low political trust by Turkish citizens in institutions such as political parties and the parliament can be due to the country's long history of coups and changing parties in the past, such experience might have affected the general tendency to trust such institutions.

### Conclusion and Implications

Trust is essential to a country's social, economic, and political development since it solves any cooperative conundrum society may face as it is our inner belief that other people may be trusted. This article aims to provide valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of trust within different societal contexts by studying interpersonal, institutional, and social trust in Iran and Türkiye. The article accounted for different factors that shape different trust levels. Therefore, can understand the intricate dynamics of trust and its profound impact on the functioning of both societies. The seriousness of low social, outgroup, and institutional trust in both societies has been highlighted.

This study has discussed how citizens in Iran and Türkiye have low to medium confidence in central institutions, such as the political parties, the parliament, and the justice system. It means that if an effective system of financial intermediation is lacking, high interpersonal trust is needed for investment and access to bank credit and function as informal credit markets. Interpersonal trust is an imperfect substitute if the government cannot protect property rights or enforce contracts. This necessitates governmental initiatives to address this issue and recover public trust in domestic institutions.

Irwin (2009) emphasized that collectivist societies establish fixed boundaries between the ingroup and the outgroup to regulate social interactions. Both countries represent collectivist communities with low levels of social and outgroup trust, making it necessary for the government and policymakers to develop effective policies and strategies to raise the community's ability for collaboration and coordination among citizens and social groups. Based on the importance of each type of trust for societies' economic and social development, governments in both countries should design programs and initiatives to foster social, outgroup, and institutional trust. Such programs should go beyond the traditional focus on classical economic factors, including trust and cooperation among citizens.

It is worth highlighting the interrelatedness of trust types and their crucial role in social and economic development. This means that trust types reinforce each other. For example, if individuals have little trust in domestic institutions, they might depend more on ingroup trust for social interactions and economic transactions and depend less on outgroup trust. Moreover, it should be the case that trust types reinforce each other. Individuals who have high trust toward their family and friends are supposed to be trusting toward other outgroups as well. However, depending on the cultural context, individuals can show less outgroup trust when they depend too much on ingroup trust.

Considering all the points discussed, some solutions have been proposed for raising trust levels in both societies. For Knack and Keefer (1997), social trust can be raised by policies that reduce income disparities and social polarization. According to Delhey and Newton (2003), interpersonal trust has two main variables, which are public safety and social conflicts. This means that public policy areas should be based on effective and fair legal institutions, ensuring public safety, and preventing social conflict.

Putnam et al. (1993) and Guiso et al. (2006) argue that institutional trust might be promoted by social cooperation that encourages civic engagement and trust among citizens. Similarly, active involvement in civic engagement and political participation can improve confidence in fundamental institutions such as the legal system, the parliament, and civil societies (Miller & Listhaug, 1999). Citizens who are active members of their societies contribute to the quality of life and environment through participating in the governance of their countries (Guagnano & Santini, 2020). As a result, citizens can trust their domestic institutions the more active they become. This means both governments can design programs to raise the political and civic awareness of citizens. Citizens in both countries must believe in the social contract with the state before they trust other members of society or state institutions. This can be done also by participatory and transparent government policies encouraging citizens to communicate and cooperate. Kwon (2019) suggests some tasks that public policies should follow to improve institutional trust. Legal institutions should ensure effectiveness and fairness, ensure social justice, promote economic development, and job opportunities, and ensure economic opportunities and income equality.

Interestingly, Kayaoğlu (2016) in a study in Turkey, attributes low social trust to the education system that created the idea that Turkey has no friends except Turks and that the country was surrounded by enemies. Because generalized trust contributes to the economic and social development of nations, low social trust is a phenomenon that requires further investigation. Also, declining trust levels in Turkish society are affected by politics, which necessitates a healthy social dialogue in society to encourage trust among different groups. Also, levels of civic engagement in Turkish society need to be improved by effective policies, which in turn will boost trust among different groups, and facilitate the socio-economic development in Turkey (Kayaoğlu, 2016).

This study utilized data from the WVS to measure social, interpersonal, and institutional trust. However, it should be noted that the data can be unavailable in certain waves. This, in turn, affects the consistency of data and prevents accessing a time series of data to compare trends over periods or to compare these measurements to those by other organizations.

### **Ethical Declaration**

During the writing process of the study titled “Trust in Iran and Turkey: A Comparative Study of Interpersonal, Institutional, and Social Trust,” scientific rules, and ethical and citation rules were respected. This study was not submitted to any other academic publication platform for evaluation. This study did not require an ethics committee approval required for the research.

### **Declaration of Conflict**

There is no potential conflict of interest in the study.

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## TÜRKÇE GENİŞ ÖZET

Bu araştırma, Arap olmayan iki Orta Doğu ülkesine odaklanarak Türk ve İran toplumlarında güvenin doğasını ve etkisini incelemektedir. Sosyal ilişkilerin temeli olarak güvenin yerleşik önemine dayanan bu çalışma, bu ülkelerdeki potansiyel olarak düşük sosyal güven seviyelerinin potansiyel nedenlerini ve sonuçlarını araştırmaktadır. Güven kavramları, tipolojileri, belirleyicileri ve ölçüm araçları kapsamlı bir şekilde incelenmekte ve bunların ekonomik ve sosyal kalkınma üzerindeki etkileri vurgulanmaktadır. Arap komşularına kıyasla farklı dilsel, siyasi ve sosyal özellikleri nedeniyle seçilen Türkiye ve İran, güven dinamiklerini anlamak için zorlayıcı vaka çalışmaları olarak hizmet etmektedir. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, bu iki toplumda güveni analiz etmek için kavramsal bir çerçeve oluşturmaktır. Ayrıca çalışma, toplumsal, kurumsal ve bireysel güven düzeylerini geliştirmeye yönelik hedefli kamu politikası önerileri formüle etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmada güven kavramı, sosyal, kurumsal ve kişiler arası güven de dahil olmak üzere, çeşitli biçimlerini kapsayacak şekilde ele alınmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, ulusal düzeyde temsili örneklemeler için güvenilir bir kaynak olan Dünya Değerler Araştırması (WVS) verileri kullanılmıştır. Sosyal güvenin ulusal kalkınmadaki önemli rolünü ortaya koyan önceki araştırmaları temel alan bu çalışma, düşük güven düzeyine sahip toplumların karşılaştığı potansiyel zorlukları araştırmaktadır. Bu zorluklar arasında artan işlem maliyetleri, koordinasyon başarısızlıkları ve daha yüksek yolsuzluk sayılabilir. Buna karşılık çalışma, daha sorunsuz ekonomik faaliyetler, azalan işlem maliyetleri ve ekonomi politikalarının başarılı bir şekilde uygulanmasıyla kolaylaşan sosyal güvenin ekonomik büyümeye olumlu katkılarını vurgulamaktadır. Çalışma, sosyal güven ile ekonomik ve sosyal kalkınma arasındaki pozitif korelasyonu teyit eden yerleşik araştırmalardan yararlanarak argümanlarını daha da güçlendirmektedir. Dünya Değerler Araştırması'ndan (WVS) elde edilen veriler, Türk ve İran vatandaşlarının ortalama olarak nispeten düşük düzeyde sosyal ve grup dışı güven sergilerken, yüksek düzeyde grup içi güven sergilediklerini göstermektedir. Güven dağılımındaki bu asimetri, sosyal ve ekonomik kalkınmanın engellenmesiyle ilişkilendirilen ve iyi belgelenmiş bir olgudur. Düşük sosyal güven ile karakterize edilen toplumlar tipik olarak zayıf bir sivil toplum, az gelişmiş sosyal kurumlar, kamu yararına ve vatandaş haklarına saygının azalması, yolsuzluğun artması ve vergi kaçırma eğilimi gibi olumsuz özelliklerin bir araya gelmesini sergiler. Dahası, bu tür toplumlar genellikle kötü performans gösteren hükümetlere tanık olurlar. Sağlam bir toplumsal güvenin yokluğunda, bireyler günlük yaşamlarını sürdürmek için yakın çevrelerindeki özelleştirilmiş güven ağlarına daha fazla güvenme eğilimindedir. Bu dinamik, vatandaşların aile, arkadaşlık grupları ve diğer grup içi güvene öncelik verdiği Türkiye ve İran'da açıkça görülmektedir. Ancak, bir ulusun ve ekonomisinin gelişmesi için, daha geniş bir vatandaş kitlesini kapsayan daha geniş bir sosyal güven temeli gereklidir. Düşük sosyal güvenin bir sonucu olarak, sosyal sermaye yetersiz kalabilir ve bu da daha geniş sosyal etkileşimi teşvik etmek için hükümet düzenlemelerinin ve yasal yaptırımların potansiyel bir rol oynamasını gerektirebilir. Bununla birlikte, sağlıklı bir sivil toplumun sosyal güven, grup dışı güven ve işbirlikçi normları teşvik etmek için kritik bir temel oluşturduğunu kabul etmek çok önemlidir. Toplumsal kampanyalara veya seçimlere katılım gibi sivil katılım faaliyetleri, karşılıklı ilişkileri ve gruplar arası bağlantıları teşvik eder. Ancak, bu tür bir katılımı etkin bir şekilde teşvik etmek için devletin vatandaşların ihtiyaçlarına yanıt verebilmesi ve reform taahhüdünü göstermesi gerekir. Daha önce sunulan sosyal, kişilerarası ve kurumsal güven belirleyicilerinin incelenmesine dayanan bu makale, sosyal, kişilerarası ve kurumsal güven düzeylerini artırmayı amaçlayan bir dizi kamu politikası önerisi sunmaktadır. Bu politikalar, çeşitli güven biçimlerinin toplumların gelişimi için eşit derecede önemli olduğu anlayışına dayanmaktadır. Artan sosyal güven, güvenin zaman içinde giderek güçlendiği erdemli bir döngüye yol açabilir. Tersine, ısrarla düşük güven seviyeleri tutarlı bir toplum inşa edilmesini engelleyebilir. Bu nedenle politika yapıcılar, İran ve Türkiye'de hem ekonomik hem de sosyal ilerlemenin sağlanmasındaki kritik rolünün farkında olarak sosyal güvenin korunmasına ve geliştirilmesine öncelik vermelidir. Ayrıca, hükümetin çabaları toplumsal örgütlenmeleri güçlendirmeye ve marjinalleştirilmiş nüfus da dahil olmak üzere çeşitli toplumsal gruplar arasındaki çapraz bağlantıları teşvik etmeye odaklanmalıdır. Siyasi, kurumsal ve sosyal teşviklerin stratejik kullanımı bu hedeflere ulaşılmasında önemli bir rol oynayabilir.